

How to Love Those Who Don't Love Us

Headline: As Christian fathers, we are called in a special way to demonstrate patience, restraint, wisdom, and a sacrificial love in the face of dissension and disagreement. Whether it is a family member or estranged friend, we must be Ambassadors for Christ in this world even to those who seemingly hate us. If there is someone in your life with whom you just don't get along, it's time to step up and be the man God has called you to be!

Objective: To reflect upon our handling of difficult relationships, then consider how the Lord calls us to be healers and peacemakers. We must start by identifying our own behaviors that might be contributing to a broken relationship (are you helping to heal or rubbing salt in the wound?). It is not about who is right and who is wrong, but instead it is about an attitude of humility and openness that creates fertile ground for new growth. Finally, we will discuss strategies that over time may bring about reconciliation.

Song Suggestion: Prayer of St. Francis.

Bible and Catechism Readings:

Genesis 50:15-21

Realizing that their father was dead, Joseph's brothers said, "What if Joseph still bears a grudge against us and pays us back in full for all the wrong that we did to him?"...

But Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid! Am I in the place of God? Even though you intended to do harm to me, God intended it for good, in order to preserve a numerous people, as he is doing today. So have no fear; I myself will provide for you and your little ones." In this way he reassured them, speaking kindly to them.

Romans 12:14-18

Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited. Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone.

Catechism 1826

If I . . . have not charity," says the Apostle, "I am nothing." Whatever my privilege, service, or even virtue, "if I . . . have not charity, I gain nothing." Charity is superior to all the virtues. It is the first of the theological virtues: "So faith, hope, charity abide, these three. But the greatest of these is charity."

Saint:

St. Monica was raised a Christian but was given in marriage to a pagan official named Patricius. Through patience and prayer, St. Monica helped bring about the cooperation of her mother-in-law, as well as the conversion of her husband before his death and later, her son St. Augustine.

Vignette: – While shopping for groceries, Joe noticed his estranged daughter-in-law before she saw him. He paused for a moment: "Should I duck into a different aisle, and avoid causing a fuss?" He said a quick prayer: "Lord, please let this go well. I'd really like to heal this relationship." Instead, Joe approached her and greeted her with "Hi Amy, how's it going?" After a brief conversation, Joe learned that Amy's car was in the shop still, and she was going to have to take the day off from work. Thinking for a moment, Joe said, "Hey why don't you borrow my car—I work from home today anyway." "Really??" she said. "I would really appreciate that!" Amy was amazed that Joe would offer to do anything for her after their previous blowup months ago...

Questions for Large and Small Group Discussion:

1. Can I identify the people in my life that evoke a negative attitude at first sight (either by you or by them)? How can I be sure I am not holding a grudge? How can I turn this reaction into a habit of stepping up my effort to get along instead of a defense mechanism? Can I break the cycle of negativity by ignoring provocation and returning kindness?
2. What is the tipping point where I should give someone else space? Does “time heal all wounds”? How can prayer or silent acts of charity be used to promote healing, even when you are not speaking to one another?
3. Consider both sides of the prodigal son parable. What did it take for the son to return to his father, after he had left on such bad terms? What did it take for the father to accept and even welcome his son home?
4. Is there someone in my life that I am in the habit of provoking (a brother or sister, son or daughter, etc)? Do I take delight in bringing up past embarrassments or bad decisions they have made? Do I focus on areas of disagreement such as political or religious differences? Am I willing to set a topic aside and “agree to disagree”? What changes can I make that will make me more approachable?

Resources:

<https://todayscatholic.org/dealing-with-difficult-people/>

<https://catholiccounselors.com/loving-difficult-people-a-catholic-approach-to-annoying-behavior/>

Step it up!:

What can you do over the next week/month to make a step change in loving others. Some examples:

1. Pray for your own heart this week, that God will soften it toward the difficult people in your life. Ask for patience and wisdom, and ask the Father to heal your broken relationships
2. Reach out to a family member you haven't spoken with in over a month. Sometimes a long period of silence can cause misunderstandings – reassure them that you have been thinking about them and just wanted to see how they are doing.
3. Is there a “black sheep” in your extended family who is aloof at holiday gatherings, the one that everyone avoids? Be the one to approach them, greet them, and include them in the conversation.

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