



Greetings from St. Michael and St. Gabriel parishes,

Above is a picture of the first flowers to bloom in our Marian Garden at St. Michael's. Barely a quarter inch a piece, together they make a kind of flowery face with two black pea eyes, a matching nose and a little crown sprouting on top. Blink a few times and you will see it. Much like the warm weather that keeps teasing us every couple of weeks or so!

The reflection this week considers our friendship with God and how it is reflected in our lives, through what happens around us.

Enjoy the spring weather,

Fr. John

Getting friendly with God...

It has always been an odd relationship, one that is, but is not, is now and yet has always been and will be forever more. How are we supposed to relate to someone like that? Even at the best of times our relationships can change at a moment's notice. Our human ones can be faithful and enduring, but then in a heartbeat they can be no more, life is irrevocably changed but not ended.

I count myself lucky to have been acquainted with God at an early age. I say lucky because I am still not quite sure why I deserve such an honour. It seemed like everyone around me talked about God as a distant being in the sky who was either very angry or very happy with what we did. I never saw, only felt his presence in and around me. This was the extent of our relationship until the veil of childhood innocence gave way to temptations and testings of adulthood.

Somewhere between growing up enjoying the cuddling of those who loved me and being fearful of those that did not, I started to see God in a similar light. As I leafed through the pages of the Bible in search for more answers it became apparent to my teenage mind that God was a lot bigger and more complex than my childhood inspirations. It was about that time that I also discovered other relationships, which seemed far more immediate and engaging than one with an elusive and tentative being whom I wasn't all that sure if he liked me or not.

Human relationships engage all of our senses whereas God, it seems, only shows up every once in a while, to remind us that there is more to life than what we can see, touch and feel. It is this divinely elusive relationship that ends up being the more engaging and life giving one, if we take this time to engage in it.

Once you get past the older testaments of God loves me when I am good and hates me when I am bad, a door opens to a friendlier relationship of knowing God more intimately through Father, Mother, Son, sister, and brother. Where we are released from the servitude of seeing God through one rigid and unyielding dimension and come to know God as truly present in ourselves and others. A profound experience of this comes to us through our relationship with Mary, the mother of Jesus, who also becomes known to us as the Mother of God.

Throughout my life, my relationship with Mary had been even more elusive than any other. There was never much of a personal connection with her outside of Christmas celebrations. I understood and believed all the theology surrounding her, but never really came to know her as a person. This began to change when I became a year-long guest at a place called Madonna House.

It wasn't long after my arrival that people started asking me about my relationship with Mary. At first, I was a little embarrassed at having nothing to report and just kept repeating that I was happy with my relationship with God and thought that was good enough. But they persisted, not with pestering questions, but more profoundly in their humble displays of devotion to her. Unable to come up with a sufficient answer for myself, I prayed to God about it and the answer I got back was 'You can pray to her if you like, she and I are of the same spirit. Praying to her is like praying to me. We have been joined together through Jesus.'

Wow, that made a lot of sense, so I began to pray to Mary expecting this to be the turning point in our relationship, but to my surprise not much happened. There still seemed to be this barrier between us and this bothered me for many years until I finally travelled to Medjugorje, where she is reported to have been visiting people there for the past 42 years. It was there that I had a chance to meet her, kind of, while being present at one of the famed apparitions. There I felt that I was given a blessing from her. Hoping to see her with my eyes, I was granted only a feeling of God's blessing in my spirit. The same Holy Spirit that God said we all share.

At some point in our relationship with Jesus we realize that it has been infiltrated with too many human influences. Too often we see him as being either too much like us or too far above us. Sometimes we feel that Jesus has become too much like us, when the point is for us to become more like him. This is what can happen when our relationship with him is too casual. The Good News is that we can become friends with God without losing our reverence for him. We can also revere our Blessed Mother without losing our reverence for God. When we begin to accept others to share in this relationship, then we become more like Jesus. Which is why we were created.

For many this seems either too difficult or too easy, depending on where we are coming from. Where we might be too rigid in our thinking about God's judgment upon us or too comfortable in thinking that there will be no judgment at all. We often end up stuck somewhere in between heaven and earth not knowing which way to go and not knowing who to trust and guide us to a place of peace and freedom that we always seek.

We could all use a bit of an awakening to open our eyes to the possibility of conversing more directly with Jesus, who keeps giving us opportunities to draw more closely to him. To help us become more childlike as adults in our relationship with him, as we listen more intently and speak more freely about what bothers us and what needs to be done about it. This may not be easy, but it will be necessary if we want to grow up and fully appreciate what it is like to be friends with God.

May this peace be with you,

Fr. John