

"I CALL YOU FRIENDS"



P. Sullivan
9-XI-11

A PASTORAL LETTER IN THIS "YEAR OF FAITH"
THE MOST REVEREND DAVID D. KAGAN, D.D., P.A., J.C.L.
BISHOP OF BISMARCK

“I Call You Friends”

Introduction

“This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. I no longer call you slaves, because a slave does not know what his master is doing. I have called you friends, because I have told you everything I have heard from my Father. It was not you who chose me, but I who chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit that will remain, so that whatever you ask the Father in my name He may give you. This I command you: love one another.” (Jn 15:12-17)

In anticipation of our full and joyous entrance into and participation in the celebration of the “Year of Faith”, I offer to you, my brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus, this Pastoral Letter on the mystery, the beauty and the joy of the Divine Friendship each of us has been given for the salvation of our souls.

To begin to grasp the magnitude of the gift of Divine Friendship is to begin to understand the real Love which this Friendship expresses. No one is excluded from the Divine Friendship and thus, none of us can ever not respond to it.

Pope Benedict XVI, on the occasion of the solemn inauguration of his Pontificate, said in the course of his homily at that Mass: “There is nothing more beautiful than to be surprised by the Gospel, by the encounter with Christ. There is nothing more beautiful than to know Him and to speak to others of our friendship with Him.”

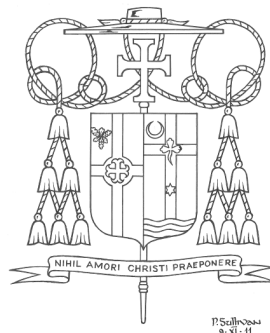
The Divine Friendship offered to each of us has a name: He is Jesus. In all of human history that preceded Him, He was foretold and prefigured; in all of human history since His advent, He has been, is and will be made manifest as God Who is Love Incarnate.

Who we are as members of His Body, the Church, and what we do in and through His Church, begins with Him as our Divine Friend and is destined to end with Him in heaven where we shall see God face-to-face, as He is.

In this “Year of Faith”, which celebrates the Fiftieth Anniversary of the opening of the Second Ecumenical Council of the Vatican, and the Twentieth Anniversary of the promulgation of the *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, Pope Benedict XVI has called the Church universal to consider its Symbol of Faith, the Apostles’ Creed. His is a call to deepen our understanding of who we are as Catholics and why we are Catholics.

The Year of Faith . . . is a summons to an authentic and renewed conversion to the Lord, the one Savior of the world. In the mystery of His death and resurrection, God has revealed in its fullness the Love that saves and calls us to conversion of life through the forgiveness of sins (cf. Acts 5:31). . . . Through faith, this new life shapes the whole of human existence according to the radical new reality of the resurrection. To the extent that he freely cooperates, man’s thoughts and affections, mentality and conduct are slowly purified and transformed, on a journey that is never completely finished in this life.” (Porta Fidei, n. 6)

It is my fervent hope that this Pastoral Letter will be of help to each of us in our particular vocations as we strive to cultivate in faith our response to His Friendship. Our response is contained both in our understanding of the Apostles’ Creed and in how we put what we believe into practice by our prayers, our works of mercy and our acts of true self-sacrifice.



Friendship Itself

A General Definition

As the terms “friend” or “friendship” are often used today, they refer more often to something else such as how we might describe an acquaintance, or a classmate, or a co-worker, or a cordial or polite relationship, or being civil and respectful toward another. Of course, none of these other references for a “friend” and for “friendship” are wrong or unhealthy but, do they define and mean “friend” and “friendship”?

According to *The Oxford Universal Dictionary*, a friend is “one joined to another in mutual benevolence and intimacy.” This is a good basic and natural or common definition but, it seems to me, it is incomplete. It certainly identifies a “friend” and the relationship of “friendship” as much more than what I have already noted.

What this good basic definition lacks can be supplied for only by the Catholic perspective given to us by the Lord Jesus Himself.

The Catholic Definition

If you read again that passage from the Gospel of Saint John which I am using as the basis for this Pastoral Letter, it is apparent that the Catholic notion of “friendship” flows from the specific way in which Jesus Himself uses this term. It is equally clear that as Jesus is the “friend” to His disciples, His “friendship” requires something of them, His “friends”. That something is obedience, freely given and lived.

However, let us ponder first, this truth – Jesus chooses us to be His friends. He elevates us from slaves to His intimate friends so that we are given through Him knowledge of the Father. What a gift! With this God-given knowledge we can freely do what He commands us to do – to bear fruit that will remain.

Thus, the Catholic definition of “friendship” comes to us directly from our “Friend”, Jesus and it gives us everything we need, grace, to be “friends” with others in the way we have been “befriended” by Jesus.

The Divine Friendship is not something we can earn; it is the wondrous and mysterious gift of God to us, not for His sake, but for our sakes. The Divine Friendship is love in its purest form because it is Jesus, the Incarnate Son of God. The Divine Friendship is ours not because we have asked for it but because we need it in order to fulfill our purpose for being created.

