

Alter Christus

*“As an **alter Christus** (another Christ) the priest is in Christ, for Christ and with Christ... Because he belongs to Christ, the priest is radically at the service of all people: he is the minister of their salvation” (Pope Benedict XVI)*

Monthly bulletin dedicated to all the Priests of Papua New Guinea and Solomon Islands

Difference Between True and False Friendship

By Saint Francis of Sales

[From the book *Introduction to the Devout Life*]

Evil and Frivolous Friendship

Foremost among the soul's affections is love. Love is the ruler of every motion of the heart; drawing all to itself, and making us like to that we love. Beware, then, my daughter, of harbouring any evil affection, or you too will become evil. And friendship is the most dangerous of all affections, because any other love may exist without

much mental communication, but as friendship is founded thereon, it is hardly possible to be closely bound by its ties to any one without sharing in his qualities.

All love is not friendship, for one may love without any return, and friendship implies mutual love. Further, those who are bound by such affection must be conscious that it is reciprocal, - otherwise there may be love but not friendship; and moreover, there must be something communicated between the friends as a solid foundation of

friendship.

Friendship varies according to these communications, and they vary according to that which people have to communicate. If men share false and vain things, their friendship will be false and vain; if that which is good and true, their friendship will be good and true, and the better that which is the staple of the bond, so much the better will the friendship be. That honey is best which is culled from the choicest flowers, and so friendship built upon the highest and purest intercommunion is the best. And just as a certain kind of honey brought from Pontus is poisonous, being made from aconite, so that those who eat it lose their senses, so the friendship which

is based on unreal or evil grounds will itself be hollow and worthless.

Mere sensual intercourse is not worthy of the name of friendship; and were there nothing more in married love it would not deserve to bear the name; but inasmuch as that involves the participation of life, industry, possessions, affections, and an unalterable fidelity, marriage, when rightly understood, is a very real and holy friendship.

Whatever is founded on mere sensuality, vanity, or frivolity, is unworthy to be called friendship. I mean such attractions as are purely external; a sweet voice, personal beauty, and the cleverness or outward show which have great weight with

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Francis de Sales was born in France in 1567 to a noble family. His father sent him to the best schools, and when he was 20 he decided to become a priest. Despite his wealthy background, Francis always thought it was more important to serve God than to have money or power. His father tried to persuade him to marry, but Francis was instead ordained at the age of 26.

He quickly earned a reputation for being a kind and understanding man and an excellent speaker who attracted people to the Catholic faith. Many people in his diocese, which was partly in France and partly in Switzerland, followed the teachings of John Calvin, since at one time the Catholic faith had been outlawed in the region. Francis won many of them back. He taught religion to children and helped prepare men to be ordained priests. He wrote several books and helped St. Jane Francis de Chantal to found a religious order of women, the Order of the Visitation of Holy Mary, in 1610.

Francis died in 1622 and was canonized in 1664 by Pope Alexander VII. He was declared a Doctor of the Church in 1877. He is a patron of writers and journalists because he used his writing to teach people about the faith.

some. You will often hear women and young people unhesitatingly decide that such an one is very delightful, very admirable, because he is good-looking, well-dressed, sings, or dances, or talks well. Even charlatans esteem the wittiest clown amongst them as their best man. But all these things are purely sensual, and the connections built on such foundation must be vain and frivolous, more fitly to be called trifling than friendship. They spring up chiefly among young people, who are easily fascinated by personal attractions, dress, and gossip - friendships in which the tailor and hairdresser have the chief part. How can such friendships be other than shortlived, melting away like snow wreaths in the sun!

