



## Twenty-Third Sunday of Ordinary Time September 10, 2017 A

- **Confronting an issue, rather than letting it stew within us**
- **Three stories of how difficult events can lead to positive unexpected results**

In today's Gospel, Jesus tells us how we are to act when someone wrongs us. He says:

*"If your brother/sister commits some wrong against you, go and point out his fault but keep the matter between the two of you."*

Is this what we normally do? Probably not. All too often, we go to *others* and talk about the issue seeking to get them on our side. While it is understandable that we would do this, we can see from the above verse of Scripture that such action is a direct violation of God's Word. When we do not act according to God's Word in this area of our lives, we allow a big resentment to grow within us. This is unhealthy emotionally, spiritually and even physically.

Going directly to the person who has wronged us is usually not easy especially if we do not have a cordial relationship with that person. People say to me, "I hate confrontation" or "I don't like to make waves." Most of us are like that, but if we are to have healthy relationships in our home, parish and workplace, we sometimes have to muster up the courage to confront the person who has wronged us or hurt us. (We do need to remember that sometimes we may *feel hurt* even though we have not been wronged. Jesus frequently said things to the Pharisees that must have deeply hurt them, but he had not wronged them. Sometimes our feelings get hurt when someone does not give us enough attention or speaks some truth we do not want to hear. In such situations, we may be hurt but certainly not wronged.)

But assuming someone has not only hurt us but also *wronged* us, what should be our *Christian* response? Jesus tells us to go directly to that person. As we consider confronting the person who has wronged us, we may want to keep the following in mind.

- Pray before you go. Ask the Holy Spirit to help you to say what you need to say but in a gentle and not harsh way. Be sure that your attitude is not one that seeks to bring down the other person a peg or two. Such an attitude will only make the situation worse.

- Remember: timing is important. All too often, our efforts to right a wrong are messed up because our timing is bad. When possible, we should say to the other person, "I need to talk to you about something. What would be a good time for you?" It is usually a bad idea to do this over the telephone. *Writing* out what we want to say is often a very good idea, especially if we think we are going to get flustered and not say what we want to say or say it in such a way that we only add more hurt to the situation. Commenting on today's Gospel, Fr. Sylvester O'Flynn writes: *"Before we confront someone we should:*

- *Pray for the light of truth (the whole truth may not be on our side).*
- *Pray for tactful gentleness that will heal rather than wound. Our whole aim should be to heal a wounded or broken relationship and not to score a victory.*

### Dealing with hurt feelings

As I said above, sometimes we feel hurt by another even though we have not been wronged. Do we bring the hurt to the offender or do we try to deal with it ourselves? Each of us will have to decide what is the best and most Christian way to deal with such a situation.

Sometimes the problem is ours and we need to own it and deal with it. For example, the person may have expressed opinions that we did not like or even resented. He/she may have spoken a truth that convicted us in some way. In both cases, the problem is obviously ours and we need to deal with it. On another level, someone may have made a false accusation or said something in a harsh and offensive way. In that case, we have to decide how to handle it. Ideally, if the offender is a mature person, we should feel confident that we can bring our hurt to him/her and resolve it in a way that would make Jesus smile and not cry.

While we may judge rightfully that there is no point in approaching the offender, it should not be *simply* because we do not like the discomfort of confrontation, and we instead opt for a false shallow peace. **Often the refusal to confront is a failure to love. In a mature Christian community or family, people choose to deal with hurt feelings because they truly care about the community and family that they belong to.** Some

wise person once said: "All that is needed for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing." Unfortunately, all too often in our families, parishes and workplaces, we allow the evil of dissent and resentment to grow because we do not have the courage and true love to confront a situation and deal with it as best we can.

Having said all of the above, I understand the resistance to go and talk to the offender because he/she is simply impossible to talk to and is the type who thinks he/she is always right. In such situations, we have to learn to live with what cannot be changed. Certainly, what can *always* be changed is *our* attitude. Our constant loving attitude may in time soften the heart of even the most difficult person.