Examples of Divine Friendship

The Most Blessed Trinity

What the Catholic Church has believed from the beginning and has never deviated from is that the Most Blessed Trinity is *the* basic mystery of its faith and its life. It is God alone Who chooses to reveal Himself to mankind and only He can do this. The fact that God has chosen to do so is the first act of Divine Friendship. The Church states our belief in this way: “The mystery of the Most Holy Trinity is the central mystery of the Christian faith and of Christian life. God alone can make it known to us by revealing himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.” (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 261)

Why speak of the Most Blessed Trinity in relation to Divine Friendship? Because the Divine Friendship we are offered in Baptism is a result of the intense, perfect communion of love between the Three Divine Persons and, this love has taken on flesh and blood in the very Person of Jesus. He is the “Face of God” as our Holy Father Pope Benedict XVI has so often said and thus, He is our “Divine Friend”. In an address to the priests of the Diocese of Rome on February 7, 2008, the Holy Father said:

God is flesh and blood. He is one of us. We know him by his Face, by his Name. He is Jesus Christ who speaks to us in the Gospel. He is both man and God. And being God, he chose man to enable us to choose God. Thus, we must enter into the knowledge of Jesus and then friendship with him in order to walk with him.

It is this communion of love of the Most Blessed Trinity which expresses itself in Creation and most vividly in the creation of man. “Then God said: ‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. . . . God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them.’” (Genesis 1: 26-27) Again, we read: “The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.” (Genesis 2: 7)

What do we learn of Divine Friendship from these passages? First, it is God Who initiates this Friendship and we, human beings, are the singular and privileged recipients of it. Second, God Who initiates this Divine Friendship never takes back His offer; we, the recipients are the ones who betray His Friendship by our sins (cf. Genesis 3). Finally, God Who is all-just is all-merciful as well since while we are punished for our sins, because He is our Divine Friend, He forgives and restores us to His friendship (cf. Genesis 3: 15).

Pope Benedict XVI, in his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* (n. 1), teaches us: *“To enter through that door is to set out on a journey that lasts a lifetime. It begins with baptism (cf. Rom 6:4), through which we can address God as Father, and it ends with the passage through death to eternal life, fruit of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, whose will it was, by the gift of the Holy Spirit, to draw those who believe in Him into His own glory (cf. Jn 17:22). To profess faith in the Trinity – Father, Son and Holy Spirit – is to believe in one God who is Love (cf. 1 Jn 4:8): the Father, who in the fullness of time sent His Son for our salvation; Jesus Christ, who in the mystery of His death and resurrection redeemed the world; the Holy Spirit, who leads the Church across the centuries as we await the Lord’s glorious return.”*

The Old Testament

Clearly, the first friends of the Divine Friend are Adam and Eve. God created them last as a sign of their importance among all of His creation and he entrusts to them the care of all that He has created (cf. Genesis 1: 26, 28-29; Genesis 2: 8-9; 15-20). The greatest act of Divine Friendship to Adam was his partner, Eve, and the fact that they participate in the creation of new human life is their response to their Divine Friend Who is the Creator of all life.

Noah is another friend of God precisely because “Noah found favor with the Lord. . . . Noah, a good man and blameless in that age, for he walked with God . . .” (Genesis 6: 8-10).

When you read the entire story of Noah, he is God’s friend precisely because “. . . he carried out all the commands that God gave him” (Genesis 6: 22). Look again at what is at the heart of the offer of Divine Friendship as found in John 15: 14. Divine Friendship offered and then accepted always generates obedience to God.

Let us look now at Abraham (Abram) the first patriarch and the friend of God. Read for yourselves his story in the Book of Genesis 11: 27 – 25: 11. Again, as you read Abraham’s story it is a story of obedience to God and it is an obedience which is unwavering no matter the circumstances. The defining moment in the Divine Friendship with Abraham is found in Chapter 22 of Genesis when God requires him to sacrifice his only son and he perseveres in his obedience to God. We know how this story concludes. Abraham is blessed lavishly by God and as God said “. . . all this because you obeyed my command.” (Genesis 22: 18)

Jacob, the third patriarch and the one who had his name changed to “Israel”, presents us with another element of what Divine Friendship produces in those who accept it and are obedient to it. Perseverance is that second element and, along with obedience, brings God’s blessings (cf. Genesis 32: 23-31).

Joseph is our next friend of God and the beloved son of Israel. Again, we know the story of Joseph sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt and how he rose to be the second most powerful man in Egypt. To read the life story of Joseph is to read how God, the Divine Friend, allows trials to come not as a punishment but as opportunities for a person to grow in obedience, perseverance and patience. As it is written of him, “but since the Lord was with him, Joseph got on very well . . .” (Genesis 39: 2). What we learn from Joseph’s friendship with God is that he can forgive his brothers unconditionally and in so doing, they are changed for the better (cf. Genesis 45).

Of all of the great and holy friends of God in the Old Testament, there are two more who I would like to present to you for your consideration and edification – Moses and King David. While there are so many more, especially all of the Prophets, these two friends of God give us clear examples of the virtues of humility and justice.

The Books of Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy record the dramatic offer of Divine Friendship to Moses from God, his acceptance of this Friendship, and how God’s Friendship generates true humility which is the first fruit of obedience. It is to Moses that God reveals His name (Exodus 3: 14-15); it is Moses whom God uses to glorify His Name in Egypt, in the desert, at Mount Sinai, and at the Red Sea. God speaks repeatedly to Moses as a friend and face-to-face (Exodus 33: 11) and Moses experiences some of God’s infinite glory as a blessing for him (Exodus 33: 18-23). This is

what happens to each of us as God's friends when we pray and with true humility submit to God's will.