On Frivolous Attachments

Such foolish attachments between man and woman without any matrimonial intentions as are called amourettes, - mere abortions, or rather phantoms of friendship, - must not, idle and empty as they are, profane the name of friendship or love. Yet such frivolous, contemptible attractions often snare the hearts of both men

and women, and although they may end in downright sin, there is no such intention on the part of their victims, who consciously do but yield to foolish trifling and toying. Some such have no object beyond the actual indulgence of a passing inclination; others are excited by vanity, which takes pleasure in captivating hearts; some are stimulated by a combination of both these motives. But all such friendships are evil, hollow, and vain; evil, in that they often lead to sinful deeds, and draw the heart from God, and from the husband or wife who is its lawful owner; hollow, in that they are baseless and without root; vain, in that neither gain, honour,

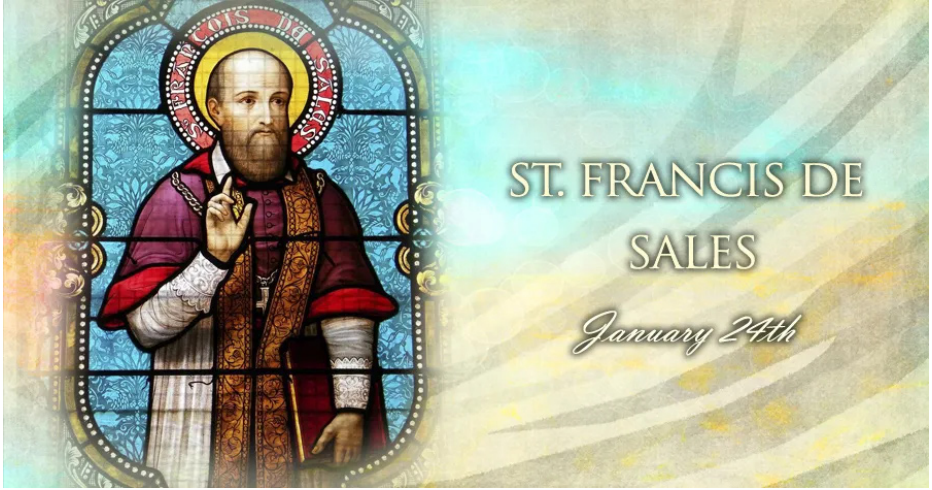
You may distinguish between worldly friendship and that which is good and holy, just as one distinguishes that poisonous honey from what is good.

nor satisfaction can come from such. On the contrary, nothing comes of them but a loss of time and credit, and unreasoning excitement, mistrust, jealousy, and perturbation.

S. Gregory Nazianzen speaks very wisely on this subject, admonishing vain women, and his words are equally applicable to men: - "Your natural beauty will suffice your husband, but if it is exhibited to all, like a net spread before birds, what will be the end? You will be taken by whoever admires you, looks and

glances will be exchanged, smiles and tender words, at first hesitatingly exchanged, but soon more boldly given and received. Far be it from me to describe the end, but this much I will say, nothing said or done by young men and women under such circumstances but is perilous. One act of levity leads to another, as the links in a chain." They who tamper with such things will fall into the trap. They fancy that they only mean to amuse themselves, but will not go too far. Little you know, forsooth! The tiny spark will burst into a flame, and, overpowering your heart, it will reduce your good resolutions to ashes, and your reputation to smoke. "Who will pity a charmer that is bitten with a serpent?" asks the Wise Man; and with him I ask, Do you, in your folly, imagine that you can lightly handle love as you please? You think to trifle with it, but it will sting you cruelly, and then every one will mock you, and laugh at your foolish pretension to harbour a venomous serpent in your bosom, which has poisoned and lost alike your honour and your soul. What fatal blindness this to stake all that is most precious to man! Yes, I say it advisedly, for God desires to have us only for the sake of our soul, or the soul through our will, and our will for love's sake. Surely we have not by any means a sufficient store of love to offer God,

