

21 October 2024 - Janet Dale Funeral

We read in the 18th chapter of the Book of Proverbs: “A man with many friends may be harmed, but there is a friend who stays closer than a brother.”

The Book of Proverbs warns that sometimes having too many friends can be harmful. Maybe you will expend yourself too much in too many directions. Maybe some of your friends will take advantage of you.

Now, Janet Dale was a woman with many friends. But Janet did not have those problems.

It is often the case, that when I go to see a shut-in or someone who lives in a care facility, I could show up at any time on any day, and would find the person I came to see in her room, ready for a visit, and not involved in anything else.

But that was never the way it was with Janet. If there was an activity in her residence, she was a part of it. And she encouraged others - especially those who might be feeling a little bit down or depressed - also to be a part of it.

She spread the cheer, and was herself the source of a lot of the cheer that was in the lives of those with whom she shared her residence. She was a friend to all of them.

So, when I would call to make an appointment for a time when I could stop by, when she would be free, sometimes I had to plan that visit two weeks out from when I was calling.

Human beings are social creatures. That’s the way God made us.

Each of us is a member of a family, in which we should be able to give and receive love and acceptance. We also have friends with whom we are able to join together in wholesome recreations and to have some good clean fun.

What the Lord said with respect to Adam in his single, unmarried condition - that “It is not good for the man to be alone” - also has broader applications. It is not good for any of us to be alone.

We need to know that we have friends who care about us. And our friends need to know that we care about them.

Maybe there is a limit as to how many friends some people should have. Too many friendships might stretch some people too thin. The Book of Proverbs gives us that gentle warning, “A man with many friends may be harmed.”

But Janet never reached that limit for herself, if she even had a limit of how many friends she could safely have. She had many friends. She never reached the point of having too many.

But not all of her friendships were equal. Her love for her husband, for her children, and for her grandchildren, were major defining features of her life. Those were by far her closest and most treasured earthly friendships.

And most important of all, she knew - as the Book of Proverbs also says - that “there is a friend who stays closer than a brother” - and closer than a spouse, a son, or a daughter.

In the original Hebrew, a different word for “friend” is used in that statement. This stronger term refers not only to a companion, but to an intimately close friend: a friend who knows everything about you and still loves you. This extraordinary, special friend - closer than a brother - is Jesus.

During the time of his earthly ministry, Jesus’ enemies mocked him by calling him “a friend of tax collectors and sinners.” But that’s exactly what he was. He was a friend of sinners, not to join them in sin, but to save them from sin.

And since "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" - as St. Paul reminds us - we all need Jesus' friendship. And Janet - a penitent sinner - knew him as her friend.

In St. John's Gospel Jesus speaks of his friendship with those whom he has redeemed and who trust in him. He says:

"Greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. You are my friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you."

Jesus laid down his life for his friends - on the cross atoning for their sins before the holiness and justice of God, and winning for them forgiveness from God and reconciliation with God. Janet knew that she was included in this.

Jesus makes known to his friends - in his gospel and sacraments - the divine message of this forgiveness and reconciliation, so that they can indeed believe this message, and in that faith receive the salvation that is offered through it. In a lifetime of hearing and believing the Word of God and of receiving the Lord's Supper, Janet was included in this as well.

Jesus was her friend - a friend closer than any other friend - and in her Christian devotion she deeply enjoyed that friendship.

Whether she was in the house of God gathered with scores of fellow worshipers, or was just with me in her room - as I shared with her a text of Sacred Scripture and communed her with her Lord's body and blood - she knew that Jesus was keeping the promise that he had made to his friends when he said:

"Where two or three are gathered together in My name, I am there in the midst of them."

Jesus was her companion - her comforter and her consoler - in times of grief and sadness. And she did indeed know such times.

And Jesus was her companion in times of celebration and good cheer. She knew such times as well. In her caring relationships with other people she often helped to create such times for them, as an outgrowth of the love for others that her Christian faith instilled within her.

A friendship with Jesus is an eternal friendship. Jesus, as Janet's loving Lord, was her closest and dearest friend during her time in this world. Jesus, as Janet's loving Lord, is still her closest and dearest friend. St. Paul writes in his Epistle to the Romans:

"If we live, we live to the Lord; and if we die, we die to the Lord. Therefore, whether we live or die, we are the Lord's. For to this end Christ died, and rose and lived again, that He might be Lord of both the dead and the living."

If you knew Janet as a friend in this life, then you know that she would want you - and all her other earthly friends - to join her in knowing Jesus as your truest friend: as a friend who comforts and sustains you in times of grief; who brings clarity of thought and firmness of conviction in times of confusion and doubt; who gives healing and strength in times of weakness, and who in so many other ways can do more for you than any earthly friend could ever do.

She would want you to know Jesus as a friend, even as she knew him and loved him as the best of friends: as a friend forever, who washes away your sins forever, who makes you to be a member of his family and a citizen of his kingdom forever, who restores your peace and fellowship with God forever.

What a friend she had in Jesus, all her sins and griefs to bear. What a friend we have in Jesus, all our sins and griefs to bear. Amen.