I

The Friendship of Christ: General

It is not good for man to be alone.
GENESIS 2: 18

The emotion of friendship is among the most mighty and the most mysterious of human instincts. Materialistic philosophers delight in tracing even the most exalted emotions—art, religion, romance—to purely carnal sources; to the instincts of the propagation or sustentation of physical life; and yet in this single experience, at any rate—when we class together, as we can, all those varied relationships between men and men, women and women, as well as between men and women, under the common title of friendship—materialistic philosophy wholly breaks down. It is not a manifestation of sex, for David can cry to Jonathan, "Thy love to me was wonderful, passing the love of women"; it is not a sympathy arising from common interests, for the sage and the fool can form a friendship at least as strong as any between two sages or two fools; it is not a relationship based on the exchange of ideas, for the deepest friendships thrive better in silence than in speech. "No man is truly my friend," says Maeterlinck, "until we have each learned to be silent in one another's company."

And this mysterious thing is as mighty as it is mysterious. It is bound to rise, so far as it is true to the laws of its own development, to a pitch of passion far beyond that of ordinary relations between the sexes. Since it is independent of those physical elements necessary to a love between husband and wife, it can rise mysteriously higher,

in certain respects, than the plane which those elements sustain. It seeks to win nothing, to produce nothing—but to sacrifice all. Even where the supernatural motive is apparently absent, it can reflect on the natural plane, even more clearly than does sacramental wedded love, the characteristics of divine charity. On its own plane, it also "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things . . . seeketh not her own . . . is not puffed up." It is the salt of perfect matrimony, but it can exist without sex. It takes its place with those other supreme departments of human experience—art, chivalry, and even religion—and it is not the least noble of the company.

On the other hand, there is hardly any experience more subject to disillusionment. It deifies beasts, and is disappointed to find them human after all. When my friend fails me at a crisis or when I fail my friend, there is hardly any bitterness in life so bitter. And, again, while friendship itself has an air of eternity about it, seeming to transcend all natural limits, there is hardly any emotion so utterly at the mercy of time. We form friendships, and grow out of them. It might almost be said that we cannot retain the faculty of friendship unless we are continually making new friends: just as, in religion, in proportion as we form inadequate images and ideas of the divine which for the time we adore, and presently change for others, we progress in the knowledge of the true God. I cannot retain true childhood unless I am continually putting away childish things.

Here, then, is one of the more princely passions which, while feeding upon earthly things, are continuously dissatisfied with them; which, themselves white-hot, are never consumed—one of the passions that make history, and therefore look always to the future and not to the past—a passion which, perhaps above all others, since in its instance it is impossible to resolve it into earthly elements, points to eternity only for the place of its satisfaction, and

to the divine love for the answering of its human needs. There is but one intelligible explanation, then, for the desires which it generates yet never fulfills; there is but one supreme friendship to which all human friendships point; one ideal friend in whom we find, perfect and complete, that for which we look in type and shadow in the faces of our human lovers.

I

It is at once the privilege and the burden of Catholics that they know so much of Jesus Christ. It is their privilege, since an intelligent knowledge of the person and the attributes and the achievements of incarnate God is an infinitely greater wisdom than all the rest of the sciences put together. To have a knowledge of the Creator is incalculably a more noble thing than to have a knowledge of his creation. Yet it is a burden as well; for the splendor of this knowledge may be so great as to blind us to the value of its details. The blaze of the divinity to him who sees it may be so bright as to bewilder him with regard to the humanity. The unity of the wood vanishes in the perfection of the trees.

Catholics, then, above all others, are prone—through their very knowledge of the mysteries of faith, through their very apprehension of Jesus Christ as their God, their high priest, their victim, their prophet and their king—to forget that his delights are to be with the sons of men more than to rule the Seraphim, that, while his majesty held him on the throne of his Father, his love brought him down on pilgrimage that he might transform his servants into his friends.

For example, devout souls often complain of their loneliness on earth. They pray, they frequent the sacraments, they do their utmost to fulfill the Christian precepts; and, when all is done, they find themselves solitary. There could scarcely be a more evident proof of their failure to

understand one at least of the great motives of the Incarnation. They adore Christ as God, they feed on him in Communion, cleanse themselves in his precious blood, look to the time when they shall see him as their judge; yet of that intimate knowledge of and companionship with him in which the divine friendship consists, they have experienced little or nothing.

They long, they say, for one who can stand by their side and upon their own level, who can not merely remove suffering, but can himself suffer with them, one to whom they can express in silence the thoughts which no speech can utter; and they seem not to understand that this is the very post which Jesus Christ himself desires to win, that the supreme longing of his sacred heart is that he should be admitted, not merely to the throne of the heart or to the tribunal of conscience, but to that inner secret chamber of the soul where a man is most himself, and therefore most utterly alone.

See how full are the Gospels of this desire of Jesus Christ! There were indeed splendid moments when the God within the humanity blazed out in glory—moments when the very garments that he wore burned radiant in his divinity: there were moments of divine energy when blind eyes opened through creative to created light, when ears deaf to earthly noises heard the divine voice, when the dead burst their graves to look on him who had first given and then restored their life. And there were august and terrible moments when God went apart with God into the wilderness of the garden, when God cried through the lips of desolated humanity, "Why hast thou forsaken me?" But for the most part it is of his humanity that the Gospels tell us; a humanity that cried to its kind—a humanity not only tempted but also, as it were, specialized in all points like as we are. "Now Jesus loved Martha, and her sister Mary, and Lazarus." "Jesus, looking upon him, loved him"—loved him it seems with an emotion distinguished from

that of the divine love that loves all things that it has made; loved him for the ideal which he in particular might yet accomplish, more than for the fact that he merely existed as did others of his kind—loved him as I love my own friend, and as he loves me.

