

HOMILY ~ 23rd SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME SEPTEMBER 9/10, 2023

How many of you have experienced a little anger with other drivers when you are driving? I was talking to a friend recently who told me that he gets really angry when people tailgate. He said he likes to teach people a lesson; so when someone is tailgating him, he hits the brakes. He told me that recently he hit the brakes when someone was tailgating, and they rear-ended him. I suggested that maybe he should stop hitting the breaks when someone is tailgating. He said, "*Do you have any suggestions about something else I could do that would be equally as satisfying?*" I said, "As satisfying as getting rear-ended? Maybe you could just change lanes, get away from them and be satisfied that you were not rear-ended or shot."

The Gospel Reading today calls us to forgiveness and reconciliation, and this must always be done with love. We have an epidemic of loneliness in our country today because people are unable to do this. 33% of people in the United States today report being lonely. That is one in three. If you are angry, hurt or offended by someone you need to stop, recognize what you are feeling, allow yourself to feel it and investigate what is going on. This can also be called the *24 hour cooling off period* or maybe it is a week cooling off period. Do not let it go on for too long; or it will take on a life of its own, and it will become more difficult to resolve. Then you need to decide if it is worth making an issue out of it. Maybe you just need to let it go. I definitely think someone tailgating is not worth expending any energy over. Many things that cause us to get hurt, angry or offended fall into that category.

If you decide that it is worth making an issue out of it, Jesus tells us that we should talk to that individual alone. Sometimes we talk to everyone except the individual that we have the issue with. That will never resolve the issue. Many times if you can just calmly discuss the issue, you can resolve things before they become a huge issue. Do not just bottle it up until you explode. Sometimes the individual did not intend to hurt you, did not realize they hurt you, or tells you they are sorry and will not do it again.

If you cannot resolve it with the individual, I Jesus tells us to involve one or two other people to make sure every fact is established. This does not mean that you get a couple of people together so you can gang up on someone. Maybe talk to someone who knows the individual well to get some advice on how to handle the issue.

I have found that many times when people do something that is out of character for them, it has nothing to do with me but has something to do with what is going on with them. If you are talking to someone because you want others to know about this terrible thing that individual did to you, that is gossip and should be avoided. If you are talking to someone out of love to try and resolve the issue, that can be helpful. Maybe you just have to agree to disagree. Maybe we have different points of view on a particular issue, and we can just stop talking about it. This is true of many of the issues that have become politicized.

If you still cannot come to an agreement, Jesus tells us to take it to the Church. At the time the Gospels were written, the Church was a very important group. If you were Jewish and became Christian, you were excluded from the Synagogue. In these early days, Christians were persecuted, so they needed their Church group for support. We now have our families and our social groups where we feel that we belong and are supported. One of these groups could be the Church. These groups are very important. Sometimes close friends and family members are just not capable of doing what you would like them to do. You cannot blame someone for not doing what they are not able to do. There may be someone else in our family, social or church group that can better meet our needs. All of our needs cannot be met by one person. We can only exclude someone as a last resort. That is really extreme to exclude someone from your family, or to stop inviting someone to your social group, or to exclude someone from our Church.

So remember, we must be about forgiveness and reconciliation. We need to do all of this with love. We can only exclude someone as a last resort.

Love and Peace,

Fr. Jim