



## Friendship

Source: 1st Conversations of Cala Figuera, Foundation Eduardo Bonnín Aguiló (FEBA).<sup>1</sup>

The revised translation of this book describes *Days of reflection on the Founding Charism of the Cursillo held in “The Porciúncula” in Palma de Mallorca on the 50th Anniversary of the First Cursillo Weekend held in Cala Figuera in Santanyi, on the Island of Mallorca, Spain in August 1944.*

The dictionary defines friendship as “affection, a pure and disinterested feeling that exists between people, stemming from mutual esteem, appreciation and empathy.” As always, the dictionary refers to the concept, to what the word means, but it is life itself that tells us what it really is.

Without any doubt the wonder of life where it can be best captured and most valued, is inside the person, and the quality that can give them more joy is their ability to understand, feel, and spread the joyful experience of friendship.

Mankind, in its steady progress, has been able to discover and invent many things, but none has yet been able to overcome the joy that the delight of friendship brings to the person.

When we talk about friendship, we must define the two different conceptions of it. First, there is the particular friend; although one can have more than one friend, we cannot forget that each one requires a special and different approach. In a word, each friend requires “a custom-made approach”.

Secondly, the term ‘friend’ is used in the generic sense. Generically, friend is a word, which like many others, has undergone a certain inflation and the resulting devaluation.

Until recently, in linguistic and social use, there was a distinction between “acquaintances” and “friends.” The first of these words is scarcely used now because both meanings are encompassed today within the second word.

An acquaintance is a person about whom we have some knowledge, we know a few details about their lives, we occasionally talk to them and we deal with them only in a superficial manner, and nothing else. We may have a vague feeling of empathy for an acquaintance, but s/he is not felt as necessary or certain.

Speaking of friends in the singular we should, no, it is necessary and joyfully appropriate for Christians, to speak first about the special friend, the most unique friend, the living, approachable, and close Christ who when we have internalized Him by Grace, He lovingly makes us become aware of that which we have in common with Him. For the fact of having been conceived and

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.feba.info>

created in the image of God, and of that which we still lack and need to do, to let the simple and always possible – resemblance of Him – which we have perhaps already attempted but seldom achieved – gradually become a reality.

He became like us to befriend us men (in a generic sense, therefore, also women). He is the prototypical paradigm of true friendship, a sort of friendship that spares no sacrifice to make it real in everyday life, He, shows us the heights to which friendship can aspire, i.e. to give one's life for the sake of the person we love and to consider it as something possible which we should not rule out in order to avoid running the risk of lowering our one's guard, slackening the bowstring or causing a rift in the friendship. Friendship must always be, for he who offers friendship and he who accepts it a shelter, a safe haven, a strong fortress.

When the person, by conscious and divine Grace, experiences friendship with Christ they gradually come to realize that He is truly a friend, the quintessential true friend Who truly and always loves us Who always looks at us with enthusiasm and is listening to us with passionate interest, Who knows our intentions, and yet is constantly at our beck and call, Who rejoices in our joy.

When the friendship between two friends is ratified and strengthened by the friendship that both have with Christ, then the joy of being friends increases and they enjoy a deeper level of friendship, because the friendship forged and cultivated within the light of Christ and warmed by His grace seems to be supported and somehow secured by Him. Many words can be said about Christ as our friend, but all of them are not just pale but very inadequate to explain what actually is experienced when lived in conscious and alive contact with Him

After my bold audacity in trying to explain the unexplainable, I must talk about friendship between friends.

When there is a true and intimate friendship between friends, the partners in the friendship know each other inwardly, although each one has different qualities they respect each other, they live the ups and downs of life side by side, and what they cannot experience together they can relive together when they meet to discuss and talk about the things each one of them has lived individually. They understand each other with a word, a gesture, with a look, because every smile proclaims closeness and every gesture defines friendship.

Friendship is the best channel to approach and to understand a person; It is the most profound form of coexistence and it turns coexistence into a feast. Friendship makes it possible for friends to talk as equals, without having to use annoying “filters” to avoid misunderstandings; to be able to express what they feel deep in the intimacy of their souls, without fear of not being listened to or of not being understood when expressing their feelings and thoughts. This kind of communication brings a lightness to life, oxygenates our coexistence and makes it more interesting, more enjoyable and delicious. In friendship the degree of authenticity of every single life emerges. Communication is an experience and an essential activity of human life that, when it is performed at the interpersonal level of sincere and deep friendship, attains a valuable dimension that motivates life and helps us find the proper channel to develop ourselves and to carry on towards an always possible higher fulfillment.