It is these moments, probably, above all others, that have endeared Jesus Christ to humanity—moments in which he displayed himself as truly one of us. It is when he is "lifted up"—not in the glory of triumphant divinity, but in the shame of beaten humanity, that he draws us to himself. We read of his works of power and are conscious of awe and adoration: but when we read how he sat weary at the well-side while his friends went for food; how in the garden, he turned in agonized reproach to those from whom he had hoped for consolation—"What? Could you not watch one hour with me?"—when he turned once more and for the last time used the sacred name to him who had forfeited it for ever—"*Friend*, whereto art thou come?"—we are conscious of that which is even dearer to him than all the adoration of all the angels in glory—tenderness and love and compassion—emotions to which friendship alone has a right.

Or again—Jesus Christ speaks to us more than once in the Scripture, not merely in hint and implication, but in deliberate statement, of this desire of his to be our friend. He sketches for us a little picture of the lonely house at nightfall, of himself who stands and knocks upon the door and of the intimate little meal he expects. "And if any man will open [any man!] I will come in to him and will sup with him and he with me." Or again, he tells those whose hearts are sick at the bereavement that comes upon them so swiftly, "I will not now call you servants . . . ; but I have called you friends." Or again he promises his continual presence, in spite of appearances, to those who have learned his desires. "Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst." . . . "Behold, I am with

you all days." And, "as long as you did it to one of these my least brethren, you did it to me."

If, then, there is anything clear in the Gospels it is this—that Jesus Christ first and foremost desires our friendship. It is his reproach to the world, not that the Savior came to the lost, and that the lost ran from him to lose themselves more deeply, not that the Creator came to the creature and that the creature rejected him; but that the friend "came unto his own, and that his own received him not."

Now, the consciousness of this friendship of Jesus Christ is the very secret of the saints. Ordinary men can live ordinary lives, with little or no open defiance of God, from a hundred second-rate motives. We keep the commandments that we may enter into life; we avoid sin that we may escape hell; we fight against worldliness that we may keep the respect of the world. But no man can advance three paces on the road of perfection unless Jesus Christ walks beside him. It is this, then, that gives distinction to the way of the saint—and that gives him his apparent grotesqueness too (for what is more grotesque in the eyes of the unimaginative world than the ecstasy of the lover?).

Common sense never yet drove a man mad; it is common sense that is thought to characterize sanity; and common sense, therefore, has never scaled mountains, much less has it cast them into the sea. But it is the maddening joy of the conscious companionship of Jesus Christ that has produced the lovers, and therefore the giants, of history. It is the developing friendship of Jesus Christ and the passion that has inspired those lives, which the world in its duller moods calls unnatural, and the Church, in all her moods, supernatural. "This priest," cried St. Teresa, in one of her more confidential moments with her Lord, "this priest is a very proper person to be made *a friend of ours*."

II

Now, it must be remembered that while this friendship between Christ and the soul is, from one point of view, perfectly comparable to friendship between man and man, from another point of view it is incomparable. Certainly it is a friendship between his soul and ours; but that soul of his is united to divinity. A single *individualistic* friendship with him, therefore, does not exhaust his capacities. He is man, but he is not merely a man: He is the Son, rather than a son of man. He is the eternal Word by whom all things were made and are sustained . . .

He approaches us therefore along countless avenues, although it is the same figure that advances down each. It is not enough to know him interiorly only: He must be known (if his relation with us is to be that which he desires) in all those activities and manifestations in which he displays himself. One who knows him therefore solely as an interior companion and guide, however dear and adorable, but does not know him in the Blessed Sacrament—one whose heart burns as he walks with Jesus in the way, but whose eyes are held that he knows him not in the breaking of bread, knows but one perfection out of ten thousand. And again, he who calls him friend in Communion, but whose devotion is so narrow and restricted that he does not recognize him in that mystical body in which he dwells and speaks on earth—one, in fact, who is a *devot*, an individualist, and does not therefore understand that corporate religion which is the very essence of Catholicism; or, again, who knows him in all these ways, yet does not know him in his vicar, or in his priest, or in his mother; or, again, who knows him in all these ways (who is, in popular language, an "admirable Catholic") but who does not recognize the right of the sinner to ask for mercy, or the beggar for alms, in his name; or, again, who recognizes him under sensational circumstances, but

not under dreary ones—who gives lavishly to the first beggar who pleads in Christ's name in the street, but fails to find him in the unappealing dullard—those, in short, who recognize Christ in one or two or three or more aspects, but not in all (not, at least, in all those of which Christ himself has explicitly spoken)—can never rise to that height of intimacy and knowledge of that ideal friend which he himself desires, and has declared to be within our power to attain.

Let us then consider the friendship of Christ under some of these aspects. Truly we cannot live without him, for he is the life. It is impossible to come to the Father except by him who is the way. It is useless to toil in pursuit of truth, unless we first possess it. Even the most sacred experiences of life are barren unless his friendship sanctifies them. The holiest love is obscure except it burns in his shadow. The purest affection—that affection that unites my dearest friend to myself—is a counterfeit and a usurper unless I love my friend in Christ—unless he, the ideal and absolute friend, is the personal bond that unites us.