**If we want a simple way to test or gauge the *quality* of our Christianity or to check our personal maturity, we only need look at how we deal with hurts.**

A postscript to the above words by Jesus is to state that "anonymous letters" are not the way to deal with hurts. Over the years, I, like all Pastors, have received anonymous letters. My reaction is to trash them. I think Jesus would agree.

I do not know who wrote the following:

### **GOOD REASONS TO LET GO OF A RESENTMENT**

*The moment you begin resenting a person, you become his/her slave.*

*They control your dreams, disturb your digestion, rob you of your peace of mind and goodwill, and take away the pleasure of your work.*

*They ruin your religion and nullify your prayers. You cannot take a vacation without bringing them along.*

*They destroy your freedom of mind and hound you, wherever you go.*

*There is no way to escape the person you resent. They are with you when you are awake: invade your privacy when you sleep.*

*They are close beside you when you eat, when you drive your car, and when you are on the job.*

*You can never have efficiency or happiness. They influence even the tone of your voice.*

*They require you to take medicine for indigestion, headaches, and loss of memory.*

*They even steal your last moment before you go to sleep.*

*So, if you want to be a slave, continue to harbor resentment.*

### **Admonishing the sinner**

One of the *Seven Corporal Works of Mercy* is *Admonish the Sinner*. This is what Ezechiel in the first reading today is urging us to do. In fact, he tells us that if we do not try to stop someone who is walking down a wrong path, we will be held responsible for his/her sins.

Now there is a tough Scripture to act on. Who wants to go to some individual and point out his/her sins, especially when we realize that all of us are sinners? Christian charity should move us to show concern for people walking down a destructive path, such as those dealing with the problem of excessive use of alcohol, drugs and food. Workaholism is also very destructive especially if one is married and has children. It frequently leads to divorce. Another example is injustice in the workplace.

If we decide to talk to someone about what we perceive as destructive or immoral behavior, we should go to that person with love and concern. But first, we would do well to pray to the Holy Spirit to grant us wisdom and courage and love to confront the person who is clearly on a destructive and dangerous path.

A simple example of someone acting on today's first reading would be a parent who explains to a child that stealing is wrong and then sends the child back to the store to return the stolen item.

### **High-tech psalm**

The Lord is my programmer, I shall not crash.  
He installed his software on the hard disk of my heart;  
all of His commands are user-friendly;  
His directory guides me to the right choices  
for His name's sake.  
Even though I scroll through the problems of life,  
I will fear no bugs, for He is my backup;  
His password protects me;  
He prepares a menu before me  
in the presence of my enemies;  
His help is only a key stroke away.  
Surely goodness and mercy will follow me  
all the days of my life,  
and my file will be merged with His  
and saved forever.

### **How life's unexpected events can lead to good things**

The following article by Annemarie Scobey appeared in the August 2017 issue of *U.S. Catholic* magazine.

#### ***When Katie was 22, she lost her 51-year old mother***

*When Katie was 22, her 51-year old mother was diagnosed with breast cancer that had metastasized to her liver. She was given just four weeks to live.*

*“She was sent home to hospice, and we spent the next weeks caring for her, sharing conversations, and watching her grow weak and ill,” Katie says. “My mom was a woman of great faith and was not afraid.” Katie says her mom believed her body was merely a shell and that her presence would continue on. Indeed, in only a few weeks, Katie’s mother died. “I spent the next few years trying to navigate life without her,” Katie says.*

*The unexpected death caused Katie to reexamine her life. She quit her job in marketing and went to graduate school to become an early childhood educator. “Knowing how short life can be, I wanted to make an impact if I could and spend my days doing something I enjoyed,” she says.*

*We spend much of our lives making plans for what’s next. The hyper-organized among us operate from daily to-do lists with the day’s prescriptions for the minutes as they pass. Even the most laidback folks have their own loose direction for where they’re going. From big career strategies to the daily calendars we keep on our phones, planning the future offers a sense of control. When a major life event changes our course, most people react first with shock.*

*“I would tell my mom ‘it isn’t fair’ and ask why her?” Katie says. “My mom would respond that there was no such thing as fair, and my question would be, ‘Why not us?’”*