Finally, let us look to David, "God's beloved", and learn better how the Divine Friendship not only chastens but purifies and refines virtue and it inspires one to be truly just and upright of heart. The story of God's choice of David to be king of His people and therefore, His friend, is most telling. This story is found in 1 Samuel 16: 6-13. We learn that God chooses us to be His friends since "Not as man sees does God see, because man sees the appearance but the Lord looks into the heart" (1 Samuel 16: 7). Better still, once God chooses to be our Friend what happened to David happens to each of us ". . . and from that day on, the spirit of the Lord rushed upon David" (1 Samuel 16: 13). David's son, Solomon, has described the relationship of Divine Friendship between God and David best when he prayed to God: "You have shown great favor to your servant, my father David, because he behaved faithfully toward you with justice and an upright heart . . ." (1 Kings 3: 6).

The New Testament

Just as in Old Testament times, so in the time of the New Testament, the definitive age, the numbers of the friends of God, made such by God Himself, are countless. I would like to meditate on just a few of these friends of God since they inherited the virtues of the Divine Friendship from their ancestors in the faith some of whom have been mentioned. However, they model for us what the encounter with the Divine Friend in the flesh effects in one's life, true and complete conformity of oneself to the Person of Jesus.

There is no better example for us than the Mother of God, Mary most holy. She is the very best example of how God chooses to befriend us and she is the very best example of how one responds to this choice. Let us listen and ponder: "Hail, favored one! The Lord is with you. . . . Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. Behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called Son of the Most High, . . . the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you.

Therefore the child to be born will be called holy, the Son of God. . . . Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord. May it be done to me according to your word.” (Lk 1: 28, 30-32, 35, 38) Our Blessed Mother personifies with her words and actions what we, in faith, strive to be: a perfect adorer of the Blessed Trinity.

In the person of Saint Joseph, the descendant of David, the most chaste spouse of the Mother of God, “a righteous man” (Mt 1: 19), we have the specially chosen friend of God to be the faithful guardian and provider for the Son of God and His Mother. His silent obedience to his Divine Friend’s will is the most eloquent sermon ever preached on the virtue of the obedience of faith (cf. Mt 1: 24; 2: 14-15, 19-23; Lk 2: 22, 33-40, 41-51).

Let us look now at the Precursor, John the Baptist. So often referred to as the “bridge” between the Old Testament and the definitive age of salvation, the Divine Friendship given to him brought with it a specific vocation, a mission to be fulfilled. This is the way it is for each us. The gift of Divine Friendship is also a grace, a blessing and a definite role to fulfill in cooperating with the plan of our Divine Friend. St. John the Baptist shows us that to be a friend of God is a true joy (Lk 1: 44) and this friendship requires fidelity, courage and a zealous perseverance to the end of one’s life (Lk 1: 57-80; 3: 1-20; 7: 18-30; Mt 3: 1-15; Mk 6: 17-29).

I urge you to read all four Gospels and to do so with a prayerful and meditative mind and heart. Allow the inspired Word of God to sink in, to drench you with its transforming power. If you do this you will meet more of those known friends of God and learn from them that to be chosen for Divine Friendship is a life-altering experience. You will never be the same! Look at the twelve Apostles, Martha, Mary and Lazarus, the woman caught in the act of adultery, Jairus and his family, the Centurion and his sick servant, and the woman with the incurable hemorrhage, to name but a few.

Before going further, let us look at three more friends of God, each very different one from the other, but with whom we may be most able to identify. The first is the “rich young man” who asks of Jesus *the* question of one’s life: “Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?” (Mt 19: 16). We know His answer and the reaction of this young man who went away “sad, for he had many possessions” (Mt 19: 22). Divine Friendship demands of us everything and our willingness to give it all up for Him.

The second friend of God is the man, Zacchaeus, who was a tax collector. Ponder for a moment what Divine Friendship causes in one who *looks for* Jesus. “. . . Jesus looked up and said to him: ‘Zacchaeus, come down quickly, for today I must stay at your house’. And he came down quickly and received him with joy.” (Lk 19: 1-10) Divine Friendship can surprise us by its suddenness but it will always generate joy in the one befriended and that joy will be translated into a conversion which is total and generous.

The third friend of God is perhaps one of the most unlikely of all – the Good Thief, Saint Dismas. Consider how just being in the presence of your Divine Friend changes your life! Was it just blind luck that Dismas happens to be crucified next to Jesus? Not at all. Jesus, His one true Friend, brings him to repentance (Lk 23: 40-41), to ask for salvation and he receives it that very day! (Lk 23: 42-43) He hears what each of us, the friends of God, long to hear: “Amen, I say to you, today you will be with me in Paradise.” (cf. Lk 23:43)

The Age of the Church – the Communion of Saints

When we confess our faith in the communion of saints in the Apostles’ Creed we are acknowledging literally that when one becomes a friend of God, this Divine Friendship generates more of the same! By the good example of the friends of God who have gone before us in faith, we learn to be better friends of God who offers His same Divine Friendship to us. The Divine Friendship is ever new and always efficacious. We have the great host of saints and all the holy men and women of our history who testify to this truth.

I would urge you to obtain and read the Lives of the Saints. It is not only very good and accurate and interesting Catholic Church history, but their lives are living witnesses to what the Divine Friendship offered and accepted does – it saves us for eternal life with our Divine Friend.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council in the Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*, teach this about the communion of saints: “Being more closely united to Christ, those who dwell in heaven fix the whole Church more firmly in holiness. They do not cease to intercede with the Father for us, as they proffer the merits which they acquired on earth through the one mediator between God and men, Christ Jesus. So by their fraternal concern is our weakness greatly helped” (49).

