

If you have ever used the social networking website, Facebook, you know that to do anything, you need 'friends.' To see someone's full profile, you have to be friends. And friend requests come in all the time. Sometimes the request is from someone you haven't heard from in years, like a high school classmate, and sometimes it is someone you don't know. Facebook even suggests people that might be friends. It even tracks how many 'friends' you have. I have even heard that people compete to see who has more friends.

But what is a friend? Let's look to today's Gospel.

We hear the story of a paralyzed man. He has no hope of ever walking. He is barely able to get around on his own. He has very few options for providing for himself or his family. His legs are paralyzed, but so is his sense of dignity and self-worth.

He didn't have Eleanor's Project to not only provide a wheelchair but also to make sure it is adjusted and fitted properly to give him back his dignity, mobility and self-worth.

But he did have one thing going for him; he had four true friends. These friends really care about him. They care so much that they literally pick him up, maybe even against his own will, and carry him to Jesus. The large crowd that has spilled into the street doesn't deter them. They climb the roof and tear a hole into, lowering their friend to Jesus. These friends would not be deterred from getting their buddy in front of Jesus. Nothing else mattered, even though they had no assurance that Jesus could or even would heal their friend. But where determination and assurance left off, faith kicked in.

Saint Mark tells us that was their faith that Jesus saw. It wasn't the trail of dust and debris from the roof, it wasn't the interruption of his teaching session — it was the set of four hopeful eyes peering through the hole that Jesus sees. Through the sweat and grime of all their work to get their friend to Jesus, he can see their love for their friend.

Yes, this paralyzed man had friends, friends with faith — stubborn, hopeful, loyal faith — and that is after all, is the best faith to have, and they were the best friends of have. These were the type of friends who literally “let him down” in a good way— “letting him down” to Jesus.

Jesus values friendship. In fact, in John’s Gospel, on the last night Jesus was on earth, he gathered around a table with his disciples. At the table, Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down their life for their friends. You are My friends... No longer do I call you servants..., but now I call you friends.” (John 15:13-15).

Imagine that, Jesus calling us his friends!

We gather with him at this Table, the table of the Eucharist, as friends. And even though we may not know everyone’s name gathered at this table, through Jesus we are friends, friends with him, friends with one another, friends with the world.

This friendship is an awesome invitation and responsibility.

There will be times when we will be paralyzed by selfishness, fear, pride, greed or whatever. There will be times we won’t recognize the extent of our own need. There will be times when we will be unable or willing to do anything on our own behalf. There will be times we will need others to carry us to the Lord.

And there will be times when others will need our strength to hold on to the corners of their life. There will be times when our faith will help others see Christ in the middle of their darkness. There will be times when others will need the power of our faith to sustain them and carry them.

And so here we are again, gathered with Jesus at this Table. Gathered as friends.