

# VINTAGE Saints & Sinners

## Aelred of Rievaulx (1110-1167): Friendship's Child

1. When I was still just a lad in school, and the charm of my companions pleased me very much, I gave my whole soul to affection and devoted myself to love amid the ways and vices with which that age is wont to be threatened, so that nothing seemed to me more sweet, nothing more agreeable, nothing more practical, than to love. And so, torn between conflicting loves and friendships, I was drawn now here, now there, and not knowing the law of true friendship, I was often deceived by its mere semblance.

**“God is friendship. Those who abide in friendship abide in God & God abides in them.”** after I John 4:16

Aelred's *Spiritual Friendship*: A formula for friendship whereby I might check the vacillations of my loves and affections.

2. Let one kind of friendship be called carnal, another worldly, and another spiritual. The carnal springs from hope of mutual harmony in vice; the worldly is enkindled by the hope of gain; and the spiritual is cemented by similarity of life, morals and pursuits among the just.

The real beginning of **carnal friendship** proceeds from an affection... following its own lustful ear and eyes in every direction. By means of the avenues of the senses it brings into the mind itself images of beautiful bodies or voluptuous objects... Then by gesture, nod, words, compliance, spirit is captivated by spirit, and one is inflamed by the other, and they are kindled to form a sinful bond, so that... the one will do or suffer any crime or sacrilege whatsoever for the sake of the other... And so this sort of friendship is undertaken without deliberation, is tested by no act of judgement, is in no wise governed by reason... consumed by its own self....

3. **Worldly friendship**, which is born of a desire for temporal advantage or possessions, is always full of deceit and intrigue; it contains nothing certain, nothing constant, nothing secure; for to be sure, it changes with fortune and follows the purse. Hence it is written: 'he is a fair-weather friend, and he will not abide in the day of your trouble.' Take away his hope of profit, and immediately he will cease to be your friend.... Such love their friends as they love their cattle.

Even the philosophers of this world have ranked friendship not with things casual or transitory but with the virtues which are eternal. Solomon... says: 'He that is a friend loves at all times,' manifestly declaring that friendship is eternal if it is true friendship; but if it should ever cease to be, then it was not true friendship, even if it seemed so.

4. For **spiritual friendship**, which we call true, should be desired, not for consideration of any worldly advantage or for any extrinsic cause, but from the dignity of its own nature and the feelings of the human heart, so that its fruition and reward is nothing other than itself. ... And so spiritual friendship among the just is born of a similarity in life, morals, and pursuits, that is, it is a mutual conformity in matters human and divine united with benevolence and charity.

Friendship is... a stage toward the love and knowledge of God. Indeed, in friendship there is nothing dishonorable, nothing deceptive, nothing feigned. Whatever there is, is holy, voluntary, and true. And this itself is also a characteristic of charity. In friendship are joined honor and charm, truth and joy, sweetness and good-will, affection and action.... Thus charm follows upon charm, sweetness upon sweetness upon affection. Friend cleaving to friend in the spirit of Christ is

made with Christ one heart and one soul. I confess that I am convinced that true friendship cannot exist among those who live without Christ.

**Here we are, you & I and, I hope, a third, Christ, is in our midst...for what more sublime can be said of friendship...that it ought to & is proved to, begin in Christ, continue in Christ & be perfected in Christ?**

There are four qualities which characterize a friend: **Loyalty, right intention, discretion, and patience.** Right intention seeks for nothing other than God and natural good. Discretion brings understanding of what is done on a friend's behalf, and ability to know when to correct faults. Patience enables one to be justly rebuked, or to bear adversity on another's behalf. Loyalty guards and protects friendship, in good or bitter times.

**5. This type of friendship is not common...** Divine authority approves that more are to be received into the bosom of **charity** than into the embrace of **friendship**. For we are compelled by the law of charity to receive in the embrace of love not only our friends but also our enemies. But only those do we call friends to whom we can fearlessly entrust our heart and all its secrets..."

**6. Selection:** Not all whom we love should be received into friendship, for not all are worthy of it. For since your friend is the companion of your soul, to whose spirit you join and attach yours...since he is the one to whom you entrust yourself as to another self, from whom you hide nothing, you should, in the first place, choose one who is considered fitted for all this. Then he is to be tried, and so finally admitted.

**7. Probation:** Therefore, to those friends for whom thus far we have thought probation was necessary, we ought not to confide to them all our profound secrets, but at first, external or little things about which one does not care a great deal whether they be concealed or exposed; yet this should be done with very great caution as if these smaller matters should do harm if betrayed, but would be of service if concealed....Misfortune is the best way to prove the fidelity of a friend: in adversity, we discover friends who are there not for prosperity.

**8. Admission:** When the test is complete, and when admitted to friendship, one should never question the loyalty of a friend.

**9. Cultivation:** We disclose to the friend whatever confidences we have in our hearts, and that we be not ignorant of his confidences. Let us lay bare to him our heart and let him disclose his to us. For a friend hides nothing. If he is true, he pours forth his soul...And even though your friend think himself wronged, nevertheless correct him....Friendship heightens the joys of prosperity and mitigates the sorrows of adversity by dividing and sharing them. Hence the best medicine in life is a friend. And so, praying to Christ for his friend, and longing to be heard by Christ for his friend's sake, he reaches out with devotion and desire to Christ himself. And suddenly and sensibly, natural affection passes into spiritual love, as though touched by the gentleness of Christ close to hand... Thus, from that holy love with which he embraces his friend, he rises to that by which he embraces Christ.

**10. Dissolution:** If you nevertheless suffer...evils from him whom once you received into friendship, we said that your friendship should not be broken off immediately, but dissolved little by little, and that such reverence should be maintained for the former friendship, that, although you withdraw your confidence from him, yet you never withdraw your love, refuse your aid, or deny him your advice. [When] that interior delight is withdrawn which drank continuously from the heart of the friend; security is lost, but which is revealed its secrets to a friend; happiness is put aside, which friendly conversation produced. Therefore, that familiarity, in which such things find their place, must be denied a former friend, but love should not be withdrawn; yet all this should be done with a certain moderation and reverence, so that, if there has not been so great a shock, some traces of the former friendship always seem to remain.