

TO BE FAILED BY FRIENDS

Jesus, like ALL of us, had FRIENDS. He was CAPABLE, unlike any OTHER human being, of being totally INDEPENDENT. He had eternal WISDOM. He was DIVINE. But He ALSO had loved ones: His MOTHER and Joseph; His brothers, and a sister; His friends: MARY, Martha and Lazarus; the 12 disciples; and those 70 men, women and children, who traveled WITH Him wherever He went.

And Jesus TAUGHT us, by this good EXAMPLE, that it is not WRONG to love our friends and family. Yet, He ALSO taught us, in His AGONY, that NO one should ever rely ENTIRELY upon LOVED ones. We should NEVER make another human being the CENTER of our universe. IF we make someone the MOST important thing in life, what give our lives MEANING and purpose; then we are setting ourselves UP for a HUGE hurt, a HUGE disappointment. And THAT'S because NO human being is GOD. The CENTER of our lives belongs to GOD! C. S. LEWIS, the famous Anglican author, writing shortly after the DEATH of his beloved WIFE, wrote THESE words: *If I put my beloved in this world in the FIRST place, and not GOD in the FIRST place, I do my beloved a DISSERVICE.*

And that's TRUE! You see, down in the very DEPTHS of our souls, down where GOD is calling us, we are always ALONE with God. No one else can EVER go that deep INTO us. SO, God HAS to be at the CENTER of our lives. NO human being can EVER take that CENTER position that belongs to GOD. However, AROUND that center position, we CAN and DO place those whom we LOVE, and UPON whom we RELY. But we always have to TELL ourselves that they are NOT God. They are HUMAN beings, who grow TIRED, have LIMITATIONS, get sick, and sometimes become OVERWHELMED by the difficulties of life. And unfortunately, walls of separation OFTEN build within human relationships. That's why friends or loved ones can become the worst CROSS we ever have to BEAR. They can TURN on us. They can FAIL us. Sometimes they even DIE on us. And WHEN that happens, when they LET us DOWN in some way, we cannot HELP but to feel BEREFT. And we ALL feel this way sometimes. But IF we have placed that person at the very CENTER of our lives, IF we have made that person our MEANING-GIVER in life, our GOD, THEN we have set ourselves UP for a HUGE letdown, a HUGE hurt, a HUGE fall.

And I suspect that ALL of us have had friends and loved ones FAIL us! To be failed by FRIENDS -- either innocently, or because of THEIR fault, OR because of our OWN fault, or sometimes because of ALL 3 -- is SIMPLY part of our HUMAN condition. And AS I look around tonight, I am DEEPLY aware that there are MANY here who have LOVED and LOST -- sometimes through DEATH, sometimes through FAILURE, sometimes through hard feelings -- but MOST, if not ALL of us, have LOVED and LOST. Yes, loved ones DO fail us, and WE fail THEM. And that's JUST the way it IS, because we are ONLY human.

And THIS happened to JESUS in ways that are even WORSE and more PAINFUL than will EVER happen to US. In your mind's eye, LOOK at Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane! His CLOSEST disciples FAIL Him. Here they are in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here they are at an event that BILLIONS of people will focus their ATTENTION on in the future. Here they are at an event, which will be depicted in literally THOUSANDS of stained glass windows and paintings. And literally MILLIONS of printed pictures will show THIS very scene. And WHERE are the disciples of JESUS? They have STUPIDLY fallen ASLEEP! HOW could they be so DUMB and INSENSITIVE as to fall asleep at THAT moment? BUT, how many of OUR friends and family fail US because of STUPIDITY as well? OR, how often do WE fail THEM because of OUR stupidity? It HAPPENS!

Friends, WHENEVER someone FAILS us, for whatever reason, it's one of the most terrible HURTS in the world. And the more you LOVE that person, the WORSE it feels! And WHENEVER it happens, it ALWAYS seems so POINTLESS, doesn't it? And for MOST of us, it's another person who's a Christian, another person who's DEVOUT, another person who prays to God just like WE do. It MIGHT even be a PASTOR who FAILS us. And it HURTS! But let me tell you, WHENEVER someone

FAILS you, KNOW that Christ is PRESENT. Know that CHRIST is in the MIDST of that betrayal. And THAT'S because Christ KNOWS your AGONY. Remember: He was THERE in that Garden of Gethsemane, and He found His disciples sound ASLEEP when He's BEGGED them to stay AWAKE!

And THAT was just the BEGINNING of His passion. For the next 12 to 15 hours, over and over again, Jesus would watch ALL of His friends BETRAY Him, DESERT Him, and DENY Him. Jesus would WATCH as, ONE by ONE, ALL of His friends would LEAVE Him standing utterly ALONE against the world. And it wasn't JUST His disciples back THEN who FAILED Him. It's US as well. Remember: being DIVINE, Christ sees BEYOND time, and sees ALL eternity as if it were happening in the PRESENT moment. SO, when Jesus saw His FIRST disciples ASLEEP, He saw US asleep as well. WHEN Jesus saw His FIRST disciples running away, He saw US running away as well. And it's TRUE: WE, like His FIRST disciples, BETRAY Him, DENY Him and DESERT Him ALL the time. So He KNOWS the depth OUR hurt and agony when WE are FAILED by friends or loved ones.

Well, friends, TONIGHT and TOMORROW night, I hope and pray that we will ALL be MOVED – in our very DEPTHS of our SOUL – by the utter ABANDONMENT, by the utter FRIENDLESSNESS, by the utter ALONENESS that Jesus has to ENDURE. EVERY reading, EVERY piece of music, and EVERY candle we extinguish, represents another LOSS, another AGONY, another ABANDONMENT that JESUS has to face. And we NEED to know this, not JUST because it makes us feel GUILTY, and hopefully become more FAITHFUL, but ALSO because we can find SOLACE in knowing that HE has experienced what WE so often experience, only at a DEEPER level. SO, He can BE there for us in OUR times of suffering and pain. Yes friends, think on THESE things tonight and tomorrow night, as we, slowly but surely, extinguish the LIGHT of Christ. And following the prayer, we'll take the story “from the top”, so to speak, and it will CONTINUE tomorrow night as well.

Let us pray: O Lord Jesus, THIS detail of Your passion -- the failure, the running away, the treachery, the denial and the betrayal of Your disciples -- was NOT all NECESSARY. It COULD have happened some other WAY. Your providence could have simply removed them from the scene. But NO, each one of us HAS, in the story of Your PASSION, the example of FAILED friends. And YOU go ALONE – ALONE to your trial, ALONE to Golgotha, ALONE to the cross, and ALONE to Your death -- separated from ALL your friends by the curtain of suffering and death. Though some of them stand near the cross, they see YOU move away. They see Your LIFE coming to an END. They see YOU moving from time into eternity. And they do NOT know WHEN they will see You AGAIN. O Lord, be with each of US in OUR time of SORROW, when OUR friends and loved ones FAIL us or LEAVE us. And help us remember that you DO understand. We pray in YOUR most holy name. Amen.

(My thanks to Benedict Groeschel, for his work *Jesus Endures the Sorrows of Life With Us.*)