and yet in our madness and folly we lavish and waste it on vain frivolous objects, as though we had enough and to spare. Our Dear Lord, Who demands nought save our love in return for our creation, preservation and redemption, will require a strict account of the senseless way in which we have frittered and wasted it. If He will call us to account for idle words, how will it be with respect to idle, foolish, pernicious friendships? Husbandmen know that the walnut tree is very harmful in a vineyard or field, because it absorbs the fatness of the land and draws it away from the other crops; its thick foliage overshadows and deprives them of sunshine; and, moreover, it attracts passers-by, who tread down and spoil all that is around while striving to gather its fruit. So with these foolish love affairs and the soul; they engross it, so that it is unable to bring forth good works; their superfluous foliage - flirtations, dallyings and idle talk - consume profitable time; and, moreover, they lead to so many temptations, distractions, suspicions, and the like, that the heart becomes altogether crushed and spoiled. Such follies not only banish Heavenly Love, they likewise drive out the fear of God, enervate the mind, and damage reputation. They may be the plaything of courts, but assuredly they are as a plague spot of the heart.



Of the Difference between True and False Friendship

Take notice, my child, that the honey of Heraclium, which is so poisonous, altogether resembles that which is wholesome, and there is great danger of mistaking one for the other, or of mixing them, for the virtue of one would not counteract the harmfulness of the other. We must be on our guard not to be deceived in making friendships, especially between persons of the opposite sexes, for not unfrequently Satan deludes those who love one another. They may begin with a virtuous affection, but if discretion be lacking, frivolity will creep in, and then sensuality, till their love becomes carnal: even in spiritual love there is a danger if people are not on the watch, although it is not so easy to be deluded therein, inasmuch as the very purity and transparency of spiritual affection

show Satan's stains more promptly. Consequently, when he seeks to interpose, he does it stealthily, and strives to insinuate impurity almost imperceptibly.

You may distinguish between worldly friendship and that which is good and holy, just as one distinguishes that poisonous honey from what is good - it is sweeter to the taste than ordinary honey, owing to the aconite infused; - and so worldly friendship is profuse in honeyed words, passionate endearments, commendations of beauty and sensual charms, while true friendship speaks a simple honest language, lauding nought save the Grace of God, its one only foundation. That strange honey causes giddiness; and so false friendship upsets the mind, makes its victim to totter in the ways of purity and devotion, inducing affected, mincing looks, sensual caresses, inordinate

sighings, petty complaints of not being loved, slight but questionable familiarities, gallantries, embraces, and the like, which are sure precursors of evil; whereas true friendship is modest and straightforward in every glance, loving and pure in caresses, has no sighs save for Heaven, no complaints save that God is not loved sufficiently. That honey confuses the sight, and worldly friendship confuses the judgment, so that men think themselves right while doing evil, and assume their excuses and pretexts to be valid reasoning. They fear the light and love darkness; but true friendship is clear-sighted, and hides nothing - rather seeks to be seen of good men. Lastly, this poisonous honey leaves an exceeding bitter taste behind; and so false friendship turns to evil desires, upbraidings, slander, deceit, sorrow, confusion and jealousies, too often ending in downright sin; but pure friendship is always the same - modest, courteous and loving - knowing no change save an increasingly pure and

perfect union, a type of the blessed friendships of Heaven.

When young people indulge in looks, words or actions which they would not like to be seen by their parents, husbands or confessors, it is a sure sign that they are damaging their conscience and their honour. Our Lady was troubled when the Angel appeared to her in human form, because she was alone, and he spoke to her with flattering although heavenly words. O Saviour of the world, if purity itself fears an Angel in human shape, how much more

need that our impurity should fear men, although they take the likeness of an Angel, if they speak words of earthliness and sensuality!

I say unhesitatingly to whosoever has become entangled in any such worthless love affairs, cut it short, break it off - do not play with it, or pretend to untie the knot; cut it through, tear it asunder. There must be no dallying with an attachment which is incompatible with the Love of God.

