

KABALE CATHOLIC DIOCESE

# Reconciliation

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## The Day of Reconciliation among the Clergy

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"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

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## Input

### Introduction

I am humbled and at the same time grateful to the Bishop and to all those who attended the workshop we had in January on Ongoing Formation, for the opportunity for me to come back and to give an input on Forgiveness and Reconciliation. I am sure there are many here who are apprehensive, that what can possibly come out of a single talk to resolve year-old conflicts. On the one hand you are absolutely right. It would be naïve to imagine that one can possibly resolve conflicts just by giving a talk, without even getting to know them. On the other hand, just because we may not be able to resolve conflicts which have raged on for years or months does not mean that a meeting like this is a waste of time. Here is what we hope to gain in this input:

- 1) Create the desire to resolve the conflict. That alone is a great score
- 2) Create a more positive attitude towards the person who has hurt us.
- 3) Improve people's ability to resolve their conflict on their own.

What we are undertaking is something that is possible with the grace of God. We would therefore like to start by asking God's assistance. For the same reason, the talk and the sharing are only a small part of today's exercise. Later we are to celebrate the Sacrament of Reconciliation, the Eucharist, and finally we shall share a meal as brothers.

1. Conflict is part of life. Conflict is normal. It is the inevitable consequences of the fact that people who are unique individuals live together. As priests we often have to live in sort of community life. Usually this is with members who are not of your own choice. You are not likely to choose your parish priest or curate, or if you work in a department, those others who you will work with. In any community, even the healthiest community, tension is not totally avoidable. The early apostolic community is regarded as ideal. Yet very soon there were quarrels in it too; that the widows of the Greek converts were being disregarded in the distribution of food. Conflicts in a community are caused by several factors including:

## Basic facts about conflict

Conflict is part of life

It is the inevitable consequence of unique individuals living together

We have different likes and dislikes

Some of these can be contrary or even contradictory

We like different programs at TV

You like talking, I like my silence

You are generous to others, I like to economize

We have different backgrounds

We belong to different ethnic backgrounds, with a history of animosity

We speak different languages, and sometimes we don't understand each other

We do not choose our company sometimes. You do not choose your curate, or PP

Even in the best of communities conflicts are never lacking

The apostolic community lived in harmony, but only for a short time

Soon there were divisions over distribution of food, between Jews and Greeks

Think of the conflicts in the Church at Corinth

Or the conflicts in the Church in Galatia

Some causes of conflict in a community include

Personal problems

Clash of temperaments

Individual psychological difficulties

Difficult responsibilities

Unfulfilled interests, etc.

Because tensions are unavoidable they should not be denied

It is unhealthy to pretend that tensions do not exist when actually they do

We do not remove them by denying them

Rather, they surface unhealthy ways which damage the community

Hatred

Loneliness

Withdrawal

Seeking outside company

Drinking out of frustration

Slander which fuels further tensions,

Explosive anger

Tensions are not always negative

They are a necessary prelude to growth of a community, e.g. in the early Christian community

The resolution led to the creation of the ministry of deacons

It led to greater dedication to prayer by the apostles

When people resolve a misunderstanding they may develop strong bonds of friendship

Putting their ideas together may develop into better compound ideas

Acceptance of the differences enriches all of us; each has a unique contribution

Unity is strength. We can fight a common enemy more effectively when united

There is a good and bad way to resolve conflicts that arise in a community

- Bad ways lead to total division of the community
  - We can shut people off by making them conscious of their limitations
    - Fear
    - Egoism
    - Jealousy
    - Ineptness
  - Also acting in anger may not be helpful
- Healthier ways should lead to greater harmony and growth

In the process of community growth we can play one of three basic roles

- We can retard growth by sowing seeds of discord
  - Spreading rumors
  - Fueling jealousies
  - Not carrying out personal responsibilities
  - Complaining
- We may be inactive and harmless members adding little to the community growth
- We can play a positive role, and the purpose of this workshop is to see how to do that

## Forgiveness is difficult

Because of this fact some might be wondering what the use of this exercise is

- How can I presume to heal old wounds which have defied healing over a long time?
- Especially when there will not even be time to hear the individual woundedness
- How can a total stranger who never had the experience of hurt presume to help

People who have been deeply hurt know this too well

- You may have tried over and over again to forgive with no success
- You may have thought you had forgiven until you were starkly reminded of the pain
- Or it may be that against your will, you recoil from the very thought of dealing with a person

There are factors which render forgiveness even more difficult

- If the offender is not sorry for what they did, or does not show any form of contrition
  - When the offence was very grave
  - When the offence was done over and over again
  - When there are grim reminders of the offence
- When the damage is irreparable
  - Due to our particular character traits
- If we make as a precondition that the offender comes and asks for pardon
- If the offender has passed on
- When both parties believe that they were wronged and do not see their own mistakes

Why is forgiveness so difficult?

