

Brothers and sisters,

The Gospel today addresses two sets of relationships, our relationship with friends, and our relationship with God. These two relationships play a central role in St. Luke's Gospel, and are highlighted once again today. In the parable that we hear about the "friend" there is an important point about friendship that I think Jesus is acknowledging. It's a concept that was commonplace in Hellenistic culture, namely that, when it comes to taking care of each other, friends hold all things in common.

That's a powerful concept. Now, don't hear me wrong, I'm not advocating a socialist economic system. But I am advocating a Christian way of life. And in the Gospel we constantly hear that friendship involves holding things in common with our neighbor. Two weeks ago we heard this in parable of the Good Samaritan. Last week, we witnessed how Martha and Mary using their resources to welcome Jesus into their home. And today we hear a story about a friends in need. And indeed there are actually two friends in need. There is the visitor, who has been traveling and is in need of food and lodging, and there is the one being visited, who was unprepared to receive a visitor, and is out of food.

What we learn from this parable is that we are called to help our friends by sharing our resources with them. Sometimes, I think we can lose sight of this fact in our materialistic world. Rather than spending time meeting the needs of our friends, and assisting them, we often spend time trying to keep up with them, to be competitive with them, right? This mentality is of course summarized in our expression, "keeping up with the Joneses." When we spend time "keeping up with the Joneses," we miss a fundamental principle of Christianity – namely that we are not called to be competitive with each other; we're called to take care of each other.

This principle is so basic that one of the characters in the parable instinctively understands this...the character that Jesus addresses as "you." The one with whom we are meant to identify. Jesus begins the parable by acknowledging that we instinctively know how to treat friends – when visitors come to our house we're supposed to offer them food and a place to sleep.

This parable also gives us a second aspect of what it means to be a friend. Not only are we called to care for our friends by sharing with them, but we're also supposed seek help from others as well. If we can't offer our visitor a meal, then we need to ask for help in carrying out our duty to others. So often in our individualistic society we tend to shy away from asking for help, because it makes us feel insufficient or weak. Yet Jesus tells us not only to ask for help, but also to be persistent in our asking. In other words, we need to recognize that we're radically dependent on our neighbors and their ability to help us.

If we're all honest, I think we all know that this is true, no matter how rugged we may be in our individualism. We know that none of us is self-sufficient. Yet for some reason we're often afraid to admit this. This week, I had to visit my optometrist to begin a new program for correcting my vision, and on Friday I needed someone to give me a ride to and from his office. And in a ridiculous manner, I dreaded asking someone for assistance. Maybe if I would have written this homily earlier I would have realized that I was missing a spiritual lesson. I needed a reminder that I am not self-sufficient, that I need to be willing to ask friends for support. It's funny, because I have no problem helping others, but when it's

something that benefits me, something that I can't do for myself, like drive myself to the doctor's office, I have a hard time asking for help.

In God's sense of irony, the person who took me to the doctor's office was the traveler currently visiting our rectory, Fr. Ray Quetchenbach. And I felt really bad asking him for help. As we talked about this, he reminded me that he let me offer him hospitality at our rectory, and he let me help him with some computer troubles, so why would I feel bad asking him to help me? Fr. Ray, of course, was right. He understood this Gospel (or at the very least he prepared his homily before I prepared mine).

Okay, so that's the background for our parable. But the transforming power of the Gospel comes in understanding our relationship with God. By teaching us to call God our Father, Jesus revealed a new truth about our relationship with God – namely that God has a familial relationship with us. This means that God is not using us. Now remember in Greek and Roman culture the gods were always using people as pawns in their wars with other gods. They were never in loving relationship with people; they simply used human beings for selfish reasons. But our God isn't like that. Our God is a Father. He is the one who provides for us out of love. He doesn't use us for his benefit. No, He gives us good things for our own benefit.

So often, I think we understand this, but on an immature level. What do I mean? Well, we act like toddlers who are in their terrible two's. We've all seen this dynamic, right? Mom or dad tries to help the toddler with something, but what does the child say? "No, I can do it." Then what happens? Well, the child refuses any assistance until he hits that point where he fully realizes that he can't accomplish the task without help. Friends, how often do we do this? How often do we resist asking God for help until we've hit rock bottom, until we've hit that breaking point.

Today Jesus tells us to stop that. By transforming our understanding of who God is, Jesus is telling us that we need to approach our Father and ask him for help. God, our Father, is always wanting to help us, just like parents who are willing to help their children, but we have to allow him to do so. If we want to get the most from our relationship with God, we can't use God as a last resort. Instead we need to constantly depend on him.

As I've grown older, I've come to realize how dependent I am on my parents. I didn't always realize this as a child, or as a teenager. But as an adult, I realize that I can bring anything to my parents, and they will do everything they can to give me what I need. This needs to be our attitude with God. We need to develop a mature relationship. It needs to be one where we are in constant dialogue with God, letting him know about the totality of our lives, not simply running to him when things are bad and we need something. We don't need to be like teenagers who call upon their parents when they need \$20 to go see Inception Point with their friends, but would rather die than be seen in public with their parents. No, we need to be in constant relationship with God. We need to let go of the toddler mentality that we don't need God, or our teenage embarrassment at being seen in Public with our Father. Instead we need to take that adult approach, where we are open with our Father, and where we are proud to be seen with him in public. Because in doing this, we will be living our relationship with God to its fullest and we will truly understand what it means to call God our Father.

Brothers and Sisters, friends, Peace to you, and to all who call God “our Father.”