Real friends are never possessive, they want their friend to move in freedom; unwittingly, the two friends push each other towards the best that each of them can be and to achieve that which is best for each of them.

Each of us is different and our circumstances are also often different, but still, we all have an infertile area in the field of our soul where the water of our personal identification does not reach; this infertile area is that which most gets in our way obstructing the process of gradually becoming our true self and achieving our highest fulfilment.

This infertile area where the water does not reach can only be irrigated by true friendship. True friendship can - consciously or unconsciously - bring suitable water where it is needed, since it is impelled by an unstoppable force similar to the force of gravity, which is always acting without any external impulse, naturally and with simplicity, to the rhythm of life itself and, like life, it has its ups and downs but is always buoyed up by the friendship. Essentially all friendship requires a mutual respect for the inner- most being, that private place in each person where they meet God in the intimacy of their being. This is the area of mystery that exists inside each person; this place is incommunicable and cannot be translated into words, and its existence must always be confidently assumed and firmly respected. This does not mean that in a given circumstance it could be advisable for the friend to go as far as the very edge of the boundary of this interior area, but to overstep that boundary in an attempt to try to find more than what is prudent can deeply hurt or even fatally wound friendship. When and wherever true friendship exists, it is usually because both friends have covered the process with interest - be it long or short - of growing in the relationship, strengthened by frequent or not so frequent mutually comforting confidences, where words arise from the personal reality of the speaker and are always spoken and listened to with the unction and respect that the circumstance requires and the esteem for the other calls for. The respectful and delicate art of confidentiality involves an attentive, conscientious and thoughtful care that requires mutual attentiveness and respect. Because friendship is precisely the opening of ourselves to our friend, but this opening must always be dynamic, trusting and confident.

Friendship is one of the best ways of achieving a whole and balanced personality because it awakens, whets and gradually completes the well-being and wholeness of the person.

### **Climate of Friendship**

It is quite apparent that we have not invented friendship, because it existed long before the beginning of Cursillo, but it is also true that the essence of what Cursillo is and aims at can only be grasped, understood, comprehended and spread in an atmosphere of deep and true friendship. It is painful that many men / women seek to learn by studying that which can only be understood by loving.

Although friendship can grow and develop in any place or situation, it usually requires an appropriate climate to be born and grow normally. Whereas in a climate where communication and dialogue are merely functional or conventional it is difficult, but not impossible, for true friendship to appear and reach a successful conclusion, but in fact we cannot talk about conclusion because friendship never ends, and its natural dynamism is continuously generating more friendship.

Wherever people gather, and everyone is regarded as a person, and is respected and appreciated for what they are, not for their possessions or for the power they have, nor for what they know, the friendly acceptance of oneself is the first step for each one to wake up to their own reality, so that each one awakens to his/her true self. First, realizing their own strengths and, second, not forgetting their limitations and difficulties, so that they can make the most of the first and make them bear fruit, and second, to try and accept the latter and overcome them.

To accept oneself as one is does not mean for anybody to remain in the same situation where s/he is now, because the dynamism of the wish of always wanting to improve is part of what shapes and forms the basis of a person.

When the person lives consciously and remains in touch with their life, he feels the urgent need to give it meaning. If we look at life from the standpoint that we will one day be brought to account for it, we will live in anxiety and stress, and we will be focused only on the exact and punctual compliance of the “law”, but the genuinely Christian attitude is not to live with the idea that we’ll be brought to account for our life, but to live fully aware of life, that is to live with enthusiasm and live fully and meaningfully, because we know very well that what we live and how we live, besides balancing and focusing our personal life, will always be to the benefit of our environment, facilitating its expansion and infecting it with our way of living.

Obviously, when there is a collective spirit of friendship that fosters it, and it is aimed, clarified and energized by the personal experience of the Christ whom we really live, or whom we really yearn to live, or whom we really regret not living, the atmosphere that emerges and gradually develops, drives us to wanting to achieve a deeper understanding of people, so as not to miss the fascinating adventure of getting to know them as they really are, and to be able to admire them in their determined efforts to progress, despite the difficulties, towards what they want to be.

