

PRAY Jesus, you are a friend who sees me. I'm not invisible to you. You accept and love me for who I am. Teach me to love and accept myself.



SPiRIT

by Ed Fasterly

A piece of notebook paper lay in my mailbox in the camp counselors' lounge. Scrawled across the page was the message:



I headed over to his cabin. I had heard from the other younger counselors that Eli was a college junior. That was a little intimidating, but beyond that Eli was physically intimidating—a football player over six feet tall and a solid mass of linebacker muscle. I am five foot eight and three years younger.

I knocked on the door of his cabin.

A booming voice said, "Come in." I walked in. Eli was huge, even sitting on his cot.

"What's up?" he asked.

"I got your note."

"I heard you write poetry," he said, putting down his pen and notebook.

The pen led my eye to drawings, sketches, paintings, and collages on his walls, each one impressive and all of them with the name "Elias" in the bottom corner.

"I write poetry and songs. Do you?"

"I'm trying," he began. "I draw. I have been drawing for as long as I can remember. It's my way of expressing the way I see the world around me." He paused. "Lately I've been reading poetry. I think that some of my thoughts can only take form in words, you know."

I looked up at an ink drawing of a man with corn rows in his hair holding up the world. "Sometimes I've wanted to draw when I'm stuck on words."

That's how we started talking and kept talking and talking.

We both grew up in the city; both did music. I played guitar and he flowed with a hip-hop group.

"Hip hop is poetry, isn't it?" I said, "A song without music is a poem.

When you're rapping, you're flowing. When you're reading your poetry out loud, you're flowing."

"My rhymes only go with music," Eli insisted. "But my girlfriend said the same thing. I read her one of my rhymes without the music. She said, 'You should make that spoken word.' I tried to explain that if the music wasn't there, it wouldn't mean the same thing."

"Yeah."

Eli dug in a backpack and handed me a notebook opened to a page in



A GREAT SILENCE

SUNDAY GOSPEL

31st Sunday in Ordinary Time

Jesus befriends Zacchaeus.

NARRATOR 1: Jesus entered Jericho and began to go through the city.

NARRATOR 2: A man named Zacchaeus lived there, a chief tax collector, who was very rich.

NARRATOR 1: He wanted to see who Jesus was, but he couldn't see among the crowd because he was small in size. Zacchaeus ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree, so that he could see Jesus, who was about to go that way.

NARRATOR 2: When Jesus came to the tree, he looked up and saw Zacchaeus.

JESUS: Zacchaeus, hurry down. Today I mean to stay at your house.

NARRATOR 1: Hurrying, Zacchaeus came down and welcomed Jesus, rejoicing.

NARRATOR 2: All who saw this complained.



CROWD: Jesus has gone to stay with a sinful man.

NARRATOR 1: Zacchaeus stood and said to the Lord:

ZACCHAEUS: I will give half my belongings, Lord, to the poor. If I have defrauded anyone in the least, I will repay the person back fourfold.

JESUS: Today salvation came to this house, for this man is a real son of Abraham. The Son of Man has come to search out and save what was lost.

Luke 19.1-10

the middle. "Tell me what you think of this poem, but not now, man. I can't deal with that, people reading my stuff in front of me." Eli smiled.

"I'll give it back at lunch?"
"Yeah."

On the walk back to my cabin I opened up to the page I held with my finger.

The poem punched me with pain I didn't know. At lunch I asked Eli when he had written it.

"Last summer when I was living at my mom's house," said Eli. "This homeless crackhead walked up and down our street, preaching and always talking about the Great Silence. Then he'd drift off into some other place of mind. I didn't understand what he was saying until these thug punks one day just up and shot him. BANG!" Eli made a gun out of his hand. "Like that. My mom, my little brother and sisters, and everyone in our neighborhood walked out and stared at him, lying there on the street. Nobody said a word. That's when I figured out what that crackhead meant."

"It's a great poem."

"That's the one I'm most proud of," he said, cutting me off, "the other ones are crap."

"Somehow I doubt that," I said.

"Read them," he said laughing, "some of them redefine 'crap'."

I knew exactly what he meant, and I laughed, too.

A couple of weeks after camp Eli picked me up at home. He had a car.

"What's up?" he asked. "You got your stuff?"

I nodded and held up my notebook, "You?"

"Yeah," he said, "it's in the car. Where're we headed?"

"What about Uptown?" I said. "I hang out at a coffee shop there. What kind of music you got?"

"What do you want to hear?" Eli asked.

"Whatever."