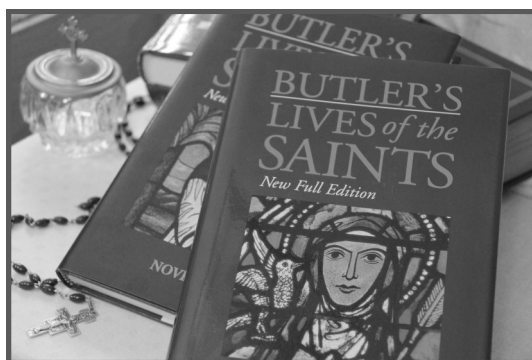
In every age of the Church the saints stand as beacons of light and holiness amidst the darkness of doubt and sin. Since they are the friends of God, they joyfully persevere as witnesses to the fact that the Divine Friendship with them is their life and it is in this that they have their hope and their joy.

Again, I urge you to read of these holy men and women. I shall name only a few: St. Clement of Rome, a convert and friend of St. Peter, St. Ignatius of Antioch and St. Polycarp of Smyrna, both converts of St. John the Evangelist. St. Ambrose, St. Augustine, St. Benedict and St. Gregory the Great; St. Dominic, St. Francis of Assisi, St. Catherine of Siena and St. Thomas Aquinas all are living reflections of what Divine Friendship accomplishes in those who are willing to say “yes” to God.

Read about the lives of St. Teresa of Avila, St. Charles Borromeo, St. Thomas More, St. John Fisher, St. Ignatius Loyola, and St. Philip Neri; St. John Vianney, St. Isaac Jogues, St. Kateri Tekakwitha, St. Elizabeth Ann Seton, and St. John Neumann. In our own times no less than in the past, the friends of God are mirrors of Him for the good of others. Look to St. Maximilian Kolbe, St. Teresa Benedicta of the Cross, Pope St. Pius X, St. Katharine Drexel, Blessed John XXIII, Blessed Teresa of Calcutta and Blessed John Paul II.

The list could go on and on but I think you get my point. Let us ask ourselves: Can I, a friend of God, honestly number myself among these other friends of God? If not, why not? What the saints teach us is that in this life, it is never too late to respond to the Divine Friendship and become a friend of His.

It is clear from Sacred Scripture and Holy Tradition that God continuously offered His Friendship to all men and women. Now, today, He offers the same Friendship to you and to me.



The Divine Friendship With Us

The Apostles' Creed

The “Symbol of Faith” as the Apostles’ Creed has been called from ancient times, is not only our standard for believing, it expresses completely who we are as Catholics. In other words, our Faith *is* our life.

Again, we listen to Our Holy Father as he proclaims this Year of Faith and refers us directly to the Apostles’ Creed. “Not without reason, Christians in the early centuries were required to learn the creed from memory. It served them as a daily prayer not to forget the commitment they had undertaken in baptism. With words rich in meaning, Saint Augustine speaks of this in a homily on the *redditio symboli*, the handing over of the creed: ‘the symbol of the holy mystery that you have all received together and that today you have recited one by one, are the words on which the faith of Mother Church is firmly built above the stable foundation that is Christ the Lord. You have received it and recited it, but in your minds and hearts you must keep it ever present, you must repeat it in your beds, recall it in the public squares and not forget it during meals: even when your body is asleep, you must watch over it with your hearts.’” (n. 9).

Let us note well that Our Holy Father refers to the Creed as “a daily prayer”. He said in his Apostolic Letter: “Faith grows when it is lived as an experience of love received and when it is communicated as an experience of grace and joy. It makes us fruitful, because it expands our hearts in hope and enables us to bear life-giving witness: indeed, it opens the hearts and minds of those who listen to respond to the Lord’s invitation to adhere to His word and become His disciples.” (n. 7).

As we now consider our Apostles’ Creed, let us do so in prayer, lifting our minds and hearts to Almighty God, our Divine Friend, and allowing His Friendship to expand our hearts in hope and enabling us to bear life-giving witness to Him as His friends!

St. Ambrose taught: “This Creed is the spiritual seal, our hearts’ meditation and an ever-present guardian; it is, unquestionably, the treasure of our soul” (CCC, 197). The faith the Creed expresses is the gift of Divine Friendship to us, the Creed we confess in word and deed is to be our grateful response to and acceptance of this Divine Friendship.

Article I: “I believe in God the Father, Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.”

Our Catholic Church helps us with the Creed when it states: “I believe in God”; this first affirmation of the Apostles’ Creed is also the most fundamental. The whole Creed speaks of God, and when it also speaks of man and of the world it does so in relation to God. The rest of the Creed depends on this first article of Faith (cf. CCC, 198-429).

To confess this belief is to state that God is the eternal, infinite, perfect Spirit, Lord of Heaven and earth. This means that God is infinitely perfect, that is, He possesses every good attribute in the highest degree. The *Catechism* (213) states: “The revelation of the ineffable name ‘I Am Who Am’ contains then the truth that God alone IS. . . . God is the fullness of Being and of every perfection, without origin and without end. All creatures receive all that they are and have from him; he *is* his very being, and he is of himself everything that he is.” Of course, God is a mystery to us but we can come to know that there is a God through the visible world, the voice of conscience and especially from Divine Revelation.