*Once the disbelief wears off, an unexpected life event—even a tragic one like Katie’s—can bring us to a place that we didn’t know existed. Unexpected life events, when we choose to accept them and enter in, can define us more fully and completely than our original plans ever could have. Because unexpected events require us to ask questions we would have not otherwise considered, they are an opportunity to discover who we are and what we are called to. Katie does not know if she would have become a teacher had she not lost her mom. Now, as a stay-at-home mother to three small children, she feels one of the reasons she cherishes her role is because her mom’s death taught her that nothing is a given.*

### **When Isabela and Jorge got married, they decided not to have children but ...**

*Isabela and Jorge got married in their late 20s and had decided not to have children. Both had excellent high-paying jobs. “I had prayed a lot before even marrying Jorge. I had never thought I wanted to get married,” Isabela says. “But eventually, I researched marriage and talked to many people, and decided that while I wanted to get married, I did not want children. I’m someone who needs to go ‘all in’ on whatever I do.*

*I knew if I would become a mother, I’d want to do that well too. I felt having kids would mean I wouldn’t be able to go as far as I wanted in my career or travel the places I wanted.”*

*Isabela discovered she was pregnant just a few months into her marriage. “I cried for three days; I considered abortion. I was depressed,” she says. Reaching for direction, she opened the Bible, and it fell open to the verse from Psalm 127: “Children are a gift from God; they are a reward from him.”*

*“I am not one to normally believe God speaks to you through an open Bible, but this was clearly God,” Isabela says. “I had often heard children were a gift, but I had never heard the second part of the verse, that they are a reward.”*

*Isabela decided to continue with the pregnancy and sought to learn how her child, for whom she had never planned and had taken care to prevent from being conceived, could possibly be a reward.*

*What Isabela discovered was that while her son Mateo’s eventual birth did alter her career path and compromise some of the couple’s income, her career took a turn for the better it might not have otherwise. She and her husband continued to travel, often with Mateo and their subsequent three children in tow. Most important, Isabela says her children opened her eyes to pieces of life she would not have known about—and this is what she sees as part of the reward the psalm speaks of.*

*“My children have brought me an appreciation for things I previously disregarded, like beauty, sunrises, and nature,” she says. “I see this as a new window into God’s world that I was blind to before.”*

### **Maeve a newly divorced mother of four children**

*Life events can take us for such an unexpected ride that we make decisions that we would not have otherwise believed possible. Such is the case of Maeve, a newly divorced mother of four, something she had never considered would be her marital status. “Just the other day, I said ‘ex-husband’ out loud for the first time. It’s still hard for me to believe,” she says. “Even in the difficult times of our marriage, I thought Michael and I should stay together for the good of the children—until it became obvious it was not good for them to live with their father.”*

*About 10 years into their 22-year marriage, Michael’s social drinking turned to heavy drinking. Maeve didn’t see it at first. “I thought he just drank beer, but then when I was unpacking boxes after we moved, I found dozens of empty vodka bottles,” she says. “I felt physically sick; I didn’t even know he drank vodka.”*

*Michael's drinking got out of control and landed him in the emergency room several times. He verbally abused Maeve and their children and secretly racked up credit card debt. Maeve tried to get Michael the help he needed, but he attended treatment programs only to placate her and his mother, never intending to stop drinking. Maeve's world became dark and terrifying. "I didn't have a partner in the marriage," she says. "My husband became my fifth child—a narcissistic child. Our home was chaotic. I could not trust him. He was drinking to self-medicate his depression and anxiety."*

*In the midst of one of Michael's binges, Maeve and the children fled their home to a domestic violence shelter, and Maeve obtained a restraining order against Michael. Shortly thereafter, she began the process of legal separation.*

*In the three years since Maeve and Michael last lived together, Maeve has seen her children flourish. "My oldest son went from doing poorly in high school to being a straight-A student," she says. "All the years I didn't leave, I was trying to be in control, but eventually I had to accept that I could not control his choices. The kids and I laugh and joke now, where we never did before. Our house has some order to it. This is our new normal."*

Have a blessed week,

*Le Sarah*