

Episode: Be Not Afraid: On Friendship with Christ

Contributor: Rev. Leo Austin

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In the name of the Father and of the Son of the Holy Spirit, Amen. My Lord and my God, I firmly believe that you are here, that you see me, that you hear me. I adore you with profound reverence; I beg your pardon for my sins and the grace to make this time of prayer fruitful. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.

I really like in the Gospel moments that are human, that show your humanity, my Lord, your personality, many of them, and that's a treasure, in my opinion, of the gospel. And I think that's the way the saints have always prayed, looking at your humanity, the revelation of God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit is wonderful- it is a treasure. We can always go back there and rest. Today, in my time of prayer, I want to join the multitude of the saints throughout history, participating in the revelation of God and of you, my Lord, and learning from them. And one of the things that I think the saints are great teachers is they're friends. They're really good friends. They know a lot, a lot about friendship. St. John Paul II is now no exception of that. He's one of those saints that are so inspiring because they just- they live their life to the fullness of their humanity.

So in the Gospel, many times you show us your- your feelings or your reactions at the human level, obviously permeated by the supernatural intervention of God, and also your own capacity as God and men combined in the hypostatic union. But- but respecting- respecting the humanity, so to speak, which is wonderful. And I really like the Chapter 14 of the Gospel of St. Matthew, in which you see how our Lord is a good friend and in need of friendship of you, my Lord. And I don't know if this is a kind of a heresy, but you are in need of friendship in the Gospel of- of St. Matthew, at least in this- in this Chapter number 14, because Our Lord receives bad news, really bad news, really shocking and sad and painful when you're causing- John the Baptist is killed. And then you reacted at a very human level, wanting to just take a break, and then you do it with your apostles, with a few followers. But then the multitudes follow you, so you don't have time for a break. And then your heart is moved with pity. And then you create this- or perform this awesome miracle of the multiplication of fish and loaves for them, 5000 people. And then afterwards, you're giving thanks, you're tired in prayer. You're kind of like- again, take another break, maybe at night. And then the apostles leave, they need to leave. Maybe they were tired and they were saying, I need to go home, or I have some obligations tomorrow. We don't know what happened, actually, so I don't know if the apostles were sort of abandoning you, maybe not in a bad way, but maybe they thought, well, you need to be alone because you're mourning for your cousin's recent death and that we don't have anything to say here, so we may as well leave. And they did. And Our Lord, you, my Lord, you were contemplating them from the top of this mountain, and you saw the boat shaking and then kind of being touched by the waves. And then you went to them.

You just walk on the water, which is an awesome miracle, because of many reasons. One of them is showing your power over nature, always a real power and a real dominion over all creation. And this is a sign of your divinity. But in this case, I think you are actually in need of being with them. Sometimes this scene of the gospel is portrayed as them being lost and Jesus reaching out to them. But I think in this case, and I do, I want to say this with all my- with due respect to you, my Lord, to you. But I think the one being lost is actually you. You were alone and you didn't like that. You needed company. And of course, the first way you- or the first place- or the first person that you wanted to talk is your father, but in your humanity, you needed human affection, and that's why, in my opinion, you went seeking your apostles for company. And that gives me a lot of hope in this feast day of St. John Paul II. Want to learn about your humanity. St. John Paul II was a big, big, big preacher, or he was always talking about the Jesus revealing men to himself. Jesus revealing men to himself. And the way to do it is because you embraced our humanity, and then we see how wonderfully you reach out to the boat. And of course, one of your best friends, Peter, said, Well, Jesus, if it is your command that I got to you, I want to be with you as well. And Jesus said, "Come." And you know what happened, that the- halfway through, Peter was kind of scared because of the wind, and he started sinking, and Our Lord hugged him or grabbed his hand and said, "Oh, you of little faith." And the encounter in the middle of the water, which is pretty epic, I would love to have a picture, a real picture, not a painting, but a real picture of that moment, of both of them meeting in this kind of a baroque scene with the waves and the boat in the distance, and it's dark, it's at night. It's kind of a wow, an amazing, and really striking and wonderfully engaging moment of friendship, right? Like both of them saying, I need you.