The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught: “God, the beginning and end of all things, can be known with certainty from created reality by the light of human reason (Rom 1:20); but it is through His Revelation that those religious truths which are by their nature accessible to human reason can be known by all people with ease, with solid certitude and with no trace of error, even in this present state of the human race.” (*DV*, 6)

Article II: “*And in Jesus Christ, His only Son our Lord*” (cf. CCC, 430-455)

This second article of Faith confesses faith in the definitive revelation of God in Jesus Christ and therefore, we need look for no other savior. “Moved by the grace of the Holy Spirit and drawn by the Father, we believe in Jesus and confess: ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’. On the rock of this faith confessed by Saint Peter, Christ built his Church” (CCC, 424).

The Church, founded by Jesus precisely on its confession of faith in Him as Lord, as Messiah, and Savior, lives its Creed as its life with Christ as its center. All that the Church teaches and does emanates from Christ and always leads to Christ. Contained in this article of Faith is the name of Jesus, “God saves”, which expresses both His identity and His mission (cf. CCC, 430); His title is “Christ” which means ‘anointed’, embodies His mission to do the will of the Father as the

priest, prophet and king (cf. CCC, 436); He is the 'Son of God' and therefore in a unique and eternal relationship to the Father and thus, He is God Himself (cf. CCC, 454); and finally, as 'Lord' He is divine (cf. CCC, 455).

"The Church believes that the key, the center, and the purpose of man's history is to be found in its Lord and Master" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 10§3).

Article III: *"He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and was born of the Virgin Mary" (cf. CCC, 456-483, 484-511)*

This article of Faith confesses belief in the Incarnation of God as a man in the person of Jesus and in the Immaculate Conception of His mother and her as the ever-virgin Mother of God. A fundament of our Faith is the Incarnation. From the beginning, remembering Peter's confession of faith which is the Church's confession of faith, and on that confession Jesus established His Church: "Taking up St. John's expression, 'The Word became flesh', the Church calls 'Incarnation' the fact that the Son of God assumed a human nature in order to accomplish our salvation in it" (CCC, 461).

The Church has never wavered in its faith and teaching that: "Belief in the true Incarnation of the Son of God is the distinctive sign of Christian faith" (CCC, 463). The mystery of the Incarnation of God is just that, a mystery which demands our unconditional faith in the "wonderful union of the divine and human natures in the one person of the Word" (CCC, 483).

This is why the Immaculate Conception of Mary, the Mother of God, is directly associated with the Incarnation. "What the Catholic faith believes about Mary is based on what it believes about Christ, and what it teaches about Mary illumines in turn its faith in Christ" (CCC, 487, 490). As the Mother of God. Mary was always a virgin. That is our faith and there can be no denial of that faith nor any deviation from that faith (CCC, 496, 499-500, 510).

Article IV: *"Jesus Christ suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died, and was buried" (cf. CCC, 571-630)*

The fourth article of Faith, along with the next, form our confession of faith in what the Apostles were the eyewitnesses to and what they preached to the world from the day of Pentecost on, that is, the saving death and resurrection of Jesus, true God and true man. "The Paschal mystery of Christ's cross and Resurrection stands at the center of the Good News that the apostles, and the Church following

them, are to proclaim to the world. God's saving plan was accomplished 'once for all' by the redemptive death of his Son Jesus Christ" (CCC, 571).

In its Declaration on the Relation of the Church to Non-Christian Religions (n.4), the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught: ". . . as the church has always held and holds now, Christ underwent His passion and death freely, because of the sins of human beings and out of infinite love, in order that all may reach salvation. It is, therefore, the burden of the Church's preaching to proclaim the Cross of Christ as the sign of God's all-embracing love and as the fountain from which every grace flows."

With this in mind and as we pray the Creed, let us keep our eyes fixed on the crucifix, whether we are in Church or at home or at school. St. Rose of Lima perhaps says it best: "Apart from the cross there is no other ladder by which we may get to heaven" (CCC, 618).

Article V: *"He Descended into Hell on the Third Day He Rose Again"*
(cf. CCC, 631-658)

By this fifth article of Faith we confess the obvious but it also continues to underscore that truth that Jesus Christ is true God and true man and, that as such, His death as a man was a real death and therefore, His sufferings were real. Various heresies down through the ages have denied the true humanity of Christ and thus, the denial of His real sufferings and death and, therefore, the fact of the definitive redemption of all mankind of all times and places. (cf. CCC, 634)

This is what we mean when we confess our faith in the other part of this article of Faith: "The resurrection of Jesus is the crowning truth of our faith in Christ, a faith believed and lived as the central truth by the first Christian community; handed on as fundamental by Tradition; established by the documents of the New Testament; and preached as an essential part of the Paschal mystery along with the cross: Christ is risen from the dead! Dying, he conquered death; To the dead, he has given life" (CCC, 638) Just as Our Lord's sufferings and death were real, as was his bodily burial in a tomb, so was his bodily resurrection from the dead and the tomb real. If one does not believe this, one cannot be a Catholic.

The Resurrection of Jesus from the dead is the defining moment for our faith and for His Church. This truth is the heart of the Apostles' preaching of the Gospel to the world, it is the reason for conversion of hundreds of thousands of souls to Christ and His Catholic Church.

Article VI: *“He Ascended into Heaven and is Seated at the Right Hand of the Father”* (cf. CCC, 659-667)

This article of Faith is an expression not only of our belief in the true divinity of Jesus but it is an expression and confession of our hope for life eternal in God which Jesus effected for us by His life, death and resurrection.