Eli turned up the music on the car stereo and a smooth, hip-hop beat saturated the car with bass and rim shots and a man flowing about lost souls.

"You writing at all?" I asked.

"Trying," he said. "My ma has me painting the house and cleaning up the yard. Football started last Monday. When I'm done with all of it, I'm too tired to think, let alone write."

"I hear that," I said. "I'm working every day at my dad's office to make a little money before school starts."

I walked in the coffee shop door first. It was cluttered and artsy in the stereotypical, coffee-shop way. The girl behind the counter had dreadlocks and the clientele was mostly late teen and college-age folks. I was a regular. I saw several faces

TRUTH

THIS IS FOR THE PROPHETS
OF THE STREETS

THEIR CLOTHING IS DIRTY AND TORN
THEIR TESTIMONY IS A GLOCK

IN A SIXTH GRADER'S HAND
EXPLODING IN VIOLENCE

FROM THE GREAT SILENCE
THIS IS THEIR SERMON

THIS IS FOR THE PROPHETS
OF THE STREETS

“It’s like there’s two of me. There’s like the me that I am—the me that I see when I look in the mirror.... Then there’s the me that the folks in there see.”

familiar enough to make eye contact and nod hello. Today they shot puzzled stares in my direction. Folks stopped talking or playing chess, looked up, turned around, and murmured to each other.

As I got to the counter, I heard Eli say quietly, “These people don’t want me in here. This isn’t a place for black folks, man.”

I looked at Eli. I saw what the people of the cafe were seeing—not a football player, a fellow counselor, or an artist, not a big guy wearing a white T-shirt, jeans, and boots. Eli was black. I was white, just like everyone else in the coffee shop—the patrons, servers, probably the artists whose works hung on the walls. I felt sick.

“You want to sit outside?” Eli asked. “This crowd is lame.”

Outside in the late summer sunlight Eli leaned over his coffee. “I don’t get people around here, this city, everywhere.” He looked up at me. “My whole life people have been doing this shit to me. It’s not like you get used to it. It’s like you just start to expect it. I’m 20 years old, and I’m in college. Do you think they see me as a student of higher learning or a future art teacher? Naw, they don’t see that.

“It’s like there’s two of me. There’s the me that I am—the me that I see when I look in the mirror, when I write in my notebooks, and draw on the page, the me my family knows and my friends. Then there’s the me that the folks in there see: I’m a big, black, drug-dealing gangbanger that don’t have no right being in their precious, white coffee house. ‘What’s he doing in here? He should be out shooting other gangbangers and smoking crack.’ They don’t see the real me.

“It’s like Hollywood—TV, movies, MTV, and all the media you and I are drowned in every day turns the real me into this walking stereotype that everyone else sees. They don’t see a man walking in and ordering a drink. They don’t even see a man right away. They see black, then they see a man, and maybe if they got over themselves, they would see Eli.” His eyes seemed to drift off to someplace else as he sipped his coffee.

The door to the coffee house swung open as a patron left. Over the clink of cups against tables and bus tubs, the chatter of college students and artists, the drone of the college radio station, I heard a Great Silence.

Promoting the common good

Sometimes schools call their cafeterias a lunch commons. All students can eat there. Some schools have grassy, outdoor spaces where students can eat, study, and visit—a student commons. A commons is the center of a world we share.

Boston Common is a park full of trees, grass, and flowers, right in the middle of downtown Boston. Once this land was the pasture early farmers shared in common.



A commons is a place where the people of a city or the students of a school experience who they are as a community. A commons gives us a visible picture of a concept important to Catholic social teaching—the common good.

The common good is a duty each of us shares to make life possible for all. When Zacchaeus becomes Jesus’ friend, he gives half his belongings to the poor. The common good, not just his own good, concerns him.

Catholic social teaching values the individual. Every human person is sacred, made in God’s image. The common good begins with respect for the inalienable rights of the human person.

However, the Catholic Church also recognizes that human beings are not a race of loners, nor does God in our history call us alone. God calls Abraham and Sarah to found a family of believers. God calls Moses to save an enslaved people and give them the commandments as a basis for living together.

We humans are social, made so that we can only grow and thrive in interaction with others. None of us survives without the care of a family, nor do we find our individual identity except in friendships. We develop our personal gifts through participating in teams, bands, youth groups as well as through individual practice and study.

QUESTIONS 1 What call does the author hear in the Great Silence? 2 How would you respond in the author’s place? 3 What is a way a friend has called you? How did you respond? 4 How does Jesus’ friendship change Zacchaeus? 5 How does Jesus’ friendship affect who you are?