And it gives me a lot of hope to know that you need me. In a way, it gives me joy that I can give you something. And that's what St. John Paul II maybe can teach us today. To know that our existence is a gift, he always preached that. If you read his- the Theology of the Body, all his speeches, everything is about the humanity- or the dignity of human beings as a gift, not only sexually or in marriage, but in friendship as well. And that's- that's something that I want to learn or to enjoy, or to dive in, learning from the saints, learning from you, my Lord, the best teacher. You didn't want to be alone. You wanted to, you know, go to Peter, and that friendship was so clear that even after the resurrection, we see the encounter between both of you at breakfast. And then you ask him, Simon, do you love me more than this? And the wonderful prayer of Peter that at least I use every time I go to confession, Lord, you know all things. You know that I love you. You know all things we had so many good times together. And it is true both Peter and Jesus- of course, there was this- you know, I'm the master, you're my vicar, but there was a friendship there.

I really like, for instance, the other moment in the life of Peter, when he was discouraged, kind of tired of the Pharisees. And they get to this town, and they the Pharisees of course, they are annoying, and I'm sorry about them, but I hope they are in heaven, but they're sometimes- they're annoying, and then Peter is kind of discouraged, saying enough. And then Jesus sees that, and then he says, You know what, Peter, I don't think we need to pay here the taxes or because I'm the son of God, and it doesn't make any sense for me to pay in my own house. But you know, in order to give them peace, just take a break, go to the lake, throw the net and the first fish, open the mouth, you will have two coins, just take them and pay for me and for you. It's super odd miracle. It's kind of very different from anything else in the gospel. But he was one of my favorite ones because, I think, as a combination of Jesus reaching out to Peter, Jesus living naturalness in his external life, and especially the friendship, I said, you know, you need a break. What do you like to do? You like fishing? Go and I'm going to give you kind of a gift inside the first fish that you catch, two coins. And then Jesus, you- you were able to ask Peter later on, do you love me? And Peter, going through his memory, through his own experience of friendship, he would say, honestly, of course, you know everything. You know that I love you, and it was real.

Now St. John Paul II, today we're celebrating his feast day. Was a man of prayer, and prayer meaning friendship with Jesus Christ in prayer. And that's why he's so strong. His legacy is so strong, and I want to give you thanks, my Lord, for this example of friendship. His life was pretty tough, when he was nine years old, his mom died. It was a liver or kidney failure and a heart attack, and she was dead. When he was twelve, St. John Paul II- John- I mean little John Paul II, his brother died. And when he was 21 years old, his dad died, so it's a big cross. In the first 20 years of his life, he lost mom, dad and his brother, and then he was ordained during the Second World War- or after the Second World War, sorry, he went to seminary in a clandestine way during the Nazi occupation of Poland, and by the time he was ordained in 1946, Poland was under the- the communist Empire for- for the next 30 or 40 years. And in that- that was the raw material of his life. That's the childhood, and that's the life of St. John Paul II. And then, through prayer, people that met him said that John Paul II basically prayed and prayed a lot, and I was in Rome with one of his- his secretaries when he was still alive, Navarro Valls, he was for 20 years with John Paul II- St. John Paul II, and he told us that the most striking thing was his sense of humor, his toughness, his kindness, and all of that was a consequence of his time of prayer.

Apparently, some nights he will spend the entire night in prayer, like you, my Lord. And that's why, later on, he was able to deliver a message of peace. His words when he was elected, "Do not be afraid," the words that you repeated to Peter, to Mary Magdalene, the quote, "do not be afraid." The statement, "do not be afraid," appears 365 times in the Bible, a constant reminder of Jesus Christ, of God, the Father, the Holy Spirit. Do not be afraid I'm with you. I'm part of you. I'm your friend, and I went to night- or in this before going to sleep or- or every morning when I wake up to think about these words, do not be afraid.

Why was St. John Paul II so happy? Or Blessed Alvaro? Or St. Josemaria? Or Maria Goretti? Or Carlo Acutis, all the saints? What's the secret sauce? Why are they so happy, so infectiously happy? Not because they had an easy life, the freedom that they had was open to love. And they were not hiding. They freely embraced reality and people around them, and that's a turning point that maybe I need to take, or to go through in my life, stop hiding.

