

Sunday, September 10, 2023

#Homily by Father Karl Daigle

23rd Sunday in Ordinary Time

Cycle A-2023

Historically, intelligence has been viewed through the lens of IQ and academic success. More recently, it has come to be viewed from a wider perspective. We have come to the realization that there are different types of intelligence, and all have an important place within the human family. For example, some people are whizzes with technology. Others are brilliant with their hands or with tools and machinery. While others are experts in business and administration. I personally believe that the most important form of intelligence is the knowledge and experience of God and His will. It is for this reason we came into existence. It is this form of intelligence that has the power to save our eternal souls.

Since the Great Commandment is to love God and love others, the next most important form of intelligence is people and relational skills. When it comes to this form of intelligence, we often are guided by what seems natural or instinctual to us or how we have been influenced by family, peers, and culture. Since Relational Intelligence is so essential in life and in faith, it should not be left to chance or our personal whims. We are called to intentionally and continually develop our people skills. It will simultaneously help us to grow in our union with God and others.

We can do this in two important ways. First, we can allow our people skills to be practically influenced by the teachings and example of Jesus Christ, the Sacred Scriptures, and our Catholic faith. Second, we can do this by learning from other people. We can do this through personal observation, conversations, and through books, articles, and videos. It is important that we learn and develop healthy and holy ways of dealing with other people. It is not a sign of weakness for this to be a growing edge in our lives. It is a sign of humility that we recognize that there can always be more positive and Christian ways of interacting with other people, especially when it comes to conflict.

In our Gospel reading, Jesus gives us some insight into how the early church handled conflict. I believe a couple of things are relevant to our own personal relationships. In the early church, people were encouraged to go directly to the person who had offended or sinned against them. How often do we do everything but that? We brood over real or perceived offenses. We talk to everyone about it but the person in question. I understand that this can be an overwhelming thought. We may have a strong aversion to conflict. We fear the other person's response. We are concerned that we may lose control of our emotions.

Before approaching the person, it would be good to talk to the One person we often forget to talk to in these types of situations. I am talking about God. We can ask Jesus to help us to reflect on the entire situation with greater clarity of perspective. We can ask Him if we are truly seeing the situation objectively and correctly. We can reflect on whether there is any way that we intentionally or unintentionally contributed to or caused the situation. We can ask Jesus to give us the right words and to say them in the right way, with the right attitude, and at the right time.

Since it is natural for someone to become defensive when approached about a problem, possessing a good bedside manner is essential. Once someone's defense shields are fully activated, it is nearly impossible to have a productive conversation. To use the words of Jesus elsewhere it is like throwing "pearls before swine." It will not get through. It will fall on deaf or even adversarial ears.

How we phrase our concerns is also crucial. Instead of blasting or accusing the other person, it is good to take ownership of our own thoughts and feelings. It is helpful to say something like, "When you said this or did that, this is how I took it, and this is how it made me feel." Then, we need to have the humility to respectfully engage in the back and forth that may take place. Ideally, both parties truly listen to each other, learn from the exchange,

admit fault, and ask pardon as needed. Even though success is not assured, the probability of a favorable outcome is more likely to occur with this approach.

Many of us instinctually see this self-controlled approach as a form of weakness. Along the way, we have picked up the notion that just telling other people like it is, always laying the blame on them, and a refusal to reconcile is a sign of strength that provides us with a deep sense of satisfaction. From a Christian perspective, these things are an expression of weakness because, as St. Paul would contend, we are operating in the flesh. We are simply living on our instincts, ego, and personal preferences and not living in the Spirit. This approach requires nothing of us. There is no grace and strength in that. The truth is that a self-controlled and respectful approach reflects a deeply personal and spiritual core. It expresses a sacrificial love for God and the other person. It is a necessary form of dying to self.

In the early church, if the one-on-one approach did not work out, the next step involved the inclusion of a third party. In my priestly experience, sometimes the relational dynamics between people or families can become so bitter and toxic that it becomes impossible to navigate the path of reconciliation by themselves. A third party is an objective person or group of people that can help facilitate the reconciling process. They do this by providing every person the opportunity to share their side of the story. They can also assist by asking questions, providing examples and personal testimony, and addressing inconsistencies and exaggerations that may come to light.

Navigating relational conflict requires a superabundance of humility and an openness of spirit. That can be a very daunting task, but it is not impossible if we are willing to put in the hard work with the help of God. The humility required brings to mind a scene from the movie "What Dreams May Come." A married couple was at a crossroads in their relationship. In a moment of grace, they were finally able to communicate with one another in a civil manner. The wife shared what she had learned through their conflict. Her pearls of great price were: "Sometimes when you win, you lose. And sometimes, when you lose, you win." Growth in #PeopleIntelligence involves the awareness that in relationships, winning does not always mean being right, having the last word, or always getting your way. We live into the epiphany that winning really involves mutual love and respect, listening and learning from each other, working together, and having the humility to say: "I am sorry," "I forgive you," "I was wrong," "I will strive to "be" and to "do" better."

Please listen closely. If we have done everything we could to reconcile with someone in a loving and sincere manner, and our gesture is not received, we can have a peaceful conscience before God. We have done our part. All we can do is prayerfully give the situation and the person over to the loving mercy of God.

Since the love of God and others is so interconnected, growth in relational intelligence is simultaneously growth in #GodIntelligence. That makes us the most intelligent people on the face of the earth!

Why? It more fully unites us with Jesus Christ and other people!

Why? It contributes to our eternal salvation! As friends and followers of Jesus, we are called to go from a Bachelor's degree to a Master's to a Ph.D. when it comes to relational and people intelligence. We are meant to mature and advance in the art of love as we seek to imitate the love of our Heavenly Father, manifested through Jesus Christ our Lord. Remember, Jesus not only said, "Love your neighbor as yourself." He also proclaimed, "Love one another as I have loved you."

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