Remedies Against Evil Friendships

How are you to meet the swarm of foolish attachments, triflings, and undesirable inclinations which beset you? By turning sharply away, and thoroughly renouncing such vanities,

flying to the Saviour's Cross, and clasping His Crown of thorns to your heart, so that these little foxes may not spoil your vines. Beware of entering into any manner of treaty with the Enemy; do not delude yourself by listening to him while intending to reject him. For God's Sake, my daughter, be firm on all such occasions; the heart and ear are closely allied, and just as you would vainly seek to check the downward course of a mountain torrent, so difficult will you find it to keep the smooth words which enter in at the ear from finding their way down into the heart. Alcmeon says (what indeed Aristotle denies) that the goat breathes through its ears, not its nostrils. I know not whether this be so, but one thing I know, that our heart breathes through the ear, and that while it exhales its own thoughts through the mouth, it inhales those of others by the ear. Let us then carefully guard our ears against evil words which would speedily infect the heart. Never hearken to any indiscreet conversation whatsoever - never mind if you seem rude and uncourteous in rejecting all such. Always bear in mind that you have dedicated your heart to God, and offered your love to Him; so that it were sacrilege to deprive Him of one particle thereof. Do you rather renew the offering continually by fresh resolutions, entrenching yourself therein as in a fortress; - cry out to

God, He will succour you, and His Love will shelter you, so that all your love may be kept for Him only.

If unhappily you are already entangled in the nets of any unreal affection, truly it is hard to set you free! But place yourself before His Divine Majesty, acknowledge the depth of your wretchedness, your weakness and vanity, and then with all the earnestness of purpose you can muster, arrest the budding evil, abjure your own empty promises, and renounce those you have received, and resolve with a firm, absolute will never again to indulge in any trifling or dallying with such matters.

If you can remove from the object of your unworthy affection, it is most desirable to do so. He who has been bitten by a viper cannot heal his wound in the presence of another suffering from the like injury, and so one bitten with a false fancy will not shake it off while near to his fellow-victim. Change of scene is very helpful in quieting the excitement and restlessness of sorrow or love. S. Ambrose tells a story in his Second Book on Penitence, of a young man, who coming home after a long journey quite cured of a foolish attachment, met the unworthy object of his former passion, who stopped him, saying, "Do you not know me, I am still myself?" "That may be," was the answer, "but I am not

myself.” - so thoroughly and happily was he changed by absence. And S. Augustine tells us how, after the death of his dear friend, he soothed his grief by leaving Tagaste and going to Carthage.

But what is he to do, who cannot try this remedy? To such I would say, abstain from all private intercourse, all tender glances and smiles, and from every kind of communication which can feed the unholy flame. If it be necessary to speak at all, express clearly and tersely the eternal renunciation on which you have resolved. I say unhesitatingly to whosoever has become entangled in any such worthless love affairs, cut it short, break it off - do not play with it, or pretend to untie the knot; cut it through, tear it asunder. There must be no dallying with an attachment which is incompatible with the Love of God.

But, you ask, after I have thus burst the chains of my unholy bondage, will no traces remain, and shall I not still carry the scars on my feet - that is, in my wounded affections? Not so, my child, if you have attained a due abhorrence of the evil; in that case all you will feel is an exceeding horror of your unworthy affection, and all appertaining thereto; no thought will linger in your breast concerning it save

a true love of God. Or if, by reason of the imperfection of your repentance, any evil inclinations still hover round you, seek such a mental solitude as I have already described, retire into it as much as possible, and then by repeated efforts and ejaculations renounce your evil desires; abjure them heartily; read pious books more than is your wont; go more frequently to Confession and Communion; tell your director simply and humbly all that tempts and troubles you, if you can, or at all events take counsel with some faithful, wise friend. And never doubt but that God will set you free from all evil passions, if you are steadfast and devout on your part. Perhaps you will say that it is unkind, ungrateful, thus pitilessly to break off a friendship. Surely it were a happy unkindness which is acceptable to God; but of a truth, my child, you are committing no unkindness, rather conferring a great benefit on the person you love, for you break his chains as well as your own, and although at the moment he may not appreciate his gain, he will do so by and by, and will join you in thanksgiving, “Thou, Lord, hast broken my bonds in sunder. I will offer to Thee the sacrifice of thanksgiving, and will call upon the Name of the Lord.”