

HOMILY
May 21, 2006

Rev. Andrew A. Czajkowski
St. John the Evangelist Parish
Davison, Michigan

Throughout the course of John's Gospel, Jesus called his followers by many names. First he called them *DISCIPLES* and invited them to come to him, to see where he lived and to stay with him. Then, as we heard only two weeks ago, he called them his beloved *SHEEP* for whom he would lay down his life. Last week, Jesus called his own *BRANCHES* growing upon the true vine—that is, himself. He also spoke of pruning and trimming them clean so as to make them *FRUITFUL BRANCHES*.

In today's Gospel, the name by which Jesus chooses to call his own is a very intimate one: "I call you *FRIENDS*." The word "friend" is a term that doesn't always convey its true meaning in our society. It was once very beautifully defined by another Jesus two hundred years before Jesus.

In the Book of Sirach, Jesus Ben Sire says,

*"A faithful friend is a sure shelter;
those who find one find a treasure.
A faithful friend is beyond price;
no sum can balance their worth.
A faithful friend is a life-saving remedy,
such as those who fear God find.
Those who fear God behave accordingly
and their friends will be like themselves."*

A middle school English teacher asked her class one day to write imaginative definitions of a friend. One student said, "A friend is a pair of open arms in a society of armless people." Another said, "A friend is a lively polka in the midst of a dreary concert." Others said: "A friend is a beautiful orchard in the middle of the desert." "A friend is a stiff drink when you've just had a terrible shock." (How does a middle schooler know that?) The winning definition goes to the one who said, "*A friend is the one who comes in when the whole world has gone out.*" A friend is someone who really loves you.

An author and speaker by the name of Brennan Manning came up with a slogan. The slogan is: “I am the one Jesus loves.” It sounds a little arrogant, doesn’t it? But he is quoting Scripture. Jesus’ closest friend on earth was none other than John, our patron. Throughout all four Gospels, John is identified as “the one Jesus loved.” If John were to be asked, “What is your primary identity in life?” he would not reply, “I am a disciple, an apostle, an evangelist, an author of one of the four Gospels,” but rather, “I am the one Jesus loves.”

What would it mean if you, too, came to the place where you saw your primary identity in life as “the one Jesus loves”? How differently would you view yourself at the end of a day?

Sociologists have a theory of the looking glass self: you become what the most important person in your life thinks you are. You become what your spouse, or parent, or boss, or your pastor think you are! How would your life change if you truly believed the Bible’s outstanding words about God’s love for you—if you looked into a mirror and saw what God sees?

Here we might recall the story of an Irish priest who, on a walking tour of a rural parish, sees an old peasant kneeling by the side of the road, praying. Impressed, the priest says to the man, “You might be very close to God.” The peasant looks up from his prayers, thinks a moment, and then smiles, “Yes, he’s very fond of me.”

I suppose to some that being a Catholic or a Christian may seem a complicated thing—there are so many sects and creeds and theologies. But the Gospel can be put into just a few simple words. I am being very serious when I say that it can all be summarized in the words:

*Jesus offers his friendship to you. He wants to say to you:
“You are no longer my servant;
you are now my friend.”*

Can it get any better?