Concerning the Ascension of the Lord the Church teaches this: “This final stage stays closely linked to the first, that is, to his descent from heaven in the Incarnation. Only the one who ‘came from the Father’ can return to the Father: Christ Jesus. ‘No one has ascended into heaven but he who descended from heaven, the Son of man’. Left to its own natural powers humanity does not have access to the ‘Father’s house’, to God’s life and happiness. Only Christ can open to man such access that we, his members, might have confidence that we too shall go where he, our Head and our Source, has preceded us” (CCC, 661).

Article VII: *“From Thence He Will Come Again To Judge the Living And The Dead”* (cf. CCC, 668-682)

All the articles of Faith have a coherence because our Faith has the One and Triune God as its source and final end. Thus, article seven has a direct connection to article six and is the logical precursor to article eight. It is Our Lord Himself who told us that He would return at a time known to the Father to judge each man according to his deeds (Mk 12: 38-42). Specifically, article seven of the Faith confesses our faith in Jesus as Lord of all Life and the One to whom the Father has given all power in heaven and on earth (Eph 1: 20-22). “Christ is Lord of the cosmos and of history. In him human history and indeed all creation are ‘set forth’ and transcendentally fulfilled” (CCC, 668).

This article of Faith serves as a basis for our celebration of the Season of Advent in which we recall the Incarnation of God, that is, His advent in human history and what He has already accomplished, but also we await with an active, vigilant faith His second advent in power and glory at the end of time. “Christ is Lord of eternal life. Full right to pass definitive judgment on the works and hearts of men belongs to Him as redeemer of the world” (CCC, 679).

Article VIII: *“I Believe in the Holy Spirit”* (cf. CCC, 683-747)

The Holy Spirit is a complete and distinct Person, not just an attribute of the Father or the Son. He is the love between the Father and the Son, love of such infinite fullness that it constitutes a third Divine Person in the one divine nature.

A good way to strengthen our faith in God the Holy Spirit is through a better understanding of His work in the Church. The Holy Spirit has always been active in just souls of all times and also in the Apostles even before Pentecost, but on that day He came bringing the fullness of His grace and gifts. The Holy Spirit sanctified the Apostles; He enlightened them so that they understood the teaching of Jesus clearly, completely and correctly; He strengthened them so that they preached fearlessly; and He bestowed on them the gift of speaking in foreign languages and working miracles. All for the greater honor and glory of God and the advancement of His Catholic Church. That is why the Church has always understood itself to be the dwelling place of God, the repository of the Truth, and the bearer of this Truth to the world in every age (cf. CCC, 688; 737).

“The Holy Spirit, whom Christ the head pours out on his members, builds, animates, and sanctifies the Church. She is the sacrament of the Holy Trinity’s communion with men” (CCC, 747).

Article IX: *“I Believe in the Holy Catholic Church”* (cf. CCC, 748-975)

As mentioned already, the articles of Faith are not isolated statements but a complete confession and profession of the one true Faith and that each article points to the next and complements the preceding articles (cf. CCC, 749-750).

The Church is the Mystical Body of Christ, the visible Kingdom of Christ on earth. The Catholic Church is the one true Church since it was the will of the Father, revealed to the world completely and perfectly through the Son that the Catholic Church faithfully proclaim salvation to the world in every age, and it is only through the constant, sanctifying activity of the Holy Spirit that the Church does this until the end of time (cf. CCC, 763-768).

In the *Declaration on Religious Freedom* (n. 1), the Fathers of the Second Vatican Council repeated the constant belief of the Church about its nature and mission as divine in origin and continuation. “The Council professes its belief that God Himself has made known to mankind the way in which human beings are to serve Him, and thus be saved in Christ and come to blessedness. We believe that

this one true religion subsists in the Catholic and Apostolic Church, to which the Lord Jesus committed the duty of spreading it abroad among all peoples.”

Article X: *“I Believe in the Forgiveness of Sins”* (cf. CCC, 976-987)

In speaking these words we profess that Our Lord Jesus gave His Church His power and authority to forgive sins and the punishment due to sin. “The Apostles’ Creed associates faith in the forgiveness of sins not only with faith in the Holy Spirit, but also with faith in the Church and in the communion of saints. It was when he gave the Holy Spirit to his apostles that the risen Christ conferred on them his own divine power to forgive sins: ‘Receive the Holy Spirit. If you forgive the sins of any, they are forgiven; if you retain the sins of any, they are retained.’” (CCC, 976)

What this confession of faith means in practical terms is that all persons who truly repent of their sins will receive God’s pardon. For the baptized person who commits sins after Baptism it means the reception of the Sacrament of Penance (Reconciliation). This article of Faith is a confession of belief in the inestimable goodness of Our Lord to the Church He founded. “In this Church, the soul dead through sin comes back to life in order to live with Christ, whose grace has saved us . . . Were there no forgiveness of sins in the Church, there would be no hope of life to come or eternal liberation. Let us thank God who has given his Church such a gift” (CCC, 981, 983)

Article XI: *“I Believe in the Resurrection of the Body”* (cf. CCC, 988-1019)

The eleventh article of the Faith directs our attention to the essential truth of the bodily, physical resurrection of every human being who has ever lived (cf. CCC, 998). This is our confession that this earthly life is not permanent, but temporary; and, more importantly, physical death is neither the end of one’s life nor a punishment for one’s life. Catholics in confessing this article of Faith, confess that because of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus, Son of God, Savior and Second Person of the Blessed Trinity, this life which we live in our bodies is meant for God and, in God’s time, we will live with Him, if Jesus judges us worthy of that.

