

## On Friendship

I have always liked the great film actor Jimmy Stewart. I know I share this with most people who have seen his movies. We empathize with George Bailey, the suffering servant in *It's a Wonderful Life*, and we are inspired by Jefferson Smith, the naïve and idealistic Senator from *Mr. Smith Goes to Washington*. These movies endure largely because Mr. Stewart's characters endure and because we know and understand them in their simplicity and profundity.

In a lesser known film, *Shenandoah*, Mr. Stewart plays Charlie Anderson, a peaceful and quiet widower raising six sons and a daughter on a Virginia farm during the Civil War. Grandfatherly and wise, Charlie attempts to steer safe passage through the war, but finds his family's involvement unavoidable, and so suffers inevitable heartache and loss. In a particularly poignant pre-loss scene in the movie, a noble young Confederate officer, Sam, sits on the porch with Charlie and valiantly asks for his daughter's hand in matrimony. Charlie replies to the request with an unusual question:

Charlie: "Do you like her, Sam?"

Sam (incredulous): "Sir, I LOVE her!"

Charlie: "Well, I know you love her, Sam, but do you LIKE her... You see, Sam, when you love a woman without liking her, the night can be long and cold, and contempt comes up with the sun."

For those of us blessed to live in the sacrament of marriage, we understand the wisdom of Charlie's message and the power of friendship in marriage.

Friendship is at the heart of the Montfort education. As families devoted to Catholic education consider whether they want single sex or coed education, I often say to them that I can understand the argument for both. A single sex education has the benefit of minimizing teenage distractions and focusing the education on the particular gifts and charisms of the individual gender. What it lacks though is daily initiation into relationships with the opposite sex which, if cherished, valued, and encouraged properly, are at the heart of healthy self-image as creatures made in the image and likeness of God – male and female – and are the catalyst for kindly and virtuous behavior toward another, male and female.

Throughout the Montfort curriculum, students confront the subject of friendship. They know that Aristotle describes three types of friendship: friendship based on utility, where both people derive some benefit from each other; friendship based on pleasure, where both people are drawn to the other's wit, good looks, or other qualities; and friendship based on goodness, where both people admire the other's goodness and help one another strive for goodness. This last encompasses and transcends the first two and is modeled for us in the Holy Trinity, the Holy Family, and in Jesus's relationships with his apostles and with special people like Mary, Martha and Lazarus. This is why friendship is the absolute essential ingredient for healthy marriages, families, and communities; because friendship, at its best, is holy.

I am bolstered in my faith to see the fruit of Montfort's education as I watch our students twirl their way around the dance floor at our annual gala. I feel the prayers of their families and teachers being answered as I observed the kindly and gracious way they deal with each other's sometimes awkward attempts at rhythm. I am grateful beyond measure for their joy and their authentic goodness. Let us continue to pray for them as they continue their sometimes awkward dance through life in true friendship.

*Ad majorem Dei gloriam.*

Lt Col David Petrillo, Headmaster