



Friends in the Lord, Friends with One Another

By James Martin, SJ

Do you remember your first day of college?

If you were at all like me, you were probably full of mixed emotions. As you stood on the brink of young adulthood, everything seemed new, frightening and exciting—all at once. You might still recall those first few weeks, as you acclimated yourself to campus and met dozens of new classmates and professors, all the while trying to make a good first impression and desperately trying to keep straight all the new names and faces.

A few of those strangers probably took their places among your most valued friends.

College friendships often become some of the most lasting in our lives. And many of us can trace the start of those bonds to specific moments during our college education—a tough

course, an exciting athletic or social event or maybe even a profound weekend retreat.

Something similar happened in the sixteenth century, when Ignatius of Loyola signed up for courses at the University of Paris in 1528. There he met a fellow Basque, Francis Xavier, and a Frenchman, Peter Favre. After their great friendship took root, the three became roommates. Ignatius, having recently written *The Spiritual Exercises*, his soon-to-be-famous manual of prayer, first directed Peter and, then, Francis, in these same Exercises. Both Peter and Francis had deeply felt religious experiences during the Exercises, which inspired them to follow their friend Ignatius in his dreams for serving God and the Church.

L-R - St. Francis Xavier
(1506-1552), St. Ignatius
(1491-1556), Bl. Peter Faber
(1506-1546)

The idea of friendship among Jesuits is an underappreciated one. “Friends in the Lord” was the phrase Ignatius used.

Not long afterwards, several more friends would be led through the Exercises, with this tight-knit group evolving into what became known as the Society of Jesus.

Thus the bonds of friendship among Ignatius, Francis and Peter sprang from this college experience, though the three would soon be scattered in different parts of the world as Jesuits.

Years later, in 1541, from Lisbon, Portugal, Francis Xavier, who was about to embark on his career as a missionary in “the Indies,” wrote a remarkable letter to the superior general of the Society of Jesus, Ignatius of Loyola.

The letter read, in part:

There is nothing more to tell you except that we are about to embark. We close by asking Christ our Lord the grace of seeing each other joined together in the next life; for I do not know if we shall see each other again in this, because of the great distance between Rome and the great harvest to be found.

In other words, I don’t know if I will ever see you again.

Francis’ intuition would prove correct: he would die on a remote island off the coast of China, far from Rome, having not seen his friend Ignatius for many years.

The difficulty of writing these words becomes clearer when we remember that Ignatius was not only the superior of Xavier, he was one of Xavier’s closest and oldest friends—from college. They valued one another not simply for what they did (Ignatius said that the person who best understood how to give the Exercises was Favre) but for who they were as individuals.

The idea of friendship among Jesuits is, I think, an underappreciated one. Frequently the great Jesuit saints, especially Xavier, are described as independent *doers*--hearing thousands of confessions, celebrating as many

Masses, preaching, writing, and traveling--often solitary, always on the go.

But certainly one thing that sustained them was their deep and very human affection for one another.

It’s certainly been that way in my own life. One of the great blessings in my life as a Jesuit, and one of the engines of my spiritual life, is my friendship with other Jesuits. And, as may have been the case with those three early companions, while I appreciate what they accomplish in their apostolates, I value just as much their personalities, their senses of humor, and their outlooks on life. In essence, I love them for *who they are*, for the way that God created them.

“Friends in the Lord,” was the phrase Ignatius used to use to describe this friendship between Jesuits. “Union of hearts and minds” was another term he used. But what’s wonderful about the Society of Jesus today is that both these terms apply not simply to other Jesuits, but to all our companions--those colleagues with whom (and often for whom) we work in our apostolates, those who are part of the communities of our schools, parishes and retreat houses, and those who support us so generously as benefactors.

Ignatius Loyola, Francis Xavier and Peter Favre were united in their desire to serve God as Jesuits. They were also united in their desire to serve one another as good and loyal friends.

As we celebrate their anniversaries in this Jubilee Year, it’s good to know that all of us can emulate these Jesuits in both of those very holy desires: desires that bring us into friendship with one another and, through this, friendship with God. ✚

James Martin, SJ, is associate editor of “America” magazine. His new book “My Life with the Saints” will be published in Spring 2006 by Loyola Press.