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## FRIENDSHIP TAKES COURAGE



*"There are all kinds of courage,"* said Dumbledore, smiling.  
*"It takes a great deal of bravery to stand up to our enemies,  
but just as much to stand up to our friends.  
I therefore award ten points to Mr. Neville Longbottom!"*  
(J.K. Rowling, *The Sorcerer's Stone*, 1997).

The phrase "*friends in the Lord*" in St. Ignatius' early letters suggests friendship was foundational for his first companions. Maybe he was inspired by the close friendship between **St. Francis** and **St. Clare of Assisi** (*whose memorial is celebrated in August*). Yet even the best of friends can find themselves at odds. The enemy of our human nature constantly tries to disturb, deceive, and divide relationships. Jesus encourages us to strive against those forces. He doesn't want us to be bound by internalizing grievances. He doesn't want us to perpetrate them either.

St. Ignatius offers us a practice of noticing: was I walking beside Jesus today or headed the wrong way? When we become aware that a heart-to-heart with a friend is needed, pray for courage to say with love, "*What you said (or did) the other day really hurt*", or "*I'm really sorry for....*" Take along trusted companions if needed or seek out the sacrament of Reconciliation. Restoring relationships between individuals, communities, and God frees us, setting loose more love in the world.

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## PRAYER

*We become what we love and who we love shapes what we become.  
If we love things, we become a thing.  
If we love nothing, we become nothing.  
Imitation is not a literal mimicking of Christ,  
rather it means becoming the image of the beloved,  
an image disclosed through transformation.  
This means we are to become vessels of God's compassionate love for others.*  
-**St. Clare of Assisi**

SOURCE: [www.JesuitPrayer.org](http://www.JesuitPrayer.org)

## GOD WINKS



Raccoons are not animals you want to encounter during the day.

Typically, if you bump into a raccoon during business hours, it's either rabid or roadkill. Both options are unpleasant at best.

You can understand, then, why I paused when a raccoon suddenly crossed my path while I was alone in the woods-in broad daylight.

This was pre-pandemic and pre-children. My wife and I were helping to facilitate a silent retreat at a retreat center just outside of Baltimore, Maryland. As is the case on such a retreat, there was plenty of time for solitude and quiet reflection.

And so, I'd wandered off into the woods, passing enormous hay bales and silent farming equipment, the omnipresent buzzing of any number of tiny insects growing louder and louder with every step. It was sunny and hot and I had just gotten to the top of a hill, pausing to look back over the path I'd trod.

I jumped at the sound of rustling leaves, no more than a few feet in front of me. The raccoon came loping out, paying me no mind at all, just crossing the path and going about its own affairs.

It's tempting, I think, to assign cosmic meaning to every detail in our life-particularly details as seemingly random as a raccoon on retreat. That's what a retreat is all about, right? Piecing together those clues that will grant clarity to life's many mysteries.

I stood there in those woods, shocked What did it mean? What was God trying to tell me through this small, woodland creature? Growing up, I'd tried to talk my parents into letting me get a raccoon as a pet; was God pointing me to some long-forgotten childhood memory?

Long minutes passed, and no revelation came. So, I headed back to the retreat center with a grin. What was I to make of such an odd occurrence?

We often find ourselves on one end of a spectrum: Either, every little thing in our life

happens for some as-of-yet unknown reason, scraps of a master plan pushing us slowly toward some specific destiny. Or, everything is random and meaningless.

But if we believe that God is present in all things, then we might look at these seemingly random events a little differently. Rather than looking for clues to help us figure out the mystery of our own life, what if we looked at our life and our world as a window into God's very self-joyful, surprising, compassionate?

Ours is a God who desires to enter more deeply into our daily lives, into the joys and challenges. Rarely do we get a ready-made roadmap, charting us through the treacherous waters of our life.

Rather, God gives us little winks. Not a clue, not a random anecdote. Just a little wink to remind us that God is there, present, intimate and engaged in our days, nudging us in new directions, helping us better understand our life.

Those God winks may not give us any answers but they do lead us to wonder. And wonder leads us deeper into ourselves and our world.

Sometimes those winks come shaped as a raccoon, a raccoon that literally stops you in your tracks and makes you wonder what God might be up to.

**SOURCE:** Eric Clayton, Jesuit Conference of Canada and United States



## SCHEDULES COUNT



*Schedules Count  
- but not for everything.*

*It is possible that life may intrude  
on all our neat little timelines -  
that things change  
and our daily routines with them.*

*But one thing must not change  
and that is our daily contact  
with the things in life  
that really count,  
like spiritual development  
over material progress.*

*We must never be too busy  
to eliminate from the daily agenda  
a moment of spiritual awakening,  
a moment of spiritual reading,  
a moment of spiritual awareness,  
a moment of spiritual growth.*

*We must never be too busy  
to stop the mundane  
for the sake of spiritual growth  
in the presence of God.*

**SOURCE:** Joan Chittister,  
***Insights into Benedictine Spirituality: A Little Rule for Beginners***