### **The Process of Friendship**

Friendship nearly always crystallizes through a more or less long gradual process. It’s not often that something like “love at first sight” occurs, and that a kind of flash suddenly illuminates two certain people who mutually and reciprocally feel called to a personal intimate and deep communication.

Although it does have its particular starting point, friendship is always the expansion in time and space of the first impression received; the echo that the warmth, the sharpness or the kindness sensed in or manifested by the other, has made on us.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to try and know the sequence of attitudes that - once started - will simplify or complicate the process of interpersonal friendship. Possible misunderstandings, assumptions - optimistically made at times -, not clarifying the point that has seemed less clear to us in the other’s behavior, etc. All this can hinder or disturb the natural process of friendship. But when friends try, above all, to let the truth of what is happening float and to express it with sincerity and, above all, when friends act righteously and have the freshness of a believing and confident heart, all difficulties are overcome under the light and warmth of the successive and periodical, confidential meetings which are like the towers and pylons of a chairlift, that, by keeping the cable of friendship taut, it will enable a communication that will affirm the coming together, the

accommodation of motives and each will know how to amicably understand and tolerate even healthy differences that are likely to occur.

### **The Encounter**

Friendship is always born in a specific geographical location and it is usually the fruit and consequence of a number of converging and influencing circumstances. To discover in other people some specific qualities that resemble your own or, on the contrary, to discover and admire in someone qualities that you don't have, is usually something that is conducive to friendship. That's why, sometimes, spontaneous and sincere friendship arises between people of widely divergent characters, but who gradually discover with joyful amazement that they complement each other and, conversely, there are similarities that seem to attract one another, and those who have them always enjoy talking to each other, never getting tired of their conversation, for the pleasure such a thing gives them, perceiving in the other the echo of their own interests and unspoken dreams.

### **The Point of Convergence**

There is no reference here to the exact place where friendship is born and develops, but to the point where the intentions of the two friends converge. The stem of the shared enthusiasm that arises between the two friends and produces in each of them the contentment and joy of knowing that the other exists and that he takes you into account, that is, that you count for him, that you matter to him, you occupy a place in his heart, that you are important to the other person, that you are part of their world, and this certainly makes you find the world more beautiful. Friendship helps you see reality from a different point of view, it's like seeing the same old things with new eyes to look at things and situations under a new light and to realize that we can change our point of view. This new way of looking at things and life uncovers many things which the person living in friendship finds fascinating, but which remain undisclosed for someone who looks at them without the passionate interest of the true friend, no matter how hard they try.

### **Paths**

Each person is different, and this is a wonderful thing; if we were all identical the world would be very boring. And it's even more wonderful to see that each person – apart from the fact that each of us has their funny ideas – has their own path, a specific orbit where they live and develop their lives, sometimes within a monotonous routine, and sometimes with unexpected events that cause very different reactions, depending on the disposition of each one. Friendship requires that each friend is master of his ship, in order to be able to bring out all his potential and use it to gradually and simultaneously get to know himself and that of his friend. All this compels us to live fully awake, because to achieve this you need love, you need faith, you need to personally discover it and open yourself up to it.

In this face-to-face meeting, person-to-person, where the other is known in his uniqueness and singularity, both friends encourage each other to go ever higher, which expands and widens the range of possibilities always brought about by true friendship.

Friendship which is for the sake of something to be gained is not friendship, for, to be authentic, friendship does not admit any other purpose than friendship itself. If friendship is capitalized on it

is denatured, it loses its essence and becomes something very different and even contrary to friendship.

Friendship cannot be quantified or valued because it belongs to the group of things that are priceless, and you can only grasp and understand it by way of appreciation. The appreciation we have for something which is dear to us is always deeply personal and not transferable, and this is especially true of a person whom we really love. It's something that has to do with the mystery that basically each of us is, and as we have said, must always be respected. Wanting to quantify and verify the affection of a friend and trying to find out to what level of generosity would he be willing or prepared to go for me, is a clear symptom of mistrust.

Nevertheless, friendship, when it is genuine, can sense the need or lack of the other long before he has to go through the annoying embarrassment of having to express it in words.

When this happens and both friends play fair, this does not need to be the cause of eroding the friendship. Because there is always a solution to everything when there is transparency of intent and both keep in mind that "a friend is someone with whom you can think out loud". When a particular circumstance puts friendship to the test, this may be the crucible for tempering the friendship or the beginning of a process of a chain of disappointments.

Of course, it is not the same thing to be a friend, to have friends, or to use friends, because it is then a friendship for gain, and in this case it's no longer a friendship.

