

**HOMILY FOR CONFIRMATION AND FIRST HOLY COMMUNION
2022-2023**

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Bishop of Springfield in Illinois**

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ,

Five years ago, our diocese held a Diocesan Synod, which was a very special gathering of representatives of the 129 parishes in our diocese, during which we pledged as a community to live as disciples of Jesus and stewards of God's creation. To be a disciple of Jesus means basically to be His friend, growing in a deep and loving relationship with Our Lord.

"I am a friend of God" is a song written by Israel Houghton, an award winning, Christian worship leader and singer.¹ The song is based on a verse of the Bible from the Gospel of Saint John 15:15, where Jesus says, "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you."

Who am I that You are mindful of me?
That You hear me
When I call?
Is it true that You are thinking of me?
How You love me
It's amazing

* * *

I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
He calls me friend

* * *

God Almighty
Lord of glory
You have called me friend

* * *

I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
I am a friend of God
He calls me friend

Jesus has indeed called us His friends. How many of you want to be a friend of God? Raise your hands!

Most people, at least those who believe in God, want to be a friend of God. Friendship with God, like friendship with anyone else, has certain basic requirements: we spend time with friends, we talk with friends, we do things with friends, we turn to them in times of need, we say we're sorry when we hurt them and tell them how much we appreciate their friendship. Let's look at each one of these.

We spend time with friends: good friends just hang out together sometimes because they enjoy each other's company. If you never spend much time with someone, chances are you won't become good friends, and if you are good friends, it won't last long if you never spend time with each other. The same is true with God. We go to Mass every Sunday to be with God. We can also spend time with Him in Eucharistic Adoration, meditation, and contemplation, when we simply enjoy His loving Presence.

We talk with friends: good friends are comfortable being quiet with each other and just being together, but that is based on knowing each other well, which comes from many prior conversations, often very deep conversations. We have such conversations with God, often very deep conversations. We call such conversations with God "prayer." Sometimes we use formal or memorized prayers to get the conversation going, but the

best conversations with God are when we speak to Him in our own words. Of course, God speaks to us differently, so we must attune our ears carefully to hear Him. He speaks to us through the words of the Bible, He speaks to us through the words of the saints, He speaks to us through the words of the Pope, the bishops, priests, deacons, religious and other leaders in the Church, and He even speaks to us through the words of family and friends.

We do things with friends: good friends engage in activities together in sports, games, entertainment, projects, work, and play. Friends of God participate in the activities of the Church, because Jesus said, where two or three are gathered in His name, He is there among them (Matthew 18:20). Jesus also said that “whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me” (Matthew 25:40), so that is why our community of friends of Jesus helps to educate the young, feed the poor, provide health care for the sick, and take care of the elderly.

We turn to friends in times of need: we know the saying, “A friend in need is a friend indeed.” When we are most desperate for help, we don’t turn to a stranger, we turn to a trusted friend whom we know will be there for us through thick and thin. That most trusted friend, of course, is Jesus.

We say we're sorry when we hurt our friends: without apologies and forgiveness for wrongdoings, friendships fall apart. Jesus always has the door open to us in the Sacrament of Reconciliation so we can tell Him we're sorry when we have hurt Him and receive His forgiveness.

We tell our good friends how much we appreciate their friendship. Even with our human friends and family members, we're usually not as good as we should be in telling them how much they mean to us. But we should make it a point to do so from time to time and not take our friends for granted. The same is true for our friendship with God. We should make it a point to tell Him every day how much we love Him and how grateful we are for all His many gifts.

Today in this Sacrament of Confirmation we celebrate in a special way the gifts of the Holy Spirit that God has given to us: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. At the Last Supper Jesus instituted the Sacrament of the Eucharist, so that the love He poured out for us when He died on the cross would fill our hearts with His grace. After Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven, He gave His disciples and us His Holy Spirit so that He would remain with us always.

I am confident that you believe this. [Read selected questionnaires.]

Thank you for these profound expressions of your faith and commitment. I pray that the Holy Spirit will strengthen you with His gifts and that you will always remain a friend of God!

I am a friend of God

I am a friend of God

I am a friend of God

He calls me friend

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ This song has also been recorded by Phillips, Craig and Dean, a contemporary Christian music trio composed of Randy Phillips, Shawn Craig, and Dan Dean. See:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lcxKRsn-hGc>