



Teaching the Way of Love

Parenting With the Heart of Christ

For all parents,
especially those
with small children.



There is no family that does not know how selfishness, discord, tension and conflict violently attack and at times mortally wound its own communion: hence there arise the many and varied forms of division in family life. But, at the same time, every family is called by the God of peace to have the joyous and renewing experience of "reconciliation," that is, communion reestablished, unity restored. In particular, participation in the sacrament of Reconciliation and in the banquet of the one Body of Christ offers to the Christian family the grace and the responsibility of overcoming every division and of moving towards the fullness of communion willed by God... "that they may be one."

~Familiaris Consortio #21

The holiest of families received more than their fair share of trials. Stop and consider the issues Mary, Joseph and Jesus had to face before and after our Savior's birth. First, Mary was found to be with child before she was married to Joseph and that almost caused him to call off the marriage. Then, Mary and Joseph were forced to leave town to be counted in the census even though Mary was close to her due date. Mary went into labor in Bethlehem and had to deliver her child in a barn because no one would welcome her into their home. If that wasn't enough, the king at that time had been told that Mary and Joseph's baby might be a threat. Thus, he plotted to kill the infant. The Holy Family was told to travel home using a different route. This took them into exile until the child became a toddler.

The conflicts for the Holy Family did not end there. As we all know, more conflicts and heartache were still ahead for this humble, God-fearing domestic church. What is most interesting is that the conflicts they experienced never stopped them from becoming who they are or from accomplishing what God wanted of them. Why? Because the Holy Family faced their conflicts and they trusted in the Lord's grace and mercy to sustain them in their trials.

Even though we don't want to admit it, every family will suffer. There will be days of stress and anger. There will be times of tears and heartache. There will be moments of frustration and anxiety. Believe it or not, current family research has shown that even the very happiest families will have approximately ten conflicts that they may never resolve! These conflicts may be minor like whose turn it is to change a diaper or major like how to pay the monthly bills. Any family wanting to model the Holy Family chooses to face each conflict and make a decision about it – even if the decision is to agree to disagree. This is very different than deciding to avoid the conflict.

Trusting in God's grace and mercy helps a family deal with conflicts. As you recall, each time that Mary and Joseph were faced with a major conflict, they received many messages from God telling them what to do. Mary and Joseph used their human reason to receive the messenger, listen to what was being sent, and then determine whether to follow the direction given or to cast it aside. In every case, Mary, Joseph and Jesus listened, thought about what God wanted and then made a decision with their free will to be obedient to Him. And, in every situation, their decision did not take them down the easiest path. In fact, each decision led them to personal sacrifice.

There is a lesson in this for parents. Doing what is right because you trust in God does not always feel good. In fact, doing what is right and good often leads to initial pain and heartache. But, obedience to God does result in goodness, truth and beauty in the end.

No one said that parenting would be easy. Yet, we can see that the Holy Family left us with a brilliant example of how to make it through the tough times of family life. They remained faithful to God's will, accepted their earthly sacrifices and worked through them with a human resolve that was fully supported by divine grace and mercy.

Conflict resolution skills help us to imitate the Holy Family in times of trouble. The methods of conflict resolution that are most effective include a system that can easily be followed. By learning and practicing a set of skills, parents will enhance their ability to respond to any crisis with wisdom and love. And, when these practical skills are coupled with God's grace, parents will find the solution that leads to the greatest good.

From the DVD (WATCH THE CLIP THAT CORRESPONDS WITH THIS SEGMENT.)

Know the distinction between _____ and _____.

Following a system makes conflict resolution _____.

Step one: _____

Step two: _____

Step four: _____

Step five: _____

Step six: _____

Step seven: _____

The key steps to effective course correction are:

Remain _____.

Be _____ not _____.

Be _____.

Continue the Discussion

Read and reflect on the following questions and examples.

1. Why do you think most people think it is better to avoid rather than face and solve a conflict?
2. How do differences vary from disagreements?
3. What techniques might a person use to stay calm in the face of a conflict with a spouse? With a child?
With a co-worker?
4. Listening to the other person's perspective is a major part of conflict resolution. What makes listening hard? What can make it easier?
5. What are the benefits of facing a conflict as soon as it happens?

Make a Plan

Becoming skilled at conflict resolution requires a hard look at oneself and determining how to stay calm and responsive when emotions are stirred. The activity that follows helps you to assess your ability to clearly see and address any conflict. Read each question and then select the response that best reflects what you do when a conflict arises. When you are finished, answer the reflection questions that follow.

How easy is it for you to...	Very Easy	Easy	Hard	Very Hard
Stay calm when there is a conflict?				
Listen attentively without thinking about what you are going to say next?				
See the issue from the other person's point of view?				
Focus on the behavior that caused the conflict and continue to show love to those involved?				
Ask for forgiveness when you have done something wrong?				
Give forgiveness when someone else has done something wrong?				
Share your concern when there is a conflict?				
Be firm, fair, and consistent during conflicts?				

What would make it easier for you to resolve conflicts?

Review your answers to the questions, in the previous table, focusing on those that you find **hard** or **very hard** to do. Then answer the following questions.

What can you do to change these behaviors so that they become easier?

What are you willing to do to make conflict resolution easier within your family?

How can prayer and reception of the Sacrament of Reconciliation help you face and resolve conflict in your family?

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