

An assembly reflection: Friendship and Mission



This reflection was created to help schools celebrate the Extraordinary Month of Mission (Oct'19). It focuses on one of four EMM aims: to encourage a deeper relationship with Jesus through prayer.

Today we're going to spend a few minutes thinking about the importance of friendship. Particularly friendships that are there in good times and bad. Someone who's spoken publicly about this kind of friendship is Bear Grylls.

Most of you will know that Bear Grylls is an adventurer and survivalist. He's a tough man famous for taking on extreme challenges. Does anyone know what he has said has been his greatest challenge?

It's not scaling Everest or sailing the Atlantic, Bear Grylls has said that his greatest challenge has been speaking publicly about his faith and his friendship with Christ.

For a long time, Bear was worried that he'd be mocked for being a Christian. But after reflecting on how his faith has helped him grow in wisdom and courage, he's no longer ashamed to say that his friendship with Jesus has become one of the most important relationships in his life.

It can sound strange when we hear Jesus described as a friend. But if all we ever do is associate Christianity with church buildings, services and rules, we can easily lose sight of the fact that Christianity is first and foremost based *on a friendship* with someone who lived, died, and rose for us.

To help us think about this a bit deeper, it may be helpful to explore the word *friend*. The word *friend* originally comes from an ancient word that means both *love* and *free*.

These ancient meanings remind us that good friends make us feel loved, valued, and accepted. They bring out the best in us. With them we don't need to pretend, we are free to be the person God created us to be.

This is what Bear Grylls discovered when he began his faith journey aged 16. So much so that he wrote in a recent autobiography:

'This is the heart of what I found as a teenager: Christ comes to make us free, to bring us life in all its fulness. He is there to forgive us when we have messed up, and to be the backbone of our being.'

Mud, Sweat and Tears, Bear Grylls.

Pope Francis has spoken often about the importance of our friendship with Jesus and the importance of our friendships with one another. He has said that 'faithful friends, who stand at our side in times of difficulty are a reflection of the Lord's love.'

What are faithful friends like, what do they do?

Possible responses: Listen. Share. Forgive. Accept. Spend time with you. They are honest, patient, kind, supportive, loyal.

And what do we need to do if we wish to maintain and develop these friendships?

Possible responses: Spend time together. Listen. Share. Be supportive. Laugh together.

Friendship is so important for our wellbeing and happiness that Jesus calls himself a friend of ours. In John's Gospel he says:

'I do not call you servants any longer, but I call you friends.' Jn 15:15

If you were to deepen your friendship with Jesus, what's the best way to do so?

Possible responses: Through prayer. Reading the Bible. Going to Mass.

One central way to deepen our friendship with Jesus is by spending time with him in prayer. Bear Grylls has said that he prays every day. Or rather, as he's described it, he has a daily conversation with Jesus. This is what prayer is - asking for help when life is tough, thanking him for the good things, listening for God's guidance.

Bear Grylls is just one out of millions of people, whose friendship with Jesus inspires them to do extraordinary things and - more importantly - be instruments of God's love in the world.

Amongst these are thousands of missionary priests, brothers, and religious sisters who often risk their lives to work in areas of poverty and conflict. There they provide practical help and pastoral care to anyone in need.

For these missionaries, it is their friendship with Jesus that guides them through the dangers and challenges of each day. From today, let's resolve to deepen our friendship with Jesus and face our own daily challenges with him.

- We can start by remembering that Jesus – who Christians believe is God – is already close at hand.
- Look for him in the actions of your friends, your family, strangers, and in the beauty of the world around you.
- Find the space to speak with Jesus in your heart. Preferably somewhere quiet and still. Spend a few minutes in the school chapel or in a room at home where you can be alone.
- Don't be afraid to be honest and open. Share with him as you would with a faithful friend.
- In time you can get to know him better by reading the Gospel. There you can discover the person Jesus is and the person he's calling you to be.
- Having thought about how we can develop our friendship with Jesus, let's spend a few seconds in silence remembering by name those faithful friends who reflect God's love. *Pause.*
- In your heart, thank God for these faithful friends. *Pause.*
- Then ask God to help you be such a friend to others. *Pause.*

Let us bring all these thoughts together as we conclude our reflection with *The Lord's Prayer*.

Fundraising is a brilliant way to involve everyone in raising money for Missio. Your support will enable missionaries to work alongside communities globally that are poor or in need, regardless of their background or belief. Below are just a couple of ideas:

Sponsored Red Box Walk: Challenge students to undertake a sponsored walk whilst wearing a Red (cardboard) Box. Adding the Missio logo to the giant red boxes will help to share the message of mission and raise vital funds to help share God's love.

Card posting service: The word *mission* derives from the Latin word *sent*. A great reason to set up a card posting delivery service! Charge students and teachers to have their Christmas or Valentine cards delivered by hand! Maybe you could persuade a special guest post-person to get involved.

Please *share your fundraising events with us @missioUK adding the hashtag #missiontocare*