

“You can choose your friends, but you can’t choose your family.” So wrote Harper Lee in *To Kill a Mockingbird*. And the statement is probably quite true when it comes to human relationships. We’re stuck with our family. And hopefully that is a good thing. We do not pick our family. God picks the family into which we are born. But we do pick our friends. And this is why, perhaps, a person is known by the friends he has, by the company he keeps.

“*You are My friends,*” says Jesus in our text. Way to go! You did good in picking Jesus to be your friend. Since a person is known by the friends he keeps, this says a lot about you that Jesus is your friend.

But not so fast. Jesus adds these words: “*You did not choose Me, but I chose you.*” This is pretty clear. We did not choose Jesus to be our friend. Jesus did the choosing. He chose you. He chose to be your friend. And since someone is known by the friends he chooses, what does this say about Jesus that He chose us to be His friends?

It says a lot. And especially when we consider that at one time, we were His enemies. This is our natural state, writes the Apostle Paul. We were born enemies of God. And if we were God’s enemies, then we were friends of the devil.

St. James connects the dots for us: “*Friendship with the world,*” he writes, “*is hostility toward God. Whoever (is) a friend of the world (and thus, of the prince of this world, Satan), makes himself an enemy of God.*”

You and I used to be Satan’s friends. Kind of a nauseating thought, isn’t it? But it’s quite true. And since a person is known by his friends, what does this say about us that at one time, Satan was our friend? We were in bad company having, as our friends, the sinful world along with its evil prince and ruler. And, to connect the dots, at the same time that we were Satan’s friends, we were God’s enemies.

In the movie, *The Dirty Dozen*, from years ago, an army commander, played by Lee Marvin, put together an elite group of soldiers to go on a vital mission into Nazi territory. The twelve men he selected were not upstanding soldiers. Rather, they were criminals and murderers on death row waiting for the day of their execution.

Is this not quite similar to the selection Jesus makes? He chooses for His friends, for His disciples, and soldiers in the Church Militant, not the most upstanding people He can find. No! Jesus selects those who were His enemies. The dirty dozen are the twelve disciples. And not just them; us as well. Jesus chose you and me, who were Satan’s friends at one time, to be His friends.

What does this say about Jesus? It says that we are Jesus’ friends not because we were so loyal and full of potential, but because we were in the enemy’s camp. Jesus chose us because we would never have chosen Him. Jesus chose you to be His friend because you and I did not have the ability to choose Him.

We were on death row awaiting our execution! But God is merciful. He chose you. He called you. He brought you to Holy Baptism and made you His friend. And what does this say about Jesus? That He is the friend of sinners. That His greatest joy is in making friends of those who were His enemies.

Now I have to admit that all this talk about picking and choosing brings to mind many regrets. I have made horrible choices in my life. Haven't you? I have chosen wrong over right far too often. I have made sinful choices, and I still do, because sin dwells in me as it does in you.

How good to know, therefore, that our friendship with Jesus is not based upon our choices in life, but upon His choice of us. Jesus does not say, "You can be My friends if you make good choices." No! He makes the good choice. He chooses to be your friend, and mine, in spite of all the sinful choices we have made.

Now He does say this: "*You are My friends if you do what I command you.*" Should that cause us to worry? Is our friendship with Jesus contingent upon our doing what He commands us? And what if we fail to do what He commands? Does our failure turn us into His enemies?

Do not fear. "*This is My commandment,*" He says, "*that you love one another as I have loved you.*" And how did Jesus love you? By laying down His life for you. "*Greater love has no one than this,*" He says, "*that someone lays down his life for his friends.*" But we weren't even His friends when He went to the cross for us. What kind of love is this that it far surpasses even the greatest love we can have, that He dies for His enemies!

It is the sun shining in its full strength compared to the moon which can only reflect the sun's light. And yet it does. The moon cannot do otherwise when the sun shines upon it.

And this is why you do not need to worry and despair. You are that moon by virtue of your baptism into Christ. You and I have no light and love of our own. But the light and love of the Son of God shines on you from the cross and reflects out from you. It is there at the cross that you hear Jesus say, "*You are My friends.*" And you will, therefore, reflect His friendship toward those in your life. The moon does not fail to shine, not when the sun shines on it.

However you and I have failed to love as Jesus commands, His friendship with you never fails, because His light and love for you never fails. And His forgiveness for you never fails. All those sinful choices we have made – they are forgiven. Jesus forgives you and me for all of them. Each one of you is forgiven. All your failures He forgives.

"*You are My friends,*" is the word that flows from Jesus' cross to you. He treats you not as a slave or a servant, using harsh commands. He loves you as a friend. And being His friend, He asks you kindly to love one another; to reflect His friendship with you to others. And this is what you will do because you live in the light and love of Jesus, your friend. Amen.