

Every family has arguments. They spring up among the kids, between the kids and their parents, and even between the parents. A family comes into being because of love, yet that love will be tested as the members go through the challenges of life. Some people rather enjoy arguments; they love to express what they think, and some of them express it even before they think it. Others avoid confrontation; they prefer the absence of conflict even more than winning an argument. Even outside of families, everyone wants to dwell in peace. But peace takes work.

When we think we're right and someone else is wrong, we have several options. One is to become enemies. Some people decide they will never have a rewarding relationship with another person, so they build a wall that will never be crossed. They may treat the other person with silence or with shouting. But they are not trying to resolve the conflict; they are trying to preserve it. Another option is to do nothing and hope that the conflict will go away. This usually does not work; people who ignore conflicts usually let them fester until some point when they will break the relationship. Yet another option is patiently to work things out. This requires a willingness to listen to the other's perspective, to try to understand things from that person's viewpoint, and to work at a resolution. This only works if we start from love. Jesus said we have to love our enemies. We don't have to agree with them, but we ought to love them and work toward peace with them.

In Matthew's gospel, Jesus encourages members of the Christian community to work out their differences among themselves. First talk directly to the person with whom you have the conflict. This always brings the best results. If the two people who have the disagreement can get it resolved, it strengthens them as individuals, it builds their relationship, and it saves everyone else a lot of grief. Sometimes two people cannot work it out. Only then does Jesus suggest they take it to the next level, involving friends or authorities. Many people start at that level, and they avoid the hard work at making peace individually. Jesus promised at the end of this advice that when two or three are gathered in his name, he will be present to them. In this context, he isn't talking about coming together for prayer, but coming together to work out differences. If two or three people have to talk about a difficult topic, if they do it in the name of Christ, Christ will be there.

In general, when we have our differences, it is better to stay in conversation with people rather than to avoid them. It is better to talk directly to the offender than to someone else. It is better to speak with charity than with rude words. It is better to do it all in the name of Christ.