

Conflict and Respect

The average American driver gets into four car collisions in his or her lifetime. That's a statistical fact.

Sometimes the crash is due to the negligence of one or more drivers. But at times no one is at fault.

Most collisions do not entail serious bodily harm. But some do, and even worse.

Crashes may involve inexperienced, distracted drivers. Many also involve well-seasoned, careful operators.

Whatever the case, all collisions are disruptive. They upend the lives of the people driving. They can also disrupt the lives of others sharing the road. Case in point: I-290 westbound a few mornings ago. What a bottleneck for morning commuters!

Collisions and crashes don't only occur with cars and trucks. "Collisions" occur within relationships: marriages, friendships, families, and parishes. We call them "conflicts."

Sometimes conflict starts with a disagreement, a misunderstanding, a competing interest, or a hurt of some kind.

Conflict can evolve into antagonism, hostility, fighting.

Conflict is a part of virtually every human relationship, at least at some point. Rare is the relationship that is conflict-free.

Jesus knows human relationships. He is certainly no stranger to conflict. In today's gospel he gives us a roadmap for navigating conflicts responsibly. (Matthew 18:15-20)

It begins by going directly to the person who has offended us. Whenever possible, seek dialogue and work to resolve the issue one on one.

If no resolution can be found, seek the help of objective mediators, helpers who are willing to assist in coming to a peaceful resolution.

If a solution still remains unreachable, Jesus has one final word of advice: "Treat your adversary as you would a gentile or a tax collector."

And how did Jesus treat gentiles and tax collectors?
Answer: With dignity and respect.

Your relationship may need to change, even drastically. You may even need to be apart for a time. But Jesus knows that if there is any hope for healing or resolution, it will come by walking a "higher road." Nothing is gained by trashing or demeaning our "adversary."

The acid test of Christian love is how we treat one another in the thick of conflict, when relationships “collide.”

An old Chinese proverb reads: “If you are patient in one moment of anger, you will escape a hundred days of sorrow.”

The mark of maturity is when someone hurts you and you try to understand their situation instead of trying to hurt them back. This isn’t always an easy path. But if our souls are to ever heal, it is the road we must embrace.

In the midst of many conflicts and “collisions” of this life may our hearts be open to the medicine that mends the fabric of our lives.

Fr. Steven Labaire