

by Joan Mitchell, CSJ

Place a lighted candle and an opened bible on a table at the center of your group. Pray together these words from the first letter of John, Sunday's second reading.

LEADER: Beloved, let us love one another—

ALL: Because love is of God.

LEADER: Everyone who loves is begotten of God—

ALL: And knows God.

LEADER: God's love was revealed in our midst in this way.

ALL: God sent the Son to the world that we might have life through him.

LEADER: Love, then, consists of this:

ALL: Not that we have loved God, but that God has loved us.

LEADER: May our time together lead us to grow in love.

ALL: Amen.

Love is a verb and a sacrament. Changing a diaper is an act of love. Helping a child take first steps, practicing spelling words, baiting hooks, soothing angers,



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shooting hoops together, attending recitals and plays, affirming gifts—all these loving actions continue the human growth process that starts in the womb. These self-giving actions make visible the bond between parent and child.

Christian churches bless marriage as a sacrament. A couple expresses their love for each other in vows that commit them to a lasting relationship. Their commitment makes visible what we all know—that we live and grow in our shared relationships. Two people's day by day, self-giving love for each other makes visible the self-gifting energy in which we live, move, and have our being.

We humans can give of ourselves to others. We can communicate and open up about who we are, even though we always remain mystery even to ourselves. We are social beings. In our intimate relationships we in a sense create each other. We let others know us and share who we are with them. In being known we recognize ourselves. In loving and being loved, we flourish.



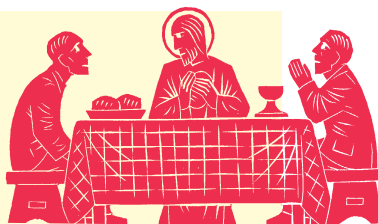
Marriage recognizes love as a sacrament. Friendship is a sacrament, too. In fact in Sunday's gospel, Jesus identifies his disciples as friends, as people whom he loves. His disciples are not slaves to a master but friends as intimate as family. Beloving a friend is believing in the person. A friend is an equal, capable of returning love for love, of treasuring the gift each is to the other, sharing laughs, sharing pain.

Some people think *disciple* is a stronger word for our relationship with Jesus than *friend*. In John's gospel Jesus calls his followers friends, people for whom he lays down his life.

● Whose friendship is life-giving for you?

GOSPEL

Live on in my love.



NARRATOR: After his last supper with his disciples Jesus talked with them.

JESUS 1: As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you. Live on in my love. You will live in my love if you keep my commandments, even as I have kept my Father's commandments and live in my Father's love.

JESUS 2: All this I tell you that my joy may be yours and your joy may be complete. This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you. There is no greater love than this: to lay down one's life for one's friends.

JESUS 3: You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer speak of you as slaves, for a slave does not know what the master is about. Instead, I call you friends since I have made known to you all that I heard from my Father.

JESUS 4: It was not you who chose me; it was I who chose you to go forth and bear fruit. Your fruit must endure so that all you ask the Father in my name, my Father will give you.

ALL: The command I give you is this: that you love one another.

John 15:9-17

stay with him. Making friends involves getting to know each other, spending time together. Jesus takes his friends along to the wedding at Cana. He enjoys dinner with Mary, Martha, and Lazarus. Sunday's gospel comes from the best known of Jesus' meals with friends—the Last Supper.

- With whom beside family do you share meals?
- How safe is your family table for each person to speak his or her experience?
- How do the meals you regularly share with others strengthen friendships?

Love is the way of Jesus' friends.

Christians have lived Jesus' command to love one another for more than 60 years when John writes the fourth gospel in the AD 90s. Jesus refers to his closest followers not only as disciples but as friends, freely chosen companions who mutually love one another and share their lives. This is Christian Faith 101, a single commandment, one almost all of us are capable of living. Jesus loves us his friends as the Father loves him.

"A friend is someone who likes you," Charlie Brown says. That's one way of looking at friendship. It suggests insiders and outsiders. Some are friends; others are people who don't like

us or don't like us yet.

God's love is not an insider/outsider kind of thing. Jesus comes because of God's love and friendship for the whole world. Jesus embodies God's commitment to all of us.

Jesus shows this inclusive friendship in other stories in John. He shares meals with people, heals them, stands up for them, and teaches them his way. He models the kind of friendship for others he asks of his followers.

Sharing meals is one of the things all of us regularly do with friends. Early in John's gospel Jesus invites two disciples of John the Baptist to come to the place where he lives and

“You are my friends if you do what I command you.” *Do* is an active verb. Jesus isn't talking about *having* friends, but about *being* a friend. Being a friend means laying down our lives for each other.

Liberation theologians have a term for laying down one's life—*acompañar*. It doesn't mean martyrdom, though that may happen. It means accompanying each other, entering into the life circumstances of one's community. It recognizes we all share a common human condition. It means acting on that recognition.

Some of these people we are called to accompany are

members of our own families and parishes we have never been able to see eye-to-eye with. Some are our new immigrant neighbors.

Minimally, love challenges us to tolerate one another. More fully, love challenges us to talk to one another and learn how we practice our faiths. Most fully, love challenges us to encounter one another, to honor each other's paths to the Holy One.

