

In Nazareth, Jesus teaches in the Synagogue. The people who have known him all of his life do not want to accept him. They have their preconceived notions of who he is and what he should say, and they are openly hostile to Jesus. “And they took offense at him” (Mk 6:3). Jesus is amazed at their lack of faith and is unable to perform any miracles in his hometown.

Jesus’s difficulties in communicating seem to be magnified in our own day and age amidst the pandemic. People are quick to take offense. Tempers seem to be very short and it takes very little conversation before a person feels a need to respond by rejecting another. Bishop Donald Hying of Madison, Wisconsin has noted that the unrest in civil society has entered into the Church as well.

Jesus calls us to unity. However, tensions are so high that we are very prone to division. You are either for me or against me. There seems to be no middle of the road where people can meet and peacefully discuss their differences. “Any words of moderation, actions of conciliation, benefit of the doubt given to another point of view, or attempt to find middle ground is dismissed as betrayal and disloyalty to the truth.”<sup>i</sup>

The pandemic affords us a wonderful opportunity to spend time in deeper prayer, to make sacrifices and to reach out to help our neighbors who are struggling. “Instead of pointing accusatory fingers at others, let’s point one at ourselves. How can I be more patient, kind, gentle, and compassionate to others, especially those I disagree with?” With this inward gaze, do not be surprised if you find room for personal growth. As we hear in the Letter to the Hebrews: “My son, do not disdain the discipline of the LORD or lose heart when reproved by him; for whom the LORD loves, he disciplines” (Heb 5b – 6a).

We live in very confusing times and it is often difficult to think clearly. I am reminded of the call of Samuel. He heard the voice of God calling in the quiet of the night, but he mistakenly thought he was being called by Eli. Each time he was called by the LORD, he misunderstood and time after time after time, he woke Eli up. After the third interruption to his sleep, Eli discerned what was happening and offered sound advice to Samuel. “Go to sleep, and if you are called, reply, ‘Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening’” (1 Sam 3:9).

To think straight, we need to listen to the LORD. Samuel did not know who the LORD was and so he made the same mistake time and again by waking Eli. Eli was wise enough to guide Samuel to listen to the LORD. Ironically, when Samuel lets the LORD speak, the LORD explained how displeased he was with Eli. Eli accepted the discipline of the LORD and did not lose heart. So, for as imperfect as Eli was, nevertheless he helped guide Samuel to the truth. Is there not a lesson for us as well? We too may learn and profit from the guidance of someone like Eli who is flawed and sinful.

Sometimes we can speak too quickly and too harshly. Good communication requires thought and reflection. Bishop Hying offers this wise advice. “Get off social media and get in front of the Blessed Sacrament. Stop watching so much news and start reading the Good News.” Or to echo Samuel once again: “Speak, LORD, for your servant is listening” (1 Sam 3:9).

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<sup>i</sup> MadisonDiocese.org Bishop Hying, Reflection on the Need for Unity in Christ