

## FRIENDSHIP

Greetings to all my friends in Christ; G'day mates; De Colores Amigos!

I hope we all feel that we are among friends today because our cursillo movement is the work of God, built on friendship. It is important right at the outset to acknowledge that cursillo is 'a work of God' upheld by palanca. I give thanks to God for all the palanca that is being offered right now for us. May this world encounter make God's love a more visible reality in the world. Please join with me in invoking the Holy Spirit without whom we can do nothing. *Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and kindle in us the fire of your love. Send forth Your Spirit and we shall be created and you shall renew the face of the earth.*

At the first Conversations at Cala Figuera in 1994, Eduardo Bonnin called Cursillo a "homage to friendship." Now we've gathered together in Brisbane, Australia, to further explore this topic of friendship as we continue to discover, accept and live out the charism of the cursillo movement . In *The How and the Why*, Eduardo said "Cursillos are basically nothing other than Christianity." In Cursillo, we come to believe that Christianity is best understood, appreciated and expressed through the joy of deep friendship. Friendship is like the treasure hidden in the ordinary field of our everyday existence. As cursillistas, we try to live out the Good News in our daily lives in friendship - with God, with ourselves and with others.

We know that mankind has been searching for the same thing down through the ages - to be happy, to belong and to find meaning in life. However, man is not the only one who is continually seeking. Through parables like the prodigal son and the lost sheep, Jesus wants us to know the Good News that God is seeking to have friendship with us. If, like me, you were one of the 'far aways,' living on the fringe of Christianity, the cursillo 3 days introduced us to the radical concept that God wants nothing less than to be our friend; that we CAN be His friend because HE is so good - not that WE have to earn it; and that makes us His beloved! This can be a point of profound personal conversion. With our friends on the journey with whom we can 'think about life out loud" this becomes, more and more, a lived reality for us and an ongoing conversion process. Others begin to see what we cannot necessarily see in ourselves, as friendship with God becomes something vital and alive within us. But we do see friendship with Jesus colouring the lives of our Christian friends and as we allow it to colour our own lives too we watch it seep into our family, friends and workmates. Perhaps we could say that friendship is the vehicle for the yeast, the salt, the light of our authentic and ever deepening relationship with God. That is why we say that "friendship is one of the pillars of the Cursillo Movement." (FI 3)

Friendship is a simple, natural and common experience of daily life. More than a superficial acquaintance, it's the best way to really get to know another person. It would be rare to find someone who has never had or been a friend. Eduardo said that, despite all the constant advances of mankind, "none of them has been able to surpass the happiness caused by the joy of friendship." (1st Conversations...) The more open and honest we are with one another, the deeper our friendship can be. A friend who knows us really well can reveal aspects that we can't see in ourselves. They help us to see the reality of our lives, our present situation. With deep mutual respect, we can celebrate our uniqueness, as our friends help us discover our gifts and talents. They also help us face up to our weaknesses and problems .

My best friend, Ricky, loves me. He accepts me as I am. He knows me better than anyone else, even better than I know myself. I can lay open my life before him, my past, my weaknesses and gifts, my expectations, dreams and yearnings, my disappointments, frustrations and pain. My accomplishments and failures are all played out before him and amazingly, he actually chooses, each day, to live the rest of his life with me. We share everything. He is honest, easy going, cheerful, generous, tender hearted.

He's a bit rough around the edges and we have some different interests but we both enjoy the simple things of life. We love nature, feeding the birds, gardening, travelling, going out in the boat and Asian food! Our life revolves around our families.

By the way, Ricky is human - he wasn't always there for me in ways I expected him to be, but those situations were terrific times of personal growth for me as I learnt that my happiness, security and fulfilment can't depend on another person. Through Ricky I have seen what love looks like in reality - not the fairy tale, romantic dream of love that I brought into the marriage, but a day in day out faithful love, that doesn't rely on emotions, feelings and inclinations. A true self giving love.

Ricky attends church regularly - once a year, without fail at Christmas. But it is Ricky, more than anyone or anything else, who has shown me what friendship with Jesus looks like. It is not something I have to strive for. It is just there. Continuously, moment to moment Jesus extends the hand of friendship to me, no matter my situation or circumstance, no matter the condition of my soul. His love simply, strongly and constantly shines and the light never goes out - even if I fail to see it at times.

Ricky inspires me to become a better friend by his steady, faithful love. When I am loved, it is like I am enlarged deep within my spirit. I think, "Yes, if I am really, deeply and personally loved, then it is possible that I can love like that too." So I yearn to love in return. I gain a greater capacity and confidence to love - to be a friend to others, to myself and to God.

