

Today's Gospel is very profound. The reason being, these are Jesus' last words, his last piece of teaching before the passion. In the hours before death, one does not have time to beat round the bush, but must be precise and succinct, saying only what's absolutely necessary and most important.

So, in what appears like his last will, Jesus says to his followers of every generation: 'This is my commandment: love one another as I have loved you.' This single line summarizes the whole Bible and explains what Christianity is all about. Christians know that they are loved by God despite all their sins.

We see a clear manifestation of God's love at the Last Super. On the night before he dies, Jesus the teacher calls his disciples friends, including the ones who betray him and desert him. What is Jesus teaching his disciples when he calls them his friends? 'I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my father.' What has he heard?

Jesus has heard and seen that God tends to make friends with dubious people: for example, Abraham, who tries to save his skin by passing off his wife as his sister, or Moses who murdered an Egyptian in a rage. God even regards David, the adulterer, as 'a man after my own heart'. So, there is little wonder that Jesus smashed the mould by befriending sinners – above all, prostitutes and the despised tax collectors who made their money out of squeezing the poorest.

In his book 'Alive in God', Fr Timothy Radcliffe writes that: *"This friendship with the moral outlaws was not a sign that Jesus was a broad-minded chap who was happy to mix with everyone. It was more than the generosity of a kind person who was pained by their exclusion from the circles of the good. It was more than scandalous. It was impossible. It is only when we glimpse the utter impossibility of such friendship that we begin to see why Jesus' declaration of friendship on the night of his death is so electrifying."*

God makes impossible friendships. The Creator befriends his creatures! Jesus does not invite us into a relationship of subservience which makes one a client of a powerful patron. Jesus' friendship is not patronage. What Jesus offers us is truly unimaginable - a sort of equality with God.

*Lord, we thank you for calling us friends. Your friendship is a gift. It is sheer grace. We are now sitting at this table with you, our Lord and our God, not as your subjects, but as your equal friends. Before such great mystery, we fall silent in utter amazement and gratitude.*