

Companions IN PRAYER



Sisters of St. Clare
Saginaw, MI

Matt 18:15-20

In today's Gospel, Jesus gives us a method for dealing with conflicts when someone has sinned against another. He urges us to talk out our differences with another person who has hurt us or made us angry. He even suggests a way to help ease conflict by enlisting the help of others.

Now this way of solving conflict may sound easy, but we know it is not. Often we have been hurt and are angry. The last thing that we want to do is talk to this person who has so upset us. Maybe the person has hurt us several times before. The roots of our hurt and anger may be very deep. To be angry is a normal reaction. We know that there is nothing wrong with being angry. We know from the scriptures that Jesus understood anger. He certainly showed anger himself. In all four gospels we are told how he overturned the tables of the money changers in the temple. Jesus seemed to realize that anger was part of life, and we need to recognize it and learn to deal with it as well. However, as angry as Jesus was with those who opposed him, he never withdrew from them. We are told earlier in Matthew's gospel (9:11) that the Pharisees asked Jesus' disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" And we remember Jesus' response, "I have come to call not the righteous but sinners."

It is clear that Jesus, even though he could be angry with some people, did not distance himself from them or act coldly toward others. And the way Jesus responds to conflict is an important message for us, even though someone makes us angry or we feel hurt. In most instances, we must not automatically avoid them or coldly dismiss them from our lives.

In our gospel story today, Jesus urges us to seek ways to settle conflicts so that we might promote reconciliation. Many people who write about church conflict, note that it is not conflict that kills churches, or families, or friendships, rather it is the refusal to deal with conflicts that kills relationships.

When we think about conflict, we might think in terms of global conflicts, of wars, or of church conflicts regarding major theological issues. All of these conflicts are obviously serious, however, I have found that one of our biggest issues in life is negotiating right relationships with each other, and often with those

closest to us. It is so easy to be misunderstood or to misunderstand someone else's intentions. We want to be understood and have the other person see our good intent. When they anger us, we tend to withdraw and go into our shells like

threatened turtles, to avoid them or we want to shut them out of our lives.

I will give one example. As Poor Clares, we live in a small community of four women. Our oldest sister now 96, Sr. Bernardone, has said that it is a small miracle that four women can live together happily and in peace, and indeed, we have had to learn how to resolve conflicts in our daily lives.

For example, we meet for formal prayer at a set time several times a day. Now the problem is that all of us have a different idea of what "on time" means. You may have experienced this difficulty among members of your own family when you try to get to church on time. Different family members may have different ideas of what "on time" means.

RIGHT RELATIONS

When we meet for our prayer times one sister is always 10 minutes early, another sister does not consider herself late if she makes it within 10 minutes after the set time, another sister arrives late and is often unprepared, and I am, of course, one of those irritating people who pride themselves on being on time and prepared aside from those few times that I forget time when I am gardening.

It took us some time to recognize that we were really getting on each other's nerves about this "on time" issue. We found that it is not easy to pray for each other and for the many others who request our prayers if we are angry with each other. Gradually, we were able to talk about these differences, and finally we were able to laugh about them, and the tension eased considerably. Now, mind you, we have not solved the conflict. I am still more regimented and on time, our other sister is still early, and another is always late, and another still often forgets when she is to lead. However, when a sister has the courage to say, "It is hard for me when we are not all on time and ready for prayers," the discussion can begin. Having faced the conflict and acknowledged how irritating it is to each other, we have gradually learned let go of our anger and can often see the humor in our behavior.

Now my example of this small conflict is a minor one. We know that there are many serious and painful conflicts both in families and in the church. Many of these conflicts often demand professional intervention. Sometimes people have psychological issues that make getting along with them very difficult or impossible. Sometimes, severed relationships are necessary for people to survive. We are not Jesus, we are humans and cannot solve all our problems or the world's problems.

However, this gospel example gives us hope and good news. We are assured that we are never alone when we face conflict. Jesus says, "For where two or three are gathered in my name, I am there among them." We know that Jesus is always with us and will guide us when we call upon him in prayer.

(We are interested in your thoughts. Let us know at: <http://srsclare.com/about-us/companions-in-prayer-newsletter>)

Sr. Laura and Sisters

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Sisters of St. Clare

4875 Shattuck Rd • Saginaw, MI 48603

Phone: 989-797-0593 • Web: <http://srsclare.com> • Facebook: SistersofStClare

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