

## Opening Our Hearts to Dialogue

September 6, 2020, 23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time – Gospel of Matthew 18.15-20

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To turn people around from a destructive path they may be on. That is one of the messages of our readings today.

We all know this can be tricky because being too preachy or trying to fix others often has the opposite effect. Think of yourselves as parents, trying to help your children learn and practice right from wrong.

This doesn't always work very well, starting in the adolescent and teen years.

None of us want to develop a reputation of being a busybody or one who police's other peoples' moral life.

Yet, because our actions and behaviours become witnesses for others, it is incumbent upon us to speak out when we see a wrong.

However, the challenging thing for all of us is how do we approach the subject with people?

How do we know when to speak out and when to just keep quiet? It's never easy. And if we feel the need to speak out, how do we find the right words without making both ourselves and the other person uncomfortable.

If we are friends with that person, we are not anxious to put our relationship with that person on the line by bringing up our concerns their questionable behaviour. How do we bring up an issue without coming across as being judgmental which we are taught in Scripture not to be?

Too often we either are too dismissive of the wrongful act or we come across as overreacting and of being preachy or rigid.

There are strategies that help one to approach admonishment of another that minimize hurt or embarrassment. Psychologists, social workers, and conflict managers deal with this all the time.

We are presently in a volatile climate globally with the pandemic and with the issue of when to wear a mask and when not to. What constitutes reasonable self-distancing.

Also, what constitutes racist behaviour?

What actions need to be taken and by whom and to what degree?

Perhaps an important first step for us as we navigate though these issues ourselves is to be **self-aware**. When we find ourselves becoming angry and drawn toward taking sides, we need to pause and step back.

The Gospel talks about admonishing for the sake of bringing that person back - - in other words we see that person who's gone astray as a brother and a sister not as the enemy.

I watch the video of the protests in the US and in some larger Canadian cities and I see people who genuinely do want positive change and rightfully so and are frustrated with the lack of it.

But I also see that there's a fine line between protesting for what one believe is right and crossing the line, getting lost in one's anger and merely antagonizing the other side.

There is an awful tendency temptation among we human beings to leap from legitimately calling out bad behaviour to jumping ahead and demonizing the other. This is not helpful.

As challenging as it might be, we are ultimately called to actively search out that place in our heart that includes the person that has hurt us. Because that is the place from which we can faithfully emerge to approach the other in search of a peaceful solution.

That is the basis for the strategy put forth by Jesus in our Gospel today.

And because talking about issues of right and wrong can be so delicate and subjective, this is difficult to do. And as a result, we do not always go directly to the person who has done the hurting to address the issue directly, but rather, we go to someone else to do something about it for us. Or we just fall into gossip and don't do anything else about it.

It is part of our Christian mission to actively search for ways to dialogue.

We also need to learn how to accept constructive criticism ourselves without getting upset unduly. It is our pride that fights against being corrected.

It is also important that we do not fall into the temptation of thinking that we have a monopoly on what is right. That's why we need community and consultation. That's why we need dialogue. That's also why we need the Church and its teachings which help us understand Jesus message. Dialogue also helps us interpret Church teachings in a balanced way.

As we mature in faith and in life in this world we learn that the world is not so black-and-white and that not one of us has all the answers.

This in turn challenges us to turn to a larger resource than ourselves or what we have been used to for input - - the teachings of our faith being a primary place. And to have faith that the Holy Spirit is working through the faith community to help inform us in our decision making as we approach the issue of right and wrong.

Finally, maybe verbal admonishment is not our calling.

By the choices we make, the way in which we carry ourselves privately and publicly, we have the power, the opportunity, to give others something to ponder concerning their own faith.

So I leave you with this question. And I take it with me as well.

How can I, through my actions and choices, give others something to think about that can potentially broaden their faith perspective in a way that brings about correction in their own lives?

Ultimately, love is to will the good of the other. If we truly see each other as members of the Body of Christ, as brothers and sisters, our goal is to learn to live by this reality.