I think I read it somewhere- I don't remember where, but this spiritual author says that in our spiritual life, we have sort of three mirrors. One of them reflects the person that we would like to be, our- ourselves, our projection of ourselves. I would love to be known as whatever, right? And that's our little mirror of vanity, or at least security in- in ourselves. There's another mirror that reflects the person that we are- we actually are, not exactly maybe as the first one, but the real us. And that sometimes could be overwhelming or- or difficult to accept or not perfect. But there is a third mirror, is according to the spiritual author, and is a mirror that reflects us according to the vision that God has for us. And it's not easy to get to that mirror, because in order to be able to sit, we need to be vulnerable. We need to go through the first two mirrors, so to speak. We need to recognize that sometimes we have dreams that are vain or absurd. We need to recognize and accept the person that we are, but the story doesn't end there. We need to be open to what Jesus is dreaming about, in you, in me. And that's as important as the other two- I would say more important, because there is a mirror of hope, and it's not naive or dreamy or- it's a mirror of real hope, because I trust you, my Lord. And that is a mirror in which we are ourselves after the experience of sin, like Peter. Do you love me after denying me three times, after swearing in public? I don't know this guy. Jesus encounters him. He asked Peter, Peter, dig in. Go back to our memories. Go down to deepest place in your heart and there answer to me, Do you love me? And Our Lord's not saying this to humiliate him, it's the contrary. He's telling him do that because there you- you will know that you love me. And- and I need you, as I needed you that night, that I was kind of lost, I was praying alone, and I needed your company, and you dare to jump out of the boat to reach out to me and to give me some consolation. And I remember that, and you remember that too. So it's not that everything is a trial or

everything is nasty in your life, we have good memories, and we have a real foundation of friendship. And I know that, and you- now you don't see it, but you need to dig in, go back to your memories. I love you, and more than anything else in this world, that's Jesus Christ talking to Peter, and I love it. I honestly, I love it because it's a path for us too.

St. John Paul II says, "It is Jesus that you seek when you dream of happiness. He's waiting for you. When nothing else you find satisfies you. He is the beauty to which you are so attracted. It is he who provoked you with a thirst for fullness that will not let you settle for compromise. It is he, Jesus, who urges you to shed the masks of a false life." It is Jesus, always him, that put inside you the thirst for beauty. It is Jesus waiting for you when nothing else, or nobody else is waiting for you, or nothing satisfies you. And Jesus is there waiting for you with a big smile, saying, don't worry, I'm here. Do not be afraid. It is him that gave you the thirst for fullness, and urges you to say- to say, no more masks, no more hiding. Hiding, actually is a- is a complicated sin, but in my opinion, is very important to discover it, because it's very toxic- it is very damaging. It is a reaction of Adam and Eve. After the Original Sin they were hiding. And that's bad because one thing is to be wounded, which is okay. I think all of us have experienced that, both physically or spiritually, but to hide is bad news, because it gets infected and we are alone with our own- our own misery, and God doesn't want that. So part of friendship is again, vulnerability, complete ease in front of Jesus Christ, complete ease. He's not disappointed. I don't know your experience, my experience is with my friends, they have seen me in my best and in my worst moments in life. And they're my friends because after both experiences they love me, and the same applies to them. I- I've, seen my friends in their best and in their worst, and I love them. You're my friend, that's unconditional. And that's precisely- sometimes makes me laugh, or we laugh together when remembering the bad moments or the good ones. As a matter of fact, when you're in friendship, there is no big difference between both of them, honestly, because both of them are funny, and unless we go through this purification, through this vulnerability in our human friendship and also in our friendship with Jesus Christ, we will always be fake, hiding, and we don't want that.

