

## **Avoiding Conflict is Not Peace**

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In marriage preparation, one of the questions for a couple to discuss is whether or not they should maintain peace at all costs. In other words, whether it is best to ignore issues in order to not upset the relationship. We can see both sides: we certainly wouldn't want to make marriage a perpetual war between the spouses, but we also know from experience that avoiding conflict can just make matters worse. Ultimately, the couple is led to the conclusion that issues, especially big issues, are important to discuss, even if it disrupts the peace. Ideally, their marital love would be strong enough to survive and the disruption would be temporary.

In our Gospel today, Jesus has some strong words that may seem out of character: "Do you think that I have come to establish peace on the earth? No, I tell you, but rather division." He then uses the example of a family: "from now on a household of five will be divided three against two and two against three..." This seems to go against everything we are used to hearing at Church. Yet, since Jesus said it, we have to account for it.

The point Jesus is trying to make is that peace at all costs doesn't get us anywhere. Being soft, indecisive, or avoiding conflict is not the path to peace, but the path of indifference. It can lead us to just going in circles, without any direction, vision, or steps forward. In more extreme cases, indifference can actually lead to violence as it tends to form complacent people who become silent in the face of evil.

As people of faith, sometimes we need to temporarily disrupt the peace before we can have God's peace. That is because we need to be

true to God's will before all else. Being true to God's will, even in the face of conflict, includes things like: living out our baptisms, being a voice for the voiceless, forming and following our consciences, risking our own safety for someone else's benefit, and accepting full responsibility for our actions. It is only after we do these things that we can find God's peace.

The prophet Jeremiah is a perfect example of someone who didn't avoid conflict. He knew that he had to speak the truth of what was going to happen to the people, even if it came across as being negative and demoralizing. Because he took a stand and followed God's will, he was rejected by the people and thrown into a muddy cistern. He nearly died of famine, but thankfully was relieved by some men at the last minute.

The 20th century English modernist writer Virginia Woolf once said: "you cannot find peace by avoiding life." I think Jesus would agree.

*Our Peace doesn't come from avoiding conflict, but from being decisive in following God's will before all else.*

Do I avoid conflict in unhealthy ways?

Conflict isn't always bad. So, while today's Gospel seems harsh, it does have a place. Whenever you face opposition, "consider how Jesus endured such opposition from sinners, in order that you may not grow weary and lost heart."