

This story comes from a friend of mine who directs religious education at a parish on the east coast. They celebrate first communions like we do, with small groups of children on Sundays, to make the day personal for the kids and let the whole parish share the joy. My friend tells me at a first communion this summer, one of the kids, who was very, very small, came up to the priest, who was very, very tall. And--you know how nervous kids get sometimes--the little boy came up, saw this big priest in front of him, and then held his hands like this. The priest couldn't reach down that low, so he said, "Raise your hands," and the kid couldn't hear him, so he just said, "Amen." And the priest said again, "Raise your hands." Well, the kid looked terrified and turned to his mother who said, "Raise your hands." So he went --.

We don't always say things clearly, and that's bad. But it's just as bad not to say things at all. Today Jesus gives some practical rules for confrontation: If someone offends you, first talk to them directly. If that doesn't work, bring in a mediator. If that doesn't work, then go public. It's a great system. Too often we take an extreme: If someone offends us, we immediately go public: We write letters to the editor, we ask to see the manager, we sue, we talk behind their backs, we get allies--anything but talk to the offender. Or we take the other extreme and say nothing: We figure it won't do any good; we're afraid if we start an argument we'll lose it; we think any disagreement is worse than just ignoring it; or if the offender is someone we love, we figure they should know how bad we feel without being told.

Well, people usually don't know, so the first hurdle we often need to overcome is saying something to the person who offends. The next hurdle is saying it well, saying it in a way that helps understanding. Resolving conflict is tense business, but if both parties act in love, seeking the common good, then the saying of Jesus will come true even when it applies to conflict: "Wherever two or three are gathered in my name," he says, "there am I in their midst."