PASTOR'S CORNER FOR THE TWENTY-FIRST SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME, YEAR C, BY FR. RUSSELL POLLITT, SJ

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HOW DO WE DEAL WITH CONFLICT? SOME IDEAS…

Conflict is an inevitable part of human life—that is a given. What is important is that we deal with conflict in a healthy way—easier said than done!

Dealing with conflict is essential for fostering trust, understanding, and long-term harmony. The way we handle conflict can significantly influence the health of a relationship. Here are some ways which might help us deal with conflict constructively.

Firstly, communication is key. Open, honest, and respectful communication helps prevent misunderstandings and allows both parties to express their feelings and concerns. Listening actively is equally important. This involves giving full attention to the speaker, acknowledging their feelings, and refraining from interrupting or dismissing their perspective. When both partners feel heard, conflicts tend to resolve more amicably.

Secondly, practising empathy can de-escalate tense situations. Empathy involves putting oneself in the other person's shoes and understanding their feelings and motivations. When conflicts arise, instead of reacting defensively, try to see the situation from the other's point of view. This fosters compassion and mutual respect, which are important for resolving disagreements.

Thirdly, managing emotions plays a crucial role. Conflicts often trigger intense feelings such as anger, frustration, or hurt. Taking a moment to cool down before responding can prevent escalation. Techniques such as deep breathing, taking a break, or going for a walk can help individuals approach the conflict with a calmer mindset, enabling more rational and constructive dialogue. Sometimes we may need to take a day or two before we face the conflict so that the intense feelings can de-escalate.

Fourthly, maintaining a solution-focused approach is beneficial. Instead of dwelling on blame or past grievances, both parties should aim to find common ground or compromises. Collaborating to identify solutions reinforces teamwork and shows commitment to the relationship's growth. Sometimes, agreeing to disagree or accepting differences is also a healthy resolution, provided it is done genuinely and respectfully.

Fifthly, setting boundaries is essential. Know your limits and communicate them clearly to others. Respecting each other's boundaries fosters trust and safety, reducing the likelihood of conflicts over sensitive issues.

Furthermore, it is always important to seek to understand underlying issues. Often, conflicts stem from deeper unmet needs or ongoing stressors. Addressing these root causes rather than just surface disagreements helps prevent recurring conflicts and promotes harmony.

Finally, if conflicts become frequent, intense, or difficult to resolve, seeking external help can be highly effective. A trained counsellor or mediator can facilitate communication, provide insights, and help both parties develop healthier conflict resolution skills.

It is at the very foundation of our Christian faith to seek to live in peace and harmony. Jesus invites us to be reconcilers – and in so doing be reconciled with God. Who might you need to seek reconciliation with at this time in your life?