- Our pride or self-esteem is injured
- Our expectations or dreams are disappointed
- We have lost something very precious
- We feel hypocritical because we do not feel like forgiving
- We tend to judge others harshly, while we are ready to excuse our own wrong doings
- Lack of forgiveness betrays a lack of empathy on our part

## Forgiveness is important

Non-forgiveness has a negative impact on our own life

- We have a choice whether we want things to be bitter or better
- To forgive is to let the prisoner free, and to discover that the prisoner was me
- Conflicts are unpleasant. They rob us of our peace of mind
- We like one holding hot charcoal wanting to hit another; we only get burnt ourselves
- We can develop psychosomatic diseases
  - High blood pressure
  - Ulcers
  - Heart attacks and strokes
- Our hearts get hardened against human need
- We do spiritual harm to our hearts
  - We sin against the commandment of love
  - We cannot grow into intimacy with God who is love
  - We impede God's graces to ourselves
  - Forgiveness is a pre-condition to our own forgiveness Matthew 6:14-15
  - Not-forgiveness gives a way to the enemy (Ephesians 4:26)

We have chosen a vocation that demands of us to be an example to others

- We are constantly called on to guide us with divisions
- These people do not only listen to our words; they observe our actions as well
- We cannot give what we do not have
- We lack the moral authority to preach forgiveness
- This is a particular challenge in this year of Mercy and in this season of Lent and mercy

Unless we are ready to let go of offence, our celebration of the Eucharist remains hypocritical

- At the penitential rite we acknowledge our sinning against each other
- We ask each other for intercession
- The Word of God we hear constantly challenges us to forgiveness and love
- We lack the moral authority to preach on some texts unless we can forgive
- At the Our Father, we ask the Father to forgive us as we forgive those who hurt us
- Jesus reminds us that forgiveness is a pre-condition for his forgiveness of us
- We drink the blood of Jesus shed for us for the forgiveness of sins
- Our wishing each other peace is insincere if we hold grudges against each other
- We cannot fully enter into intimacy with Christ, if we reject an essential element of his message

Unforgiveness makes us like those who can't receive sacraments due to an illegitimate marriage

- It's because they have a sin they are not willing to give up
- Neither can we receive the Sacrament of Reconciliation unless we are willing to confess
- The same applies to the sacrament of the Eucharist

Not forgiving makes us stuck in our own past

- We can waste years living in bitterness
- We could live those years in joy if we forgave
- Forgiveness helps us to grow, giving us time to think good thoughts

## Forgiveness is possible

It is important that like grieving forgiveness has stages

Develop the desire to forgive

- We need to be convinced that it is good for us
- With this desire we can pray for the grace to let go of grudges
- We open ourselves to the assistance of God
- We can even pray for our enemies even if we do not love them with our feelings
- Keep in mind the fact that forgiveness is hard, but necessary

Have to deal with the feelings of anger and resentment

- Trying to pretend there are not there is no solution
- One way of dealing with these is through empathy
- Try to see the situation of heart from the other's point of view
  - Understanding can restructure our cognition
  - Often when we understand the other resentment goes
    - e.g. get to know their sorrows
    - or circumstances of their upbringing
    - or their motivation in hurting us
- Try to see the likeable aspects of the other person; what their friends see
- Try to recall that the insult does not totally exhaust who the other is

Know that forgiveness is a process, more than a destination

- We should not expect miraculous or immediate results
- This knowledge helps us not to give up even when we feel resentment well up

Do good to the offender even if against your own will

- Exodus 23:4-5 help an enemy's ox or donkey
- Do not rejoice in the misfortunes of your enemy
- These things you may not do with sentiments of love
- Learn the gospel wisdom of disarming enemies by loving them

Recall that forgiveness does not really require you to forget

- It is not in our power to control what we remember and what we forget
- But it is in our power not to act according to the dictates of our memories

Try to see your own contribution to the offence

- You may have some share in the blame which up to now you did not own
- If there is a mistake you made have the courage to say "I am sorry"
- It is amazing how our own contrition can disarm the enemy
- "Whatever irritates us about others may be key to understanding ourselves" Jung

Try to perceive the opportunity in the problem

- This may be an invitation to grow in tolerance
- Or you may be enriched by a different world view

Refrain from any actions of revenge

- Try not to gain sympathy by telling the injury to others
- Resist the temptation to rejoice in the misfortunes of the enemy

## Discussion questions

1) Reflect on the meaning of the following text of Scripture

"Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

2) Reflect on the meaning of the following scripture text:

"If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or a tax collector" (Matthew 18:15-18).

3) Reflect on the iv, v, and vii spiritual works of mercy and their challenge to us in this year of mercy:

- i. To instruct the [ignorant](#);
- ii. To counsel the [doubtful](#);
- iii. To [admonish sinners](#);
- iv. To bear wrongs patiently;
- v. To forgive offences willingly;
- vi. To comfort the afflicted;
- vii. To [pray](#) for the living and the [dead](#).

## Homily

We have stated that one of the ways of reconciliation is getting to know the other's point of view

This can bring about a cognitive restructuring

We begin to see the good in the other's point of view

We also may look at ourselves and begin to see what is erroneous

Let us place ourselves in the shoes of the opponents of Jesus we heard of in the gospel reading

They did not believe he was the Messiah

Yet he claimed to be much more than a Messiah

This seemed to want to deliberately provoke them

They were not in a frame of mind to see truth

When we look at the same gospel reading with eyes of faith, we see something totally different

We are filled with awe with what Jesus is revealing about himself

We are filled with marvel at his courage and boldness in the face of opposition

We are amazed at the love of God which makes him bend so low for our salvation

Jesus' enemies would have converted if they tried to see Jesus with empathy

We are invited to look with new eyes at the people who have hurt us