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June 22, 2008: Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time  
Our Lady Queen of Peace

Friday, June 20, was the longest day. The first day of summer and the summer solstice, it gives us the most light of any day of the year. It is usually a pretty great day: The excitement of the easy summer months, the end of school, a cultural excuse to start relaxing more. I love it.

For me, this longest day was also really a long day. It was my Dad's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday, and by some stroke of family dynamics I was in charge of his celebration, a simple dinner gathering at a local Philly restaurant for my immediate family and my parents' six friends. All in all it went well, but it was challenging, as my Dad's Alzheimer's and its impact on us really can be problematic. As soon as I arrived at my parents' house, I realized that it was not the best day in my parents' 55-year-old marriage. So, I decided to separate them at dinner. (Raising parents is so hard!) Actually, this worked out well because my Dad, sitting at the head of the table, was between his two friends, Mr. Taylor and Mr. Allan, both struggling with their fair share of health issues. Throughout the meal, my brothers and I would get up to check on my Dad and direct him a bit, calm him down that we would be able to afford dinner, and that he didn't have to get the cheapest thing on the menu—a fear he kept voicing again and again and again. (You can imagine my Mom's reaction to this public anxiety called cheapness.) Thankfully, after the second round of drinks, we all started relaxing and celebrating my Dad.

For me the highlight was at the end of the night, back at my parents where we invited everyone for birthday cake and stories and the birthday poster contest among the grandchildren. I was in the kitchen with Mr. Taylor, a crusty, funny, smart, ex-Marine of two wars, who fishes out of his trailer near the Jersey shore four days a week. I thanked him for sitting next to my Dad at dinner. I don't think I will ever forget his response. "You're welcome, Kevin. But you don't have to thank me. Your Dad is my oldest friend. We've been friends for 60 years, I think. I love him. Sure, it's not the same, but I am in this for the long haul. That's what friendship is, right?"

I am so grateful to Mr. Taylor, not just for sitting with my Dad and not just for befriending him for all these years. I am grateful to Mr. Taylor for teaching me so powerfully, after a really long day, just how simple, how fresh, and how true the love of God is.

The friendship of God is for the long haul, whether we are sick, sinful, or cynical due to the vagaries of our lives. Yet, sometimes we just don't believe it or feel it or maybe even remember it. The friendship of God will never let us down, for God is with us for the long haul, even if the haul takes us all the way to eternity.

I am wondering if there is a good bit of Jeremiah in all of us. Jeremiah was a pretty Godly person; he was a prophet. But in the 20<sup>th</sup> chapter which we hear from today, we

see a person whose spiritual life I think we can connect to. The prayer of Jeremiah starts off with some serious complaining to God; in fact, he sounds angry:

*You duped me, O LORD, and I let myself be duped; you were too strong for me, and you triumphed. All the day I am an object of laughter; everyone mocks me. Whenever I speak, I must cry out, violence and outrage is my message; the word of the LORD has brought me derision and reproach all the day. I say to myself, I will not mention him, I will speak in his name no more. But then it becomes like fire burning in my heart, imprisoned in my bones; I grow weary holding it in, I cannot endure it. (10:7-9)*

But somehow, somehow, Jeremiah changes his tune:

*But the LORD is with me, like a mighty champion: my persecutors will stumble, they will not triumph. In their failure they will be put to utter shame, to lasting, unforgettable confusion. O LORD of hosts, you who test the just, who probe mind and heart, Let me witness the vengeance you take on them, for to you I have entrusted my cause. (10:11-12)*

Maybe Jeremiah bumped into his Mr. Taylor who reminded him that his God was with him for the long haul.

Church, none of us has perfect relationships with God. I think we all have moments, if not weeks or months—maybe years, of feeling weak and wobbly in our faith. I know I do. The words of my patron, St. Francis de Sales speak to us here: “The same loving Father who cares for you today, will take care of you tomorrow and every day. Either he will shield you from suffering, or he will give you unfailing strength to bear it.”

Yet, The impact of the original sin from the second reading is real. We get afraid about all kinds of things. From the health of our parents and loved ones, to the futures of our children and the care of the poor and most vulnerable in our world, we do have real cause to wobble, maybe even fall. But like Jeremiah, we can get up and move toward the Light that we hear in the Gospel. A light that allows us to not be afraid terminally, as if a death sentence. Maybe that is the assurance of the Gospel today. Our fears are real; they may even make sense. But they don't have to last forever. For there is only one thing that lasts forever: It is the friendship of God, the God who is with us for the long haul—even on our longest days.