Regardless of how special our human friendships are, however, Jesus is the best friend we could ever have. In chapter 15 of John's gospel Jesus says, "No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you." and "This is my commandment that you love one another as I have loved you." He spoke these words to his special friends, his apostles, which included Peter whom He knew would deny him, and Judas who would betray him; and he continues to speak these words to you and to me, while WE are still sinners. This is true friendship! Can we love one another as Jesus loves us? In Australia our 'diggers' or soldiers have a strong reputation for 'mateship' and they would unhesitatingly put their own life on the line for their 'mates,' their fellow soldiers. But to die for those who would deny or betray us? - that is another level. Cursillo shows us that, when we experience for ourselves that God loves us like that, we CAN aspire to such heights.

Let's look at how friendship is integral in each phase of the cursillo method. In the precursillo phase, whilst grace is the principle and foundation, *The Fundamental Ideas* makes it clear that "Friendship is the primary means." (F13) It has its greatest effect on those who are 'faraway' from the reality of friendship with themselves, with God and with others. This is in line with the preference for the poor that marked the life of Jesus Himself, whose Good News was met with only indifference or hostile

reactions amongst the Pharisees, compared to the profound impact of His friendship had on sinners and tax collectors, widows and lepers.

I look back to well before 1994 when I lived my cursillo. My sponsor Jean, befriended me. She supported and encouraged me and I know she prayed for me. Her communion with God was authentic and impacted every area of her life. As our friendship grew I saw unfolding before my very eyes, the evidence of her friendship with God manifested in a most natural, unselfconscious joy, sincerity, love and freedom that pervaded her ordinary everyday life. It was in her attitude, her perspective and the way she treated people rather than the actual things she did. As Jean opened up her life to me in a natural and honest way, I became a witness of her ongoing conversion which gently encouraged in me a seeking attitude and desire for change. Looking back I see how Jean's friendship with Jesus gradually awakened in me a desire for a more authentic personal relationship with Him also. It was only after several years of preparing me, that Jean invited me to a cursillo where I would meet the Lord in a triple encounter. In friendship she continues to accompany me on my journey of conversion to becoming an authentic Christian myself. Because of her living witness, I now see that, like Jean, I can act as leaven in my environments."

Jean was not using friendship to get to me, it was simply a natural extension of her friendship with God, that allowed Jean to see the value of me, as a person, and it was this that had a profound effect on me. It was through the process of friendship - personal contact and personal witness - that Jean tilled the hardened ground of my heart until it was soft and open and I was ready to receive the seed of true friendship of God in Jesus Christ. This is the 'work' of the precursillo phase.

The cursillo 3 days continues the process of *making a friend, being a friend and bringing our friend to Christ*. Whilst the cursillo 3 days facilitates the three encounters, it seems to me that the pivotal point of cursillo is the friendship which God offers each person. Through His Spirit in us, those of us who were far away from the Church and God, encounter a God who truly, personally, deeply loves us for who we are. We discover this by the kerygmatic announcement of the cursillo three days - By actually living it along with all the other participants on the cursillo; through meditating on His Word, by listening for His still quiet voice and as He shares Himself in the Sacraments, through people witnessing to the effect of His friendship in their lives, and by opening up to the friendship of others. During the three days we are immersed in the Good News. We come to see that our life has a purpose and that lasting happiness and true freedom will only be found by getting to know Jesus as a real and personal friend, as we bring our own friends along with us on this journey.

The team, the friendship group which has formed during team formation, is itself an authentic, joyful proclamation of these truths, a tangible witness to Christianity in Action. During team formation they have continued their own conversion as, in the light of the roles assigned to them, and amongst their Christian friends, they assess with fresh eyes the reality of their own lives, with all their limitations and possibilities. As this lived reality is integrated with the message of the rollos which are both proclaimed and lived during the three days in a simple and natural way, those who live the three days can conceive of the possibility of a different, more meaningful life based on friendship with Jesus, as witnessed by a team of Christians who share this same vision.

The wider community through their palanca and practical support and at the clausura also bears witness that living a life of Grace in friendship with other like-minded Christians is more than a

possibility, it is indeed a reality which is changing the face of the earth to look more and more like the face of Christ.

After the 3 days, the new cursillistas test the truth and sincerity of the Good News that was so freely, joyously and sincerely proclaimed during the cursillo. The offer of total security is put into practice through Group reunions and ultreyas. These provide the opportunity to establish true and growing friendships based on our common experience of the cursillo and a common desire for continued growth and conversion so that the three encounters continue beyond the three days, to enrich our attitude and way of life. We discover that we cannot accept the friendship offered by Jesus without seeing ourselves differently, and without extending the hand of friendship to others.

In our group reunions we sate our natural human desire for honest, generous relationship, our need to belong, to give and take, to share our true, often hidden selves with trusted friends. By sharing our piety, study and action 'we become better friends and better Christians.' In sharing our study we get to know Christ more. By giving voice to our piety, we come to know how truly close God is to us and we learn to read God's signs in our life. Sharing our action we discover how we are becoming a permanent and visible sign of God's love in our world. After all we don't want to arrive at the pearly gates alone. St Peter will ask us, "Where are all the friends you were supposed to bring with you?"

