

## **God Is Your Best Friend**

March 25, 2018

I have a friend from high school that I almost never see. If it weren't for Facebook, I don't think I'd even remember what she looked like. I'd need to see some age-progression because in my mind she still looks 18.

Lisa lives in Atlanta now but will soon be moving to Idaho; she just keeps getting further and further away. But I've been friends with Lisa longer than I've been friends with anyone — 40 years. Unbelievable.

In a rare occurrence in our equally busy lives, we got on the phone, and the sound of her voice triggered such a wave of timelessness and love and humor. We were laughing like teenagers within seconds of saying "hello."

My conversation with Lisa was like a half-hour with God. Everything fell away except for our connection. We were instantly finishing each others' sentences and prompting laughter with just a word or two.

It seemed as though we were one mind, one vibe. For that half-hour I existed outside of time and distance — it didn't matter that we were miles or years apart. The God that is in me was one with the God that is in my friend, and we were together with the Holy Spirit. I know it.

You know, I'm reading a wonderful book by Father James Martin called *The Jesuit Guide to Almost Everything*. I went to a Jesuit College and besides St. Francis I have a genuine love for St. Ignatius who is the founder of the Jesuit order.

St. Ignatius, by way of the author, reminds us that God is in friendship. That friendship is prayer.

Even though I was raised in the Catholic church I don't think anyone ever taught me how to pray. I learned prayers like the Act of Contrition and the Our Father, and otherwise I learned to petition God when I needed something, but I never understood that I could have a relationship with God until I studied under Jesuits.

Prayer is like friendship with God, and in a sort of imperfect analogy, that can be compared to friendship with another person. Prayer isn't just the relationship itself, but how the friendship is expressed.

For many like me, brought up in a formal Catholic tradition, God was far too remote; far too important to be bothered with our little personal lives. You didn't have a relationship with God Himself. You didn't even presume to address him directly. If you needed something you asked his son or his mother or any number of saints who had specialities in what ever disorder you were hoping to correct.

Feel hopeless, talk to St. Jude. Did you lose something? St. Anthony's your guy. Taking a trip somewhere, don't bother God with that petty stuff, St. Christopher can handle it.

But at Holy Cross, which is a Jesuit college in Worcester, MA, I learned that I could not only have a relationship with God, I could have a friendship with God, and this was critical for me.

Here's why: with friends — more so than with my parents or other Authority Figures — I could be honest. I talked to my friends about my needs, my dreams, my disappointments. My failures, my fears, the things I was ashamed of and the secret things I was proud of. St. Ignatius wanted us to know that God wants this kind of surrendered relationship with us. He knows everything about us anyway. In Jeremiah 1:5 we read, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you..." God knows every day of your life; He knows whatever "sins" you've committed and ever will commit, and he loves you anyway.

Confessing — or sharing really — isn't to inform God about who we are or what we're thinking, it's to allow us to feel peace and unconditional acceptance simply for being WHO WE ARE. Like a friend would, God simply calls us to be ourselves. Being holy means being who you are.

I know I can tell a friend something I'm ashamed about in my life; she can see the worst in me, but I know I'm safe to tell her this because she won't judge me. She loves me. She'll make me feel better and encourage me to forgive myself. I feel free and safe, knowing someone knows me and loves me so well.

So when I spoke to my friend Lisa, I knew I was in the presence of the Holy Spirit. How else to describe it? Instant joy and connection. No matter how long it had been since I'd seen her or how far away she was, once we intended to connect, we were praying.

If you've felt God is remote or untouchable, and many traditional faiths teach this, I encourage you to look into the radical nature of saints like Ignatius Loyola.

Ignatius was wealthy young man growing up in the Basque region of Spain in the late 1400's. He loved military exercises, pretty young women, and fame, and he single-mindedly pursued all three. When he was about 30 years old he was badly injured in a battle, and spent more than a year recovering from two shattered legs. It was during this time that he began to read about the lives of saints, and found his calling.

When he founded the Jesuit order after many years of prayer and study, his message was somewhat at odds not just with contemporaneous teachings, but at various periods through out history. In the 1770s the Jesuit order was suppressed and officially disbanded by papal decree. Ignatius was a practical man who strove to bring God into everyone's daily life. How else to communicate this except to say that God was approachable, he cared about you individually, you MATTERED to him and you could have a direct relationship with him.

Maybe like me you struggled with just how to talk to God or you wondered what prayer really was supposed to be like.

I'll tell you what I believe: that God yearns for a personal relationship with us. Think about moments when you're with a friend who knows you inside and out, and loves you warts and all. You can even get mad at that friend but it could never, ever, end your love for one another. Lisa and I have had some rip-roaring conflicts in the 40 years we've been friends, but forgiveness is a given.

How we feel about our friends is how God feels about us. There isn't anything you can do to drive your Creator away, to offend Him or to cause him to turn his back on you. It doesn't matter that you haven't spoken to him in years. Call him up anyway, and I promise you that the connection will pick up right where it left off and you will be filled with a timeless, eternal joy.

Look to your friendships to model your prayers. Talk to God the way you talk to your best friend. Say everything. Get into the habit of sharing, confessing, and dreaming as one with

God. This is the perfect prayer, because God is a living force — LOVE is a living force in your life.

The more you invest in a friendship with God the more joy and acceptance you'll feel, and you'll feel it from HIM.

Remember, being holy means being WHO YOU ARE. Surrender your defenses or excuses or apologies for self to God, just like you do with your friends. In return you'll feel peace, acceptance and encouragement.

You'll hear God's answers to your prayers too, because as you surrender to friendship with God, the Holy spirit within you will illuminate your way forward. You'll learn to trust in that inner guidance, which is God, to know first of all that you are perfect, that you deserve self-expression, and that you are forgiven because ultimately there is nothing to forgive.

You are God's thought of himself. How can you be anything but best friends?

Amen.