Again, is this simplicity, this- you know, directness and no hiding in front of the personality the most. Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors of for Christ. Open wide the doors for Christ. This is what he said, St. John Paul II, after his election in October 22, 1978, "Do not be afraid. Open wide the doors for Christ." In Italian, you say *spanca la porta*. It's almost like a kick in the doors, open with- with the force of nature is like a hurricane of joy. Open the doors for Jesus Christ. Do not be afraid. Three years later, he was shot by Ali Ağca, this killer that was so close to him, and inexplicably, he wasn't killed, because it was the feast day of Our Lady Fatima, and she saved him, right, basically. But even after that, he met Ali Ağca in prison and forgave him, and no worries. And then he took the bullet that was in his body and brought it to Fatima. There's this little anecdote that they were trying to put it as a gift for Our Lady, but a bullet is kind of an ugly thing for a woman, right? So the Pope was saying, what we need to bring- this bullet somehow, because it's a miracle, and I want that to be part of- of the image. So they were trying to find a way, and apparently they took out the crown that is over- Our Lady's there, wonderful. I've seen that crown and the image many times, because I've been in Fatima like 10 times, and- and they took the crown out, and then they flip it, and then they saw a little hole just in the middle, and the Pope put the- himself, he put the bullet, and apparently there was a click, and they couldn't take it off, and they said, that's it, and it's still there. The bullet that almost killed him. Now you know, it's part of the decoration of a crown of glory and joy that is over Our Lady's wonderful face and head. And that's how the saints keep moving without any fear, without any fear, not because their lives are more and more simpler or no problems or no, no. I mean, you can say, Do not be afraid, and three years later, be shot, almost killed, but continue. Why? Because Jesus Christ is with you, and that's the treasure, that's everything we need. So thank you, my Lord, for the saints that you has- you have given us in the church. Thank you for all the saints, and that's why St. John

Paul II, like any other saints, have authority- they have authority like real like Jesus Christ in the gospel, they participate in this authority of Jesus Christ. That is the authority of friendship. It's, I own you in a good way. You're my friend. I can ask you anything, and you can come to me anytime you want. There are no filters, no masks, no hiding, and he said, "Only in Christ can men and women find answers to the ultimate questions that trouble them. Only in Christ can they fully understand their dignity as persons created and loved by God. Jesus Christ is the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth." This is Jesus, and he's your friend and in him we find, as John Paul II says, answers, shelter, dignity when we lose it, security, love everything like- literally, everything we need. And that Jesus is in- in your heart. He is in in your prayer, in your experience. And Jesus is telling you, do you love me? And you say Jesus with St. John Paul II, with St. Peter. I can tell you- you know everything. You know that I love you so much and I want to love you more.

St. John Paul II is a great example of cheerfulness. And that peace and cheerfulness of the saints is not just because they had that temperament or- or they were naturally inclined to that. I mean, again, look at his life. Let's all of us look at his life today, tragedy after a tragedy, and also your country. So both externally, in your family, everything is falling apart, but then the encounter with Jesus Christ always the same thing, and the dream of happiness that God has for you and his company, more than anything else, right, more than fixing things externally or internally, is the company, need of Jesus Christ, and you giving him company as well in the world, you and I consoling God, giving him some consolation, giving him some feedback, something positive. So no more masks, my Lord. In the Gospel, when you met, for instance, your apostles, when you met Nathaniel and you said, Well, this is a true trillite. There's a real God here. And he- he knew you in his prayer, when I saw you- and I saw you under the fig tree, I recognize you. And he said, Well, if you saw me there and you still love me, you are the Son of God. You're evidently the Messiah. If you saw me under the fig tree after what happened there? We don't know what happened, but it was probably a moment of prayer, maybe a kind of confession, maybe a moment of despair, or a moment of intimacy. And he said, Well, if you saw me there and you still love me, I will go with you till the end of the world.

Let's go to the Blessed Virgin Mary. Let's ask Mary, when we're scared, to avoid hiding. To get out of our little hole of misery and just go to Jesus, as dirty as we are, as nasty, as miserable, as mediocre as we feel ourselves, it doesn't really matter. Jesus, like any good friend, loves us in the best and in the worst moments. And I would say more in the worst moments, because he can show his power, and also because he had- he experienced himself being loved in the worst moment of his life. He knows how powerful that is, and he needed that, after the death of John the Baptist, when he was crucified, obviously, when he was troubled and he was crying, and then he asked his father, his apostles, to pray with me. So Our Lord knows and experienced that too, so it's a both ways street, and he loves being in that street of friendship. So my mother helped me to never, ever hide, helped me to be like St John Paul II, with no fear. Do not be afraid, and help me to embrace that friendship with Jesus Christ as the best treasure of my life.

I thank you, my God, for the good resolutions, affections, and inspirations that you have communicated to me in this time of prayer. I ask your help in putting them into effect. My Immaculate Mother, St. Joseph, my father and lord, my guardian angel, intercede for me.