

(2.8) Familiar Friendship With Jesus

When Jesus is with us all is well and nothing seems hard but when Jesus is absent everything is difficult. When He does not speak to the heart all other comfort is ineffective; but if Jesus speaks but a single word we are greatly comforted. Did not Mary respond at once from the place she wept when Martha quietly said, *The teacher is here and is asking for you.*¹ We are so fortunate when Jesus calls us from tears of despair to joy of spirit. How arid and hard of heart you are without Jesus! How foolish and vain if you desire anything but Jesus! Without Him is a greater injury to you than the loss of the whole world! *Commit your way to the LORD, trust in him and He will act.*²

What can the world offer you without Jesus? To be without Jesus is a grievous misery; to be with Jesus is delight. If Jesus protects you no adversary can harm you. Whoever finds Jesus *finds a pearl of great value*³, yes, a higher good above every other good. And he that loses Jesus loses a great deal, more than the whole world. He that lives without Jesus is in desolate privation, while he who is at ease with Jesus' way is especially productive.

It is a great ability to know how to prayerfully converse with Jesus; and to know how to keep Jesus close to your heart is an even greater wisdom. Be humble and peaceable and Jesus abides with you; be devout and calm and Jesus will continue to abide with you. *Whoever obeys Me dwells in security, in peace, without fear of harm.*⁴

You can easily shut out Jesus and lose His grace if you turn to worldly things. And if you drive Him from you and lose Him, to whom will you go? As Simon Peter said, *Master, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.*⁵ So whom then will you seek for your friend? Without a friend you cannot live well; and if Jesus be not your friend above all other friends you shall indeed be sad and desolate. You are foolish, therefore, to trust in any other, or to rejoice in any other. *Better to take refuge in the LORD than to put one's trust in mortals.*⁶ We ought rather to have the whole world against us rather than offend Jesus. Of all things that are dear to you, let Jesus alone be your special Beloved and He says, *you are my friends if you do what I command you.*⁷

Let all be loved for the sake of Jesus, but Jesus for His own sake. Jesus Christ alone is singly to be loved, for He alone is found to be good and faithful above all friends. For His

¹ John 11:28

² Psalm 37:5

³ Matt 13:46

⁴ Proverbs 1:33

⁵ John 6:68

⁶ Psalm 118:8

⁷ John 15:14

sake and in Him, let friends as well as *enemies*⁸ be dear to you; and for all these you must pray to Him, that all may know and love Him. Never desire to be singularly praised or loved; for this belongs to God alone who has none like to Himself. Neither desire that anyone's heart should be taken up with you; nor you be much taken up with the affection of anyone; but pray that Jesus be in you, and in every good person.

Be free and pure interiorly, and be not entangled by any creature. You must be open and bear a pure heart towards God if you would be at peace and see how satisfying is the Lord; *Taste and see that the LORD is good;*⁹ And this truth, you shall not attain unless you relinquish worldly attachments and instead be drawn by His grace. *Those who fear the Lord seek to please him; those who love him are filled with his law.*¹⁰ Having cast out and dismissed all else, you shall be united to Him alone. For when the grace of God comes to a man he is capable in all things, and when such grace departs, then is he poor and weak, and left only as it were to be in complete isolation.

Yet one must not be dejected, nor despair but wait calmly upon the will of God, and for the honor of Jesus Christ endure whatever may befall him. For after winter follows summer; after night the day returns; after the storm comes a great calm; *the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness has not overcome it.*¹¹

This article is based on Book 2, Chapter 8 of Thomas of Kempis' writing, "Imitation of Christ." It is not a translation, and there are many of those, but a personal reflection on his writing; if any of it helps give credit to Thomas of Kempis; if any of it fails the responsibility is mine. (rfm)

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⁸ Matthew 5:44 *Love your enemies*

⁹ Psalm 34:9

¹⁰ Sirach 2:17

¹¹ John 1:5