The Church teaches: “We firmly believe, and hence we hope that, just as Christ is truly risen from the dead and lives forever, so after death the righteous will live forever with the risen Christ and he will raise them up on the last day. Our resurrection, like his own, will be the work of the Most Holy Trinity. . . .” (CCC, 989). At the end of the world the human body will rise and be reunited with its soul in order to share in the reward or punishment of the soul, just as it shared in the good or evil deeds on earth (cf. CCC, 1013).

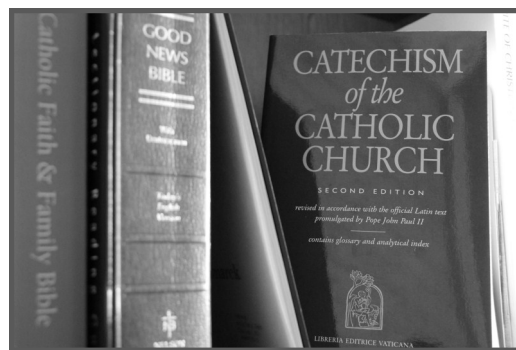
Article XII: “I Believe in Life Everlasting” (cf. CCC, 1020-1060)

As the twelfth and final article of Faith, we profess a belief that one’s earthly life will be transformed by a physical death but that this death is not an end but the means to eternity. “Death puts an end to human life as the time open to either accepting or rejecting the divine grace manifested in Christ” (CCC, 1021). To confess this article of Faith we reaffirm the prior eleven articles which are all based on the fundamental truth that the one true Faith is Trinitarian by nature and thus, as we have come from God we are to return to God.

This article of Faith is also our confession of belief in heaven, purgatory and hell (cf. CCC, 1024, 1030, 1033). The Fathers of the Second Vatican Council taught: “Before we reign with Christ in glory, all of us will be made manifest ‘before the tribunal of Christ, so that each one may receive his recompense, good or bad, according to his life in the body’ (2 Cor5:10)” (*Lumen Gentium*, 48).

The ‘Amen’ of the Creed has tremendous significance: “Thus the Creed’s final ‘Amen’ repeats and confirms its first words: ‘I believe’. To believe is to say ‘Amen’ to God’s words, promises and commandments; to entrust oneself completely to him who is the ‘Amen’ of infinite love and perfect faithfulness. The Christian’s everyday life will then be the ‘Amen’ to the ‘I believe’ of our baptismal profession of faith . . .” (CCC, 1064)

In concluding this section of my Pastoral Letter, I wish to cite St. Augustine as a help to our understanding of what it is we believe and why our belief is to be lived faithfully each day of our lives. “*May your Creed be for you as a mirror. Look at yourself in it, to see if you believe everything you say you believe. And rejoice in your faith each day.*” (CCC, 1064)



The Purpose of the Divine Friendship

Recognizing that our faith is the manifestation of the mysterious and merciful offer of Divine Friendship to every person, the first question which ought to come to mind is: why? Clearly, Almighty God is all-perfect and thus, needs nothing, not even us. Almighty God is perfectly sufficient in Himself as Father, Son and Holy Spirit, living in a perfect communion of love. So again, why does God offer His Divine Friendship to those whom He does not need?

The answer is at one and the same time simple and yet profound – He chooses us to receive His Divine Friendship for our sakes not His. He makes this choice for us so that we can come to *know, love* and *serve* Him in our earthly lives, in order that we may be happy with Him in heaven. In other words, we are to become like God in our lives now by the gift of His Divine Friendship in anticipation of the Beatific Vision which is heaven.

Jesus is the living, breathing, flesh and blood Friendship of God given to us. He tells us so: “I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life. No one comes to the Father except through Me” (Mt. 14: 6). Jesus is the heart of the Apostles’ Creed: He is the Father’s gift of personal, merciful and saving friendship to us. Jesus is the perfect response to the gift of Divine Friendship and by His humble obedience to the Father’s will on the Cross, He answers perfect Love with perfect Love with and for us.

What we believe and have come to know is that *the* sign of the offer to us of the Divine Friendship in the Person of Jesus is found and understood in His Holy Cross. We know we are His friends if we take up the Cross and follow (imitate) Him. As He has laid down His life for us, His friends, so must we do and do it with the same obedient love.

The great Bishop and Doctor of the Church, Saint Francis de Sales, presents both the mystery and the reality of the Divine Friendship given and received with a meditation on the Cross.

Your Cross

*The everlasting God has in His Wisdom
Foreseen from eternity,
The cross He now presents to you
As a gift from His
Innermost heart. This cross He now
Sends you He has
Considered with His all-knowing
Eyes, understood with His
Divine mind, tested with His wise justice,
Warmed with loving arms*

*Weighted with His own hands to see
That it not be too heavy for
You. He has blessed it with His Holy
Name, anointed it with His
Grace, perfumed it with His consolation,
And taken one last glance
At you and your courage, and has
Sent it to you from heaven,
A special greeting from God to you, an
Alms of the all merciful
Love of God.*

How to be a Friend to Him

Again, let us look to the reason why Jesus no longer calls us slaves or servants but His friends. In essence, it is for our true freedom. If we accept the Divine Friendship it frees us to obey Him in all things and thus, because He has chosen us to be His friends it is a freedom to do as we ought and not do as we want.

We cannot give Him anything He needs since He needs nothing. It is He who gives us everything *we need* to be His friends. This is the imitation of Christ in our daily lives lived precisely by how we act toward our neighbor. A true friend of Jesus is a mirror of Him, that is, a true friend is a reflector to others of His joy, His peace, His light, His truth, and His love. His love is a sacrificial love which only the Divine Friend can offer.

