

Aristotle on Friendship

Aristotle's frequently cited thoughts about friendship (Nicomachean Ethics, Book VIII, sections 1 – 14) are available [online](#). Aristotle begins by reminding us that friendship is most necessary, for without it “no one would choose to live, though he had all other goods.” While we have strong reasons for maintaining relationships with our loved ones and a few close friends, we often fail to seek the joy of a wide-ranging love for persons around us.

Aristotle's second point is that friendship needs to involve reciprocated good will – each wishing what is good for the other – and each needs to recognize the other's good will. The Gospel of John calls upon Christians to love one another. We need to see each other as being made in God's image. The Vincentians speak of “seeing Christ in each other” We need to set aside whatever ill-will, selfishness or malice we have seen in our lives and see each other as gifts from God. We can try to adopt the attitude of the American humorist Will Rogers who said “I never met a man I didn't like”. There is a good side to everyone. We just need to be able to find it.

Aristotle distinguishes between three different kinds of friendship, based on:

- Pleasure – we may enjoy being with a person because he or she is witty, charming, a lively conversationalist, or entertaining
- Usefulness – we may value a person's friendship because they are useful to us in our careers, in our social lives or for the personal or emotional support (“boost”) they give us
- Nobleness of character – we may like a person because they are admirable, they inspire us to be a better person, to be more holy and more caring

Friendship is a mutual relationship. We may value our friends for all three of these reasons, and they may find all three of these qualities in us, in varying degrees and at various times. We need to be conscious of these desirable qualities and learn to be our best selves. As Father Leonard reminds us, we need to make our relationships fruitful.

Pope Francis's "The Joy of the Gospel"

Pope Francis's exhortation, "The Joy of the Gospel" is also available [online](#). It has an opening and then chapters numbered ONE through FIVE. It is also divided into consecutively numbered sections, [1] through [288]. The online version has a "clickable" table of contents.

If you would like to study the exhortation by yourself or with friends or family members, the Catholic social justice organization NETWORK has put together an outline of the document and discussion questions [here](#).

"The Joy of the Gospel" is inspiring reading throughout. As to its relevance to building relationships, several excerpts aimed at giving us a new understanding of evangelization are noteworthy.

"An evangelizing community gets involved by word and deed in people's daily lives; it bridges distances, it is willing to abase itself if necessary, and it embraces human life, touching the suffering flesh of Christ in others. Evangelizers thus take on the 'smell of the sheep' and the sheep are willing to hear their voice." [24]

Chapter Four is entitled "The Social Dimension of Evangelization" and it gives us a vision of the whole Body of Christ – our national organizations, our many diocese, our parishes, our groups – combining our efforts to bring "genuine fraternal love" [179] and "human advancement " [178] to the world.

"To evangelize is to make the kingdom of God present in our world" [176]

"[T]he very heart of the Gospel is life in community and engagement with others" [177]

"The Holy Spirit can be said to possess an infinite creativity, proper to the divine mind, which knows how to loosen the knots of human affairs, even the most complex and inscrutable'. Evangelization is meant to cooperate with this liberating work of the Spirit. The very mystery of the Trinity reminds us that we have been created in the image of the divine communion, and so we cannot achieve fulfillment or salvation purely by our

own efforts. From the heart of the Gospel we see the profound connection between evangelization and human advancement, which must necessarily find expression and develop in every work of evangelization. Accepting the first proclamation, which invites us to receive God's love and to love him in return with the very love which is his gift, brings forth in our lives and actions a primary and fundamental response to desire, seek and protect the good of others." [178]

We should not "lose our amazement, our excitement and our zeal for living the Gospel of fraternity and justice"[179]

Thus our mission is to jointly build relationships that make the lives of everyone joyous and fruitful.