

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Twenty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time
September 7, 2008 A

CONFRONTING AN ISSUE, RATHER THAN LETTING IT STEW WITHIN US

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? Usually 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 a person who has wronged us is usually not easy especially if we do not have a cordial relationship with the person. People say to me "I hate confrontation." "I don't like to make waves." Most of us are like that, but if we are to have healthy relationships in our homes, parishes and work places we sometimes have to muster up the courage to confront another 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 hurt them very much, but he had not wronged them. Sometimes, our feelings get hurt when someone does not give us enough attention or speaks a truth we don't want to hear. In such situations we have been hurt but 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 is 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?" Usually, it is a very bad idea to talk over the telephone. On the other hand, *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.

I said above, sometimes we will feel hurt by another even though the other has not wronged us. 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 this situation.

Sometimes the problem is ours and we need to own it and deal with it. For example, the other person may have expressed opinions that we didn't like or even resented. The other person may have spoken a truth that convicted us in some way. In both these cases, the problem is obviously ours and we need to deal with it. On the other hand someone may have made an accusation that is wrong or said something in a harsh and offensive way. In that case we have to decide how we are going to handle it. Ideally, if the one who hurt us 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 sometimes we may judge rightfully that there is no point in going to the person who offended us, sometimes we may decide not to go *simply* because we don't like the discomfort of confrontation. Instead, we 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 work places 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 know that sometimes we cannot go to the offending person in our families, parish or work place because he/she is simply impossible to talk to. They seem to always feel that they have right on their side. In such situations we have to learn to live with what cannot be changed. Though 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 gage the *quality* of our Christianity or to check our personal maturity, look at how we deal with hurts.

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

I don't know who wrote the following:

GOOD REASONS TO LET GO OF A RESENTMENT

The moment we begin resenting a person, we 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 our freedom of mind and hound us, wherever we 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 to Admonish the Sinner. This is what Ezechiel is urging us to do in the first reading today. In fact, he tells us that if we do not try to stop someone who is walking down a wrong path that we will be held responsible for his/her sins.

Now there is a tough scripture to act on. Who wants to go to another and point out their sins, especially when we realize that all of us are sinners. Christian charity should move us to show concern for someone walking down a destructive path. Some examples are excessive use of alcohol, drugs and food. Workaholism is also very destructive especially if one is married and has children. It has frequently led to a divorce. Another example would be injustice in the work place. If we decide to talk to someone about what we perceive is destructive or immoral behavior, we should go with love and concern for the person. We would do well to pray a lot before we go asking for the wisdom and courage and love that we need 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 speaks to a child about the dangers of stealing and then sends him or her back to the store with the item he/she has stolen.

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."

Have a blessed week,

