
Bishop Paul Bird's Homily at the Rite of Election
St Patrick's Cathedral, Ballarat – 12.30 pm, Saturday, March 1, 2014

I was looking through a collection of quotations and I was surprised how many quotations there were on the subject of friendship.

Some of them were by very learned people from long ago. The Greek philosopher Aristotle said: "Wishing to be friends is quick work, but friendship is a slow ripening fruit."

The Roman orator Cicero said that "friendship increases happiness and reduces sadness". Sharing joy with a friend doubles the joy. Sharing sorrow with a friend halves the sorrow.

A more modern quote said that "there is nothing better than a friend, unless it is a friend with chocolate." I took this to mean that it is wonderful to have a friend but even better to have a friend who brings chocolate.

The gospel that we heard a few moments ago includes a famous quote about friendship. Jesus says to his disciples: "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." Jesus is underlining the truth that a person shows their love for a friend by what they will do for their friend. The ultimate sign of love is to lay down one's life for a friend. We hear of this happening sometimes, for example when a person dies defending someone who is being attacked.

One of the great messages of the gospel is that Jesus is a friend like that. He was ready even to lay down his life for us. The Scripture says: "Ours were the sufferings he bore, ours the sorrows he carried. We had all gone astray like sheep, each taking their own way, and the Lord burdened him with the sins of us all. Through his wounds we are healed." (Isaiah 52)

Jesus said to his first followers, "I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father." As we hear these words today, Jesus is saying the same to us. He does not call us servants any longer. He calls us friends. He wishes to share his life with us. He invites us to share our life with him and we can do so in prayer and in the way we live our daily lives.

As we gather for this celebration today, Jesus is inviting each one of us to draw close to him, as a friend. This afternoon I pray especially for those of you who are preparing for baptism at Easter and those who are preparing for full communion with the Catholic Church. I pray too for your sponsors and your families who are supporting you on this journey. I pray for us all. May we draw nearer to Jesus day by day. May we draw close to him, as a friend.

Bishop Paul Bird CSSR