When a true friend, who tries and acts with nobility and good will - and has always assumed the same intention in the other - is realizing that the other, not only does not feel the same about him/her, but the facts are giving evidence that the friend has other intentions, then the friendship cools down and something collapses inside. Its vital springs are loosened, the illusion fades. It is not good then, and never is for a Christian, to stop behaving like such. It is now opportune to recall that the difficulties are there to dispel our false virtues, that crisis, when the spirit is willing, may well be turned into growth and progress, that pride diminishes the model of the person God wants us to be, that to turn the other cheek does not mean that you receive a second slap, and that the "patches" of God are better than His new works.

When the friendship is rooted in Christ, the friends will always find the path to the desired solution, although it is not good to wait until the friendship is reduced to ashes, hoping that then, like a phoenix, it will rise from them. Friendship, as is love, is witty and at times an expression which means that nothing is lost; not even the sense of humor, can facilitate the long-awaited revival of the lost disposition that both friends, basically, want to find again.

### **Pure Friendship**

Real friendship must be disinterested, it must always be non-recoverable. When somebody takes inventory of the friendship, it means that there is or there has already been liquidation or sale, a liquidation of the friendship. When this happens it's enormously painful, especially when it has been a true friendship, because the very nature of friendship always tends to go further. It is like

glass: when it is warmed up gradually it becomes pliable and later fluid, but if the process is reversed, it breaks.

Always with its pluses and minuses, as happens in all human things, friendship is a mutual and continuous discovery of new qualities that enables us to live the amazement of new things, when you see them alive in the life of a friend. Therefore, between or among friends there is always something to tell, to comment on, and to share and therefore, the talk drags on, the farewells never end, and most of the times they are even continued by tele- phone later on. None of this can be imposed from outside, in friendship there is no place for impositions.

In Cursillo we have always said that the tree of friendship cannot be planted or cultivated for its fruits or its shade but only for the joy of having more trees, for the joy of knowing that they are alive, for the pleasure of their company, because their presence creates closeness.

Friendship does not support other adjectives than those that push friendship up. To admire a friend does not mean to flatter him, but to help him become what we know well he wants to be. Friendship is attentive charity communicated with deference and devotion, detail by detail. Friendship is an art, the art of living and knowing how to love, because love lives on tiny things and proceeds microscopically, with serene prodigality and delicate finesse.

### **Anchorage**

The structure of life, in its most private area, depends on the fabric of personal relationships that integrate it. And this integration is produced and achieved by friendship that, like everything else, is exposed to the thousand circumstances of life. Sometimes the winds are favorable and sometimes they are not, but we have to be determined to face storms – the possibility of which can never be ruled out - with courage.

When friendship is cut and anchored in lives that can assess the values in the light of the most valuable value, and Christ and the Christian life is not a mold for them to adjust to -like it or not- but a loving invitation to become yeast to help Christianity ferment the actual circumstances, the dynamism of this very friendship encourages and moves us to new adventures.

### **Projection**

When friendship is alive and active in the minds and hearts of a community, and those who make up this community live the joy of feeling physically and mentally close to each other, and the word “we” or “us” has an intimate meaning because they share with joy the satisfaction of having the same motive, and each act tends to try and give witness to the ideal that unites them, the very reality of events works with an irresistible push and becomes the most effective element of “contagion” of spreading the truth of what we believe and live.

## **Objective**

When Christian life prompts many people to say, “see how they love one another” and when the Christians who have caused that expression hear it instead of becoming conceited, strive to help those who have said it to discover something even more fascinating, i.e. to understand why we love one another. Then Christian life gradually centers the life of people, polishing their conduct and moving people to rectify their slips and mistakes. Once more in history the lame can walk, the deaf can hear and the blind can see.

## **Subjective**

Nowadays, perhaps the most current interpretation of the love of neighbor, is to become friends with the nearest to us. Usually we will express our sensitivity to the hunger in the world, to the injustice which mankind in general suffers, to unemployment, drug addiction, the unthinkable wars and violence taking place in distant countries and so on, while and not always our situation, which is given to us, allows us to do what our hearts urge us to do. This desire to help is certainly good, but sometimes these situations, which only with our prayers or our financial contribution can we, in the distance, help to solve, make us forget about the things that really and urgently do need our personal involvement. And this is the people we have around us; perhaps under the same roof there is someone who needs our willingness to listen to them, our understanding and even affection and tenderness in the case of the wife, children, parents, siblings. If we really are Christians, something of our vision and our encouragement must come through friendship to our friends, neighbors, everyone. Not trying to infiltrate it with moralistic and paternalistic sermons, but simply letting it be apparent through our conduct.

