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## MAKING FRIENDSHIP GROW

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During the past few weeks we have been following Level Two of the family-based religious education programme. Together we have tried to get a better understanding of true friendship. With the children and adults of our Church, we have prepared ourselves to better welcome Jesus' friendship who has made us his true friends for ever. Just as he could express his deep love for the people of his time, so does he express to day his love for us: "You mean very much to me, and I love you" Let us believe this Good News!

### TAKING THE MEANS

Without revealing the secrets of the many people around us who are deeply in love, it is good to realise that some of them have had to carefully consider their love for one another and who, according to the conclusion reached, took good resolutions to make their love grow. The means taken may sometimes seem disproportionate and even ludicrous. For instance, I know a husband who was unable to say "good morning", not even to his wife. If someone considers him- or herself a lover but is really not approachable in the morning, that person risks spending a rather bad day. Just a few words, and the whole climate changes. The person who is ignorant of table manners also risks not being a too loving person! If there are all kinds of physical exercises, there are also certain guidelines for growing in friendship as well as in love. Even in the religious area there are what could be called "exercises" which are more or less required if we want to stay connected to God. The person who never prays or never "does Lent", the one who never shares in community events deprives himself or herself of great spiritual resources. Saint John Eudes (1601-1680), who was a very practical man, wrote a book of spiritual exercises for daily, weekly, monthly, and yearly use, to help life and the Kingdom of Jesus grow and develop in the Christian soul. In its days, the book became a best seller in France, and it was even published in Canada.

### SURPRISING ACTIONS AND WORDS

In order to foster friendship as Jesus did, some gestures are recommended: taking the first step, as Jesus himself took the initiative for certain actions and certain encounters. Working with others, sharing ideas, agreeing with one's friend, joining in activities, all of these are excellent means for helping friendship along. Then there are words. We do not always know the effect that words can have. We only need to try! Tell someone: "You are my friend!" "I would like to play with you." "You are right." "I'm sorry." "I think that you have good ideas." – and you will see the climate change! This is not to say that the words are magic... but close to it! They are charged with surprising dynamic power. To the actions and the words must be added a right attitude: behaving well, helping one's friends in their need, agreeing together on a particular game, respecting the friend's ideas, not being a sore loser, being honest, and avoiding hurting one's friend. Attitudes express what we carry within: an honest front does not need a long speech!

### CHERISHED SOUVENIRS

If we were to pool together certain souvenirs recalling the good times of friendship, our catechetics meeting would be great! These times may have been lived when we were young, or they could be experiences of your parents, your teachers, or your priests. My father often enjoyed telling stories of his life as a lumberjack. He had certainly worked hard, and several of his stories recalled sad events, but there were other, happier stories that marked him for life. He recalled that once when he was "driving" the logs down the river and had fallen into the freezing water; one of his co-workers helped him change into dry, warm clothes. The parish priest liked telling about how, when fire ravaged homes in the parish, parishioners helped even at risk to their own lives. And Mother loved to tell how her friend Thérèse had been such help to her, with her first babies... Even last May, at a meeting of former students of St. Odilon's Tier Eight Country School (1937-1967), we had the pleasure of reminiscing about the "good old days" and the beautiful deeds of friendship. Truth to tell, at the

little country school it was not long before one be identified as somebody's friend, we were quickly "paired off", and would often have parties among friends. These are life-long memories of gestures long passed, which remain a source of life and hope!

#### **"THE MOST BEAUTIFUL GIFTS OF MY LIFE"**

Speaking of friendship, I will always remember a certain very special Christmas lived in simplicity and fellowship. There were about twenty of us friends, and we had decided not to spend money on expensive gifts. Pierre-Yves had a wonderful idea: he stuck a white sheet of paper on the back of each person, and gave everyone a pencil. He then asked us to write on each friend's sheet the quality one enjoyed the most from this friend. This was done with pleasure but great seriousness. At the end of this great "friendship circle", each participant could read what the others thought was the truth about the friend. I have very seldom experienced such an atmosphere: each quality noted was received with gratitude and even surprise, embarrassed as one was to acknowledge the quality. Pierre exclaimed: "These are the most beautiful gifts I have ever received!" And H  l  ne said: "I never thought that I was so well liked by the group!" Jer  me concluded: "Why should we wait until we die before telling others how beautiful they are?" If you feel like it and the group is open to it, don't hesitate to give such unrivalled gifts of friendship. It may be that it be a bit embarrassing at first, to hear tell of one's qualities, but it is really worth it. It is beautiful to often tell one's parents and children that they are precious to the Lord; why couldn't we tell them very simply how beautiful and good that they are? "You are really special! You have such a beautiful voice! You play well! You are a good composer! You are the best organiser! Everything changes for the better when you're around because we are friends!"

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