

Brotherhood

Opening Prayer

Come, O Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of Your faithful, and enkindle in them the fire of Your love. Send forth Your Spirit, and they shall be created. And You shall renew the face of the earth. O God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit did instruct the hearts of the faithful, grant that in the same Spirit we may be truly wise, and ever rejoice in His consolation. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

[Begin with a few moments for silent recollection.]

Understanding the Breach

1) The “Brotherhood” episode tells us that men need a “band of brothers”—other men they can rely upon. The Twelve Apostles were such a band.

- *Why is it important for men to have a “band of brothers”? What should such bands of men be aiming at or trying to accomplish together?*
- *Men bond together in “brotherhood” through various experiences, such as team sports, a college fraternity, or military service. In what ways are such “band of brothers” experiences positive? In what ways can they be unhealthy?*
- *Men sometimes act like “lone rangers” who want to be self-sufficient, taking on burdens without assistance, not wanting to admit any weakness or need of others. Why is it important even for such “rugged individuals” to form bonds of male friendships?*
- *In what ways do the Apostles provide a model for a “band of brothers” today?*

2) Dr. Tim Gray says, “We want tolerance, which is very soft and sounds good, but oftentimes is dishonest. What we need is prophets and men to stand up for the truth and fight for reform.”

- *In what ways can tolerance—in this context, ignoring the poor moral choices, sinful tendencies or spiritual apathy of a friend—be dishonest?*
- *A movie has the famous line, “You can’t handle the truth!” Why is it sometimes difficult for us to hear the truth about ourselves? Why is it sometimes difficult to tell others the truth about themselves?*
- *Think of an occasion when you felt challenged to stand up for the truth—in a discussion on a sensitive subject or when the Catholic faith was being*

questioned or attacked, for example. How did you handle that challenge, and what were the results? In retrospect, what might you have done differently, if anything?

- *How does standing up for the truth require courage?*

3) Fraternal correction is the act of one friend challenging another to amend his ways, urging him to give up or avoid a particular sin, habit or attitude. “What’s required for fraternal correction is an honesty that will engender conflict,” Dr. Tim Gray says in the video, “but we’re afraid of conflict.”

- *Stereotypically, it is a manly thing to want to join a fight, to defend a cause. So what kind of conflicts are men “afraid of”?*
- *What qualities must exist in a male friendship in order for one man to offer the other fraternal correction?*
- *If a close male friend has ever admonished you with a fraternal correction, what was your initial reaction? Did this encounter change your friendship moving forward? How would you approach having to fraternally correct a friend?*

4) Curtis Martin explains, “If you look through history, one of the things that’s striking is when there is a group of saints that come forward, they come in clusters, there’s groups. We inspire each other on. Life is designed to be a team sport. We’re supposed to be traveling together. And in a world of social media, we have a lot of friend contacts, but not a lot of human interactions.”

- *Have you ever been inspired by others, particularly as part of a group?*
- *Sometimes faith or the path to holiness can be seen as a totally personal or individualistic experience. How is growing in faith at least in part a shared experience?*
- *How has social media undermined the design of life to be a team sport? How can we fight the tendency of social media to isolate us, fragment our lives, and lead to more shallow relationships?*

5) Speaking from a military perspective, Master Sergeant Sompaul Vorapanich says that “standing in the breach is the most dangerous part of any mission.” He goes on to say, “When someone stumbles, we need to be able to carry them. We never leave a man behind.”

- *What does it mean to “stand in the breach”?*

- *How is standing in the breach related to brotherhood? Why do men need to stand in the breach for others?*
- *In terms of this brotherhood in everyday life, what does it mean to “never leave a man behind”?*
- *How does a man “stand in the breach” for his friends and family? How do you do this in your own life?*

Bricks for the Breach

“We see that Jesus called His disciples to Himself in such a way that they would form deep bonds of friendship and brotherhood. At the Last Supper, He specifically said to them, ‘No longer do I call you servants. For the servant does not know what the Master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my Father I have made known to you’ (John 15:15). This friendship with God is possible, a true brotherhood with Jesus, because we have the same Father. Do you, my sons, have true brothers in Christ in your life?” (Into the Breach: An Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men)

“Studies have shown that many men today are living friendless lives. This has its effect on marriages, where men have no emotional support apart from their wives, as well as on children, who should see true friends in the lives of their parents but often do not. What a blessing to have the presence of good faithful friends to provide the encouragement and accountability we need to be free! Indeed, as the Scriptures tell us, ‘as iron sharpens iron, so one man must sharpen another’” (Proverbs 27:17). (Into the Breach: An Apostolic Exhortation to Catholic Men)

“What people don’t realize is that when iron is sharpening iron, sparks fly. It’s not a pat on the back. It’s metals heated and beaten and then pulled up against another piece of metal, and it’s sharpened and its sparks are flying. It’s intense. I’m a beaten-up piece of metal, and I need you, Father, and I need you, brothers, to come alongside of me and help sharpen me to be used by God as a sword. And when that sharpening’s taking place, there’s going to be sparks that are flying. It’s going to take vulnerability on my part and vulnerability on yours. Be a chunk of metal with me. Help sharpen me to be a sword used by Christ.” (Mike Sweeney)

“A great Catholic friend is someone who is not afraid to tell you when you’re wrong, when you’re doing something that’s out of line with your faith or when you are doing something that’s not ethical. They’re the one that’s going to pick you up when you fall. They’re the one that’s going to move you forward when you’re slowing down. And

they're the ones that are going to push you to move past your limits." (Master Sergeant Sompaul Vorapanich)

Sword of the Spirit

Iron is sharpened by iron; one person sharpens another. (Proverbs 27:17)

A friend is a friend at all times, and a brother is born for the time of adversity. (Proverbs 17:17)

There are friends who bring ruin, but there are true friends more loyal than a brother. (Proverbs 18:24)

The just act as guides to their neighbors, but the way of the wicked leads them astray. (Proverbs 12:26)

Faithful friends are a sturdy shelter; whoever finds one finds a treasure. Faithful friends are beyond price, no amount can balance their worth. Faithful friends are life-saving medicine; those who fear God will find them. Those who fear the Lord enjoy stable friendship, for as they are, so will their neighbors be. (Sirach 6:14-17)

"This is my commandment: love one another as I love you. No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends." (John 15:12-13)

Call to Battle

Join in prayer with fellow Catholic men. An important way to strengthen fraternity with other men is to pray for them, for their struggles and for their material and spiritual needs. Ask a Catholic man or group of Catholic men you know to pray for a specific intention (or intentions) you have. Ask if he or they have any intentions for you to pray for and commit to praying for them every day (perhaps with a specific prayer or prayers). Try to form an informal group of men who share prayer intentions on a regular basis.

Strengthen the bonds of faithful friendships by serving others. Our faith is expressed in our works. Men united by a shared faith can often serve their neighbors and their communities far more effectively than as individuals alone. Ask your pastor if there is an unmet need at your parish and gather a group of men to address that need. Alternatively, identify some other need in your community and work to solve it.

Build fraternity with other Catholic men. Much of friendship simply consists in spending time with others. Find a specific way to meet socially with your brothers in Christ, whether watching a sports game or going fishing, to build your bonds of fraternity.

Closing Prayer

[Request intentions from the group and conclude with the Prayer to St. Michael.]

Prayer to St. Michael

St. Michael the Archangel, defend us in battle. Be our protection against the wickedness and snares of the Devil. May God rebuke him, we humbly pray, and do thou, O Prince of the heavenly hosts, by the power of God, cast into hell Satan, and all the evil spirits, who prowl about the world seeking the ruin of souls. Amen.