## **Friendship with Oneself**

To be a Christian requires, first of all, accepting oneself as we are, to be a friend of oneself. Without this disposition, there is the risk that the contact and relationship with Christ drifts to a disembodied mysticism, where the actions become more important than the conviction. And the contact with the brothers - especially those most in need – can turn you into a kind of sniper who needs nobody but himself to arrange the world: the church, the sacraments, the priests, etc.

## **Friendship with Christ**

Being a Christian today; at a time when distances have been shortened so much, and yet people live so apart from each other, means facilitating environments that enable communication, first and whenever possible, with the ones closest to us, but later or maybe simultaneously, with those “Far-Away”, those as we can read in “The Acts of the Apostles” who do not yet know the Holy Spirit, because nobody has spoken to them about Him; the misinformed and the uninformed, and so on.

We need to communicate with all of them to tell them that we are all brothers and sisters, and especially because, as we have seen a thousand times, when this kind of person (the far-away) captures the heart of the Gospel message, of the fundamental part of Christian life, when they realize that God in Christ loves them, and that Christ did not come to the world to embitter their life, but to make it possible for everybody to live a joyful life, they really devote themselves to Him, and those who were once the target of our desire and focus of our prayer, often become an example and spur for (all of) us.



The fact that Christian life is a feast, or can become a feast, is perhaps quite difficult to understand by those who, obsessed by a partitioned vision of reality, think that people can only be and feel oppressed by political or economic reasons.

Unfortunately, we can see that there are problems that may cause more oppression, but now is not the right time to make an inventory of them.

What matters is that we Christians, instead of deploring the situation become aware of the task we are called to accomplish, precisely because we are Christians.

The world is evolving. The human race is starting to live a process of globalization as a “living humanity”. The telecommunications experience gives us a simultaneous experience worldwide. We need a new perspective, but we clearly know that as always God, the Holy Spirit, is in everything, in the drive to the future, in the flight towards new things, in the trauma that some strong shaking can produce.

Today one of the most serious problems is unemployment, very soon it will be leisure, and later... we do not know. What matters is that the Christians, who want to be true Christians, understand that we have to accept not only with hope but with optimism and even with passionate conviction, the constant changes that life imposes. The tide of history has changed the set and reference points, and this requires unprecedented challenges to our decision and our perseverance, but in no way can this be reason to yield to the temptation of changing the vessel or losing control.

Whatever happens, it should not make us forget that there are truths that do not change, they cannot change because on their firmness and their roots in the heart of man depends the only thing that can make him evolve, and with him everything that depends on him, so that with an accurate criterion he can learn and use their freedom to experience the adventure of becoming more of a person.

To be a person means to confirm the real “why” in oneself, the real reason for existence and it means to not fall away, victim of the many ways that the world offers to people today to disorient them, to mortgage them, to accelerate their daily living, to choke them with unproductive commitments that, by trivializing their vision, flatten their perspective, in short: to manipulate them.

Obviously, man was never meant to feel fortunate and happy only by avoiding thinking; on the contrary, his faculty of thinking will help him ascertain the meaning and wonder of life.

To be a person is to wish to be oneself and to be oneself is to know that life has a purpose, a meaning, a reason for being, a “why”, a “what for” and a “where to go from here.” And only Christ Who is the Way, the Truth and Life is the total answer to this truth.

And wherever mankind progresses, if it does not progress in the same direction as Christ, who is the Way, and in the light of His Truth and to the rhythm of his Life, then mankind will not evolve because to progress it is necessary that men/women have the “Why”, a reason that is credible, possible, true, humane, fraternal, unifying, attractive, fascinating, enlightening, capable of creating

a channel for - and making sense of - the wonderful fact of existence, to live and to devote their living, not to something but to **SOMEBODY**, because whatever we do for Him, He has loved us first.

What really matters is that we gradually get to understand that our friendship with Christ has to be visible and transparent in our friendly attitude towards others, as we have no doubt that it is friendship that can produce the energy that can move men and women who, being Christians are called to act as leaven in their environments to change the actual reality; this is without doubt possible, if we make the decision to begin with ourselves.