

Father Dave's Weekly Homily

09/04/11 23 A

-- Some years ago, a family was driving through a small town. As they drove, they saw a church with the sign *First United Missionary Church*. A couple of blocks later in the very same town they saw a slightly different looking church with the sign *Second United Missionary Church*. The father who was driving the car remarked to his family *That's what happens when 2 or 3 followers of Christ gather together.*

-- I know what he means, and the Catholic Church has not been exempt. The parish I pastored before coming here broke off from the Catholic Church up the block over a dispute about language and culture in the mid 19th century.

-- Yes, the Church—as one wise person said—is like Noah's ark: You can't stand the stench inside except for the storm outside. Conflict has been a part of God's Church since the Jerusalem Christians argued over how the Greek widows were being treated in comparison to Hebrews.

-- It's in the nature of human beings, when in close quarters together, to grate against one another. Jesus knew that; so did Matthew. So our gospel gives us some guidelines for dealing with times when we are hurt by our fellow humans, and especially fellow Church members.

-- The first step is to talk to the person who hurt you. Don't go to all your friends and gab about it. Go to that person. It's simple, yet at the same time often difficult. If