We achieve the common good by working together to insure every individual's rights to what is necessary for a truly human life—food, clothing, shelter, education, work, and health. Vatican II's Constitution on the Church in the Modern World also includes as basic the rights to choose a state of life freely, to found a family, to a good reputation, to respect, to appropriate information, to act on one's conscience, to privacy, and to freedom of religion (#26).

The common good is not only local and national but also a global concern. Many people seek to simplify their lives, recycle, and eat vegetarian all or some of the time. They want to consume less of the world's goods so that people in the developing world that are poor can at least survive and so that Earth can sustain itself and support its life forms. The common good requires peace.

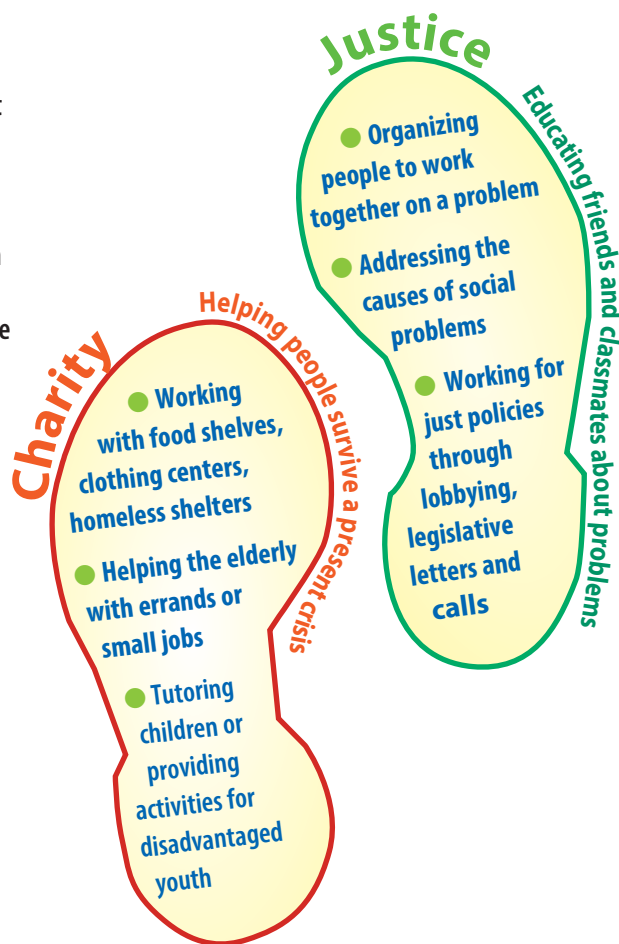
Responding to the needs of the poor and promoting the common good require the two feet of social action—charity and justice.

Charity helps people survive their present crisis by directly serving their needs: feeding a hungry person is an act of charity. Justice addresses the root cause of a problem and attempts to change that cause: supporting legislation to aid hungry people is an act of justice.



To work for the common good means not only taking personal responsibility for one's self, family, education, and conscientious work but also taking active part in public life.

Catechism of the Catholic Church, #1914-15, also 1905-1912



What makes a real friend?

Here are some reader responses. What's yours?

A real friend knows your good and bad points and loves you anyway. Real friends know who you are and don't judge you.

A real friend will stand by your side inside and outside of school.

A friend understands and accepts who you are, doesn't criticize you for mistakes, or talk to others about you in ways they wouldn't talk to you. A real friend doesn't always assume the negative and looks for the positive.

A real friend is nice and sticks up for you and accepts you for what you are.

A real friend is loyal, trustworthy, and truthful.

A real friend is someone who will stand by you no matter what. A friend will never betray you even if you have done something terrible or disagreeable. You can trust a real friend with everything.

A real friend cares for you, listens to you, and helps you, and is someone you have fun with.

A real friend should be honest and always tell you the truth no matter what and always be there for you.

A real friend is someone you can sit with and watch a sunset quietly and still have the best conversation ever.

A friend is someone who you can rely on all the time but will leave you alone if that's what you want. A friend will be with you through good times and bad. A friend is someone who deserves to get these things reciprocated.

FAITH in ACTION

- 1 How can high school students fulfill the duty of promoting the basic rights of others?
- 2 Visit PovertyUSA.org, a website of the Catholic Campaign for Human Development. Do their Tour Poverty USA, exploring the monthly budget of a poor family. Prepare a presentation for your group identifying the causes of poverty and the poorest cities, counties, states.
- 3 Contact Pax Christi to learn about peacemaking efforts in our world. paxchristiusa.org.
- 4 Check out your diocesan website.