● **Who do you accompany?
How?**

This struggle to love and to bring life to others is a joyful struggle. It is the work of the Spirit to build up the Church in this way. The Spirit is within us, dwelling with us now as Jesus did two millennia ago. We need to trust that when we lay down our lives in love, the Spirit will make them bear fruit and that the gospel story and the life it conveys will live on.

The good thing is that we have a lifetime to learn this love and a million chances a day to choose it. So if I turn my back

on someone today, this person may reappear tomorrow. And if I still turn my back, perhaps someone walking with me will put out a hand and show me how. Conversion is possible at any minute. It lies in wait in every human encounter.

Friendship is mutual and reciprocal. Anyone can be a friend. Friendship is the most inclusive way we love. It stretches us beyond our most intimate relationship and links us in circles beyond family.

● **Resolve as an individual or as a group to reach out to some of Jesus' friends who are not yet friends of yours.**

Imagine a utopia in which we taxpayers and our legislators pour out our energies and resources to love one another. What if Jesus is right that love is the real power in the world? What if we spend our dollars and creativity making friends with those we don't know rather than defend ourselves against them? What if we take the common good seriously and do for others what we ourselves need?



Kayla Mueller

Compassion for people who suffer, especially children, led Kayla Mueller from Arizona to Syria, where she worked with refugees displaced by the civil war. Terrorists kidnapped Kayla on August 4, 2013, as she left a hospital staffed by Doctors Without Borders in Aleppo. A bombing in October 2014 ended her life.

"I find God in the suffering eyes reflected in mine," Kayla wrote to her father earlier. "I will always seek God. Some people find God in church. Some people find God in nature. Some people find God in love; I find God in suffering. I've known for some time what my life work is, using my hands as tools to relieve suffering."

President Obama said that "the future belongs not to those who destroy, but rather to the irrepressible force of human goodness that Kayla Mueller shall forever represent."

● **What if we let compassion lead us?**

● **What signs of the Spirit do you see in the news today?**





How is the Spirit working in us?

In Sunday's first reading from Acts the fresh breeze of the Spirit blows through the early Christian community much as it has since John XXIII opened the window and announced the Second Vatican Council.

Peter refuses to let a Roman centurion kneel before him and honor him as a god in the same way Pope John often raised people up from their knees with a laugh at the incongruity of their bowing before him. Pope John's answer to those who criticized his decision to call a Council sounds like Peter's response when he sees the Spirit poured out upon the centurion Cornelius and his family: "What can I do to stop the Spirit?"

Our discomforts often point out where the Spirit is at work in us and our Church. Many adults seek spiritual means to ease the stress of living in our culture. Lay women and men in our parishes seek ways to use their gifts for ministry in the church and keep their churches open. Third World theologians and the U.S. Catholic bishops call First World Christians to a preferential option for the poor. Like a messy desk

or a cluttered kitchen, discomfort and messiness in the Christian community may be signs the Spirit is at work in our hearts.

God shows no partiality.

Peter entered the house of Cornelius who met him, dropped to his knees before Peter, and bowed low. Peter said as he helped him to his feet, "Stand up; I am only human."

Then Peter began to speak to the relatives and friends of Cornelius: "I begin to see that God shows no partiality, rather anyone of any nation who fears God and does what is right is acceptable to God."

While Peter was still speaking, the Holy Spirit fell upon all who heard his words. The circumcised believers who had come with Peter were astounded that the gift of the Holy Spirit had been poured out even on the Gentiles, for they heard them speaking in tongues and extolling God. Then Peter said, "Can anyone withhold the water for baptizing these people who have received the Holy Spirit just as we have?" So he ordered them to be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. Then they invited him to stay for several days.

Acts 10.25-26,34-35,44-48

- How do you experience the Spirit at work in your discomforts with the Church today?
- How impartial are you in whom you accept as God-fearing and upright?



To conclude your reflection together, bless one another for the work of building up the community of the new commandment. Add concrete loving actions to each statement.

Bless our eyes for seeing needs and beauty, for...

Bless our ears for listening to one another, for...

Bless our hands for cooking and hammering, for...

Bless our feet for visiting elderly relatives, for...

Exchange a sign of peace.



Joan Mitchell, CSJ, the editor of SUNDAY BY SUNDAY, holds a Masters of Theological Studies from Harvard Divinity School and a Ph.D. in New Testament from Luther Seminary in St. Paul, MN.

DO SOMETHING



- Read online the story of Carolyn Brown's dream of a Kitchen Table open to all. kitchentablerochelle.org. Learn about nonprofit, pay-what-you-can community cafes, a movement that believes food has the power to bring people together and build healthy communities. Visit oneworldeverybodyeats.org.



WE BEGIN READING CONTINUOUSLY FROM MARK'S GOSPEL on June 10. This simple book by Sister

Joan places the Sunday gospel excerpts in the narrative of the entire gospel. It is ideal for homilists and for anyone who wishes to understand how early Christian communities shaped the telling of Jesus' story. Only \$10.00.

Order at goodgroundpress.com or call 800-232-5533.