Gathering together in group reunions on a regular basis, in the name of Jesus and being honest, kind, generous and sincere will ensure the vitality of our friendships and keep the fire of God's love burning brightly so we can persevere in living a life of grace.

The ultreya adds the social dimension of friendship as a strong sense of communion is nurtured. Ultreya expands the horizon of friendship for each group reunion. The ambiance of an ultreya is both of acceptance of one another as beloved children of God as well as a calling to become all that we can be. The faith and witness of a wide variety of friends of all ages, situations and circumstances, from all walks of life and varied environments give us encouragement to keep going enthusiastically on our pilgrim way as we encourage each other onward in living what is fundamental for being a Christian in our normal, everyday environments.

In this way, as our friendships with God, ourselves and others blossom and grow we continue "to live, to share and to increase the spirit that has been awakened during the cursillo." (F13). Each person is acknowledged, accepted, valued and appreciated. Each person flourishes as we are formed into "vibrant, effective and life giving Christians." Thus "the purpose of cursillo movement to transform the environments by transforming the person and ultimately building the Kingdom of God" is simply and effectively achieved through the vehicle of friendship.

With the support of our Christian friends in both group reunion and ultreya, we become agents of evangelization within our own environments as we spread the Good News of God's love among our friends. Indeed why wouldn't we? As Eduardo said in Korea in 1997, "The only thing that we CAN spread like a contagion is the faith that we have that Christ loves us."

The service structures of cursillo such as secretariats and schools of leaders also function with this same spirit of friendship when each person is valued and respected, whether priest or layperson, president or brand new cursillista. Every aspect of cursillo is pervaded by this spirit of friendship, stemming from the realization of the dignity and importance of each person because they are each

God's beloved children. In Secretariats all over the world, the generous and free sharing of gifts, talents and resources in a spirit of service continues to demonstrate this as the group of friends that form a secretariat, believe in, live and promote the cursillo method in adherence to the charism of Cursillo. Schools of leaders will also function effectively when this spirit of friendship is upheld as something precious. When we feel accepted and loved we feel free to enquire, to learn, to ask, to share in a free, joyous and loving exchange as we discover together the richness of our charism for the benefit of the cursillo community.

I have been asked to propose some challenges for the movement, as I see it. I have already touched on the errant view that the cursillo method uses friendship as a means of coercion or manipulation.

My answer to this is simply that the dignity and importance of each person must always be most highly valued. Even at gatherings like this one where limited time perhaps prevents deep friendships from developing, nevertheless, in our passion and enthusiasm for the movement, we can never lose sight of the importance of the person in front of us. By so doing we avert any human propensity to let friendship become a tool of manipulation or to let passion override compassion. In becoming more Christ like we begin to lay aside any judgemental attitudes, we learn to quickly apologize and ask forgiveness if we offend someone. In the spirit of true friendship we are free to debate strongly if opinions or perspectives differ, but at the same time we learn to accept positive criticism and that silence can often be the best form of defence, that people are ultimately free to make mistakes and learn from the consequences, that God turns all things to good for those who trust in Him.

Another challenge for the Movement is not to complicate things but to keep a firm grasp of reality in all its simplicity. Sometimes we can lose perspective, lose sight of our ideal and get bogged down in the detail. Perhaps we do not have a clear understanding of something and want to add or change things. We can end up burying the natural beauty of actual friendships in theories and adornments.

The antidote is

to grow in humility for the wisdom of the charism and our predecessors both in cursillo and in the church and the Gospels themselves.

To grow in understanding of what is essential and what is not.

To remember the big picture, that Cursillo is a movement which nurtures and supports authentic Christian living in the reality of everyday life, in line with the church's vision of the mission of the laity in the world.

A further challenge continues to be how to maintain vitality within the movement.

We are addressing this at this World Encounter by continuing to look with fresh eyes at the heart of our charism - the free and generous gift of God to our founders for the benefit of all.

By understanding that friendship is key to persevering in our pilgrim journey.

Conclusion

I'd like to finish with a quote from Pope Francis to a young student in June this year.

*"Walking is an art; if we are always in a hurry we tire and cannot reach our destination, the destination of our journey. Yet if we stop and do not move, we also fail to reach our destination. Walking is precisely the art of looking to the horizon, thinking about where I want to go, and also coping with the weariness that comes from walking. Moreover, the way is often hard-going, it is not easy. "I want to stay faithful to this journey, but it is not easy; listen: there is darkness, there are days of darkness, days of failure, and some days of falling... someone falls, falls". Yet always keep this in your thoughts: do not be afraid of failure, do not be afraid of falling. In the art of walking it is not falling that matters, but not "staying fallen". Get up quickly, immediately, and continue to go on. And this is beautiful: it is working every day, it is walking humanly. But also: it is terrible to walk alone, terrible and tedious. Walking in community, with friends, with those who love us: this helps us, it helps us to arrive precisely at the destination where we must arrive."*

And on this note I wish to say only one more thing -

ULTREYA!

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