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Father Cantalamessa on Friendship

Pontifical Household Preacher Comments on Sunday's Readings

ROME, JULY 20, 2007 ([Zenit.org](http://www.zenit.org)).- Here is a translation of a commentary by the Pontifical Household preacher, Capuchin Father Raniero Cantalamessa, on the readings from this Sunday's liturgy.

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The Friends of Jesus
18th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Genesis 18:1-10a; Colossians 1:24-28; Luke 10:38-42

"Jesus entered a village where a woman whose name was Martha welcomed him. She had a sister named Mary who sat beside the Lord at his feet listening to him speak. Martha was burdened with much serving."

The village is Bethany and the house is that of Lazarus and his two sisters. Jesus loved to stop there and take some rest when he was traveling near Jerusalem.

Mary was stupefied that for once she had the master all to herself and could listen in silence to the words of eternal life that he spoke when he was taking his rest. So she sat there at his feet, as is still done today in the East. It is not difficult to imagine Martha's half-resentful, half-joking tone when, passing by them, she says to Jesus: "Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me by myself to do the serving? Tell her to help me."

It was at this point that Jesus said something that by itself is a mini Gospel: "Martha, Martha, you are anxious and worried about many things. There is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part and it will not be taken from her."

The tradition has seen in the sisters a symbol of the active and the contemplative life respectively; the liturgy with the choice of the first reading (Abraham who welcomes the three angels at the terebinth of Mamre) shows an example of hospitality in the episode.

I think, however, that the more evident theme is that of friendship. "Jesus loved Martha, together with her sister and Lazarus," we read in John's Gospel (11:5).

When they bring him the news of Lazarus' death he says to his disciples: "Our friend Lazarus has fallen asleep but I am going to wake him up" (John 11:11).

Faced with the sorrow of the two sisters he also breaks down and weeps, so much so that those who are present exclaim: "See how much he loved him!" (John 11:13).

It is wonderful and consoling to know that Jesus knew and cultivated that sentiment that is so beautiful and precious for us men -- friendship.

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Of friendship we must say what St. Augustine said of time: "I know what time is but if someone asks me to explain it, I no longer know what it is." In other words, it is easier to intuit what friendship is than to explain it in words.

It is a mutual attraction and deep understanding between two people, but it does not have a sexual component as does conjugal love. It is a union of two souls, not two bodies. In this sense the ancients said that friendship is to have "one soul in two bodies." It can be a stronger bond than that of family. Family consists in having the same blood in one's veins. In friendship one has the same tastes, ideals, interests.

It is essential to friendship that it is founded on a common search for the good and the true. That which binds people who get together to do evil is not friendship but complicity, it is "an association that corrupts," as is said in judicial jargon.

Friendship is also different from love of neighbor. The latter must embrace everyone, even those who do not return it, even enemies, while friendship demands reciprocity, that is, that the other corresponds to your love.

Friendship is nourished by confidences, that is, by the fact that I confide in another that which is deepest and most personal in my thoughts and experiences.

Sometimes I say to young people: Do you want to find out who your true friends are and rank them? Try to remember what have been the most secret experiences of your life -- positive or negative -- and ask yourself to whom you confided them: those are your true friends. And if there is something in your life, so deep and you have revealed it to one person only, that person is your best friend.

The Bible is full of praise of friendship. "A faithful friend is a strong support; whoever finds one has found a treasure" (Sirach 6:14ff.). The proof of friendship is fidelity.

According to a popular saying, "When the money goes, friends go." True friendship does not fade at the friend's first problem. We know who our true friend is during the time of trial. History is full of great friendships that have been immortalized in literature. But the history of Christian sanctity also knows examples of famous friendships.

A delicate problem with friendship is whether it is possible once one is married. It is not said that one must completely cut off all the friendships one has cultivated before getting married but there must be a rearrangement if the newlyweds are not to experience difficulties and crises.

The surest friendships are those that a couple cultivates together. Among those friendships that are cultivated separately those with persons of the same sex create fewer problems than those with persons of the opposite sex.

Often in these cases the presumption that one is above all suspicion and danger is punished. Films with titles like "My Best Friend's Bride" [Ed.N. Father Cantalamessa refers to the Italian translation given to the title of the movie "My Best Friend's Wedding"] speak volumes about the problem, but apart from this extreme they also create serious practical problems. You cannot go out with friends every night leaving the other (usually the wife!) alone at home.

For consecrated persons, the more certain friendships are those that are shared with the whole community. In talking about Lazarus, Jesus does not say "my friend Lazarus" but "our friend Lazarus." Lazarus and the sisters became friends of the apostles too according to the well-known principle, "My friends' friends are my friends." This is how the great friendships were between some saints -- the one between Francis of Assisi and Clare, for example. Francis is the brother and father of all the sisters; Clare is the sister and mother of all the

brothers.

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