

FaithBIT



Spiritual Friendship, God Is There

Reflection by Phil Weber

Henri Nouwen once wrote about the temptation of success, popularity, or power and how their seductive quality can often lead to the greater temptation of self rejection. If we come to believe messages that can make us feel worthless or unloved, then success, popularity, and power can appear to be a solution. Rejection, loneliness, or abandonment can all easily make us feel like we're a nobody. Nouwen regarded this kind of self rejection as the greatest enemy of our spiritual life because it goes against God's most sacred message to us that we are eternally beloved - the core truth of our existence.

The new year often marks for us a new beginning, a renewed outlook, a sense of hope. This was true for Jesus, too. According to scholars, it was early January when Jesus started his ministry, beginning with his baptism by John the Baptist who called to all standing at the banks of the river Jordan - "change what needs to be changed in your life!" January also commemorates the lives of Saint Paulinus II (January 11, 804 AD) - priest, theologian, and Catholic saint known for his profound belief that Jesus Christ was central to our understanding of the Triune God and that Jesus be incorporated into the Nicene Creed ("only begotten Son of God"); and the life of Aelred of Rievaulx (January 12, 1167), medieval theologian, poet, writer, and monk whose treasury of writings on the concept of Spiritual Friendship (God is love, God is friendship) reminds us that we are never alone, that we are eternally beloved, and that we are sharers in God's divine presence whenever we are gathered together - "for where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." (Matthew 18:20).

How good it can be as a congregation of friends to stand and sing together "what a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear!" Are we weak and heavy laden, cumbered with a load of care? Precious Savior, still our Refuge - take it to the Lord in prayer. In His arms He'll take and shield thee, Thou wilt found solace there."

We have all faced unprecedented challenges during this time of the pandemic, among them our inability to gather together in the pews singing great hymns of faith. However, as people of God, the caring, the charity, and the love expressed to one another during this difficult time has exposed something more powerful than coronavirus - *the spiritual friendship of our Immanuel community and God's abiding presence.*

As we begin a new year and prepare to move beyond the extreme miseries and changes of the pandemic borne by our friends, families, our nation, and our world, we can awaken ourselves to the possibilities of a new beginning, a fresh perspective, and renewed hope. We can reflect on John the Baptist's words to the crowds along the banks of the Jordan - "change what needs to be changed in your life!" As recipients of God's charity and grace, through our spiritual friendship and as sharers in God's divine presence, we can move beyond the changes forced upon us by the pandemic and continue to pray, gather, sing and worship in God's name and continue in faithful, charity-filled actions wherein God abides - in our caring, support, and love for one another.