Let us ask ourselves, am I a friend to Jesus and, if so, what kind of friend am I to Jesus? The best way for us to answer our own question is to look to Our Blessed Mother and measure our friendship with Jesus against hers. If we do this with honesty and sincerity we will find that we are His friends but we have much room to improve our friendship with Him.

This is the reason the Lord Jesus shared His Mother with each of us from the Cross. We need her to be our model of how to be a friend to God in response to His Divine Friendship with us. Her entire life was the literal living of her *Magnificat* (cf. Lk 1: 46-55). If you follow Jesus in the Gospels you see immediately that Mary “magnified” Him, not herself, in her person, in her very being. In other words, Jesus was the center of her life and that is why she kept and pondered all the things of Jesus in her heart (cf. Lk 1: 29; 2: 19, 33, 51).

What does Our Blessed Mother teach us about how to be a friend to the Lord? She does two things: she reflects or shows Him to others, and she always brings others with her as she follows Him. From her Immaculate Conception to the Annunciation to the Visitation to the Nativity of the Lord, to the Presentation of Him in the temple and to Finding Him there speaking to the doctors of the Law, it is always Jesus, it is never about her.

Throughout His Passion, Death and Resurrection, His Ascension, Pentecost, her Assumption into heaven and her Coronation there as Queen of heaven and earth, she magnified the Lord and will do so until the end of time itself, and for all eternity. She gives us the key to being the friend of the Divine Friend Who has loved us first and chosen us – “Do whatever He tells you!” (Jn 2: 5).

Conclusion

Faith is the gift of the Divine Friendship and knowledge of faith opens a door into the fullness of the saving mystery revealed by God (*Porta Fidei*, n. 10). The whole of the Divine Friendship offered to us is contained in Jesus Christ.

It is Jesus Who reveals God to mankind and allows us to know the mystery of Love. A true friend is present to the other at all times (whether physically present or not). We have our Divine Friend in our every prayer and devotion, our Divine Friend is ever present to us in the Most Blessed Sacrament. It is He Who satisfies our hopes and it is He Who answers our every prayer.

A true friend never forgets the other. Our Divine Friend is ever faithful and He shows His faithfulness to His friends in and through the sacraments. Through them He gives us His life for our lives; He is our food for the journey; He is our Good Shepherd Who lays down His life for His friends.

A true friend is always at the service of the other. As Jesus has loved us, His own, so must we love Him in His brethren. Pope Benedict XVI has said: "It is faith that enables us to recognize Christ and it is His love that impels us to assist Him whenever He becomes our neighbor along the journey of life. Supported by faith, let us look with hope at our commitment in the world . . ." (*Porta Fidei*, n. 14).

In this Year of Faith let us all come to know and to love and to serve God, our Divine Friend, better. It is our Faith, confessed with our lips and lived in our every action which will keep our friendship with Him strong and lead us to Him at the end.

Praised be Jesus Christ! Now and Forever!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "+1 David D. Kagan". The signature is written in a cursive style with a cross at the beginning.

The Most Reverend David D. Kagan, D.D., P.A., J.C.L.
Bishop of Bismarck
Apostolic Administrator of Fargo

Given at Bismarck, North Dakota

The Solemnity of the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary
the 15th day of August, in the Year of Our Lord, 2012.

Appendix I

Suggested Readings

Sacred Scripture (Old and New Testaments)

Catechism of the Catholic Church

Documents of the Second Vatican Council

Blessed John Paul II:

Fides et Ratio

Evangelium Vitae

Pope Benedict XVI:

On the Way to Jesus Christ

Deus Caritas Est

Spe Salvi

Confessions of Saint Augustine

The Divine Comedy – Dante Alighieri

Introduction to the Devout Life – St. Francis de Sales

Art of Love – St. Francis de Sales

Journal of a Soul – Blessed John XXIII

Butler's Lives of the Saints

39 Recent Saints We Need To Know

“The May Magnificat” – Gerard Manley Hopkins

“The Hound of Heaven” – Francis Thompson

Appendix II

Suggested Devotions

Adoration of the Most Holy Eucharist	The Seven First Saturdays
The Holy Rosary	The Advent Wreath
The Stations of the Cross	The Advent Calendar
The Nine First Fridays	Family Consecration to the Sacred Heart
Blessing of Homes and Businesses	Blessing of Easter Foods
Use of Holy Water and Blessed	Pilgrimages to designated Churches,
Candles in the home	Oratories, and Shrines
May Altar in homes	Monthly Confession



YEAR OF FAITH²⁰¹²₂₀₁₃

Appendix III

Suggested Prayers

The Sign of the Cross	The Apostles' Creed
The Our Father	Hail, Mary
Glory be to the Father	Act of Contrition
Acts of Faith, Hope, Charity	Hail, Holy Queen
Memorare	Angelus
Regina Coeli	Breastplate of St. Patrick
Litany of the Sacred Heart of Jesus	Litany of the Blessed Virgin Mary
Prayer to Saint Joseph	Prayer to St. Michael the Archangel

The lists of suggested readings, devotions and prayers are not exhaustive. Please draw on the Church's rich and bountiful treasury of prayers and devotions and use them personally and in private, as a family or as a parish community. I offer these suggestions since whatever your state in life, your vocation, you can pray and practice them and in the process, strengthen your faith and your resolve to be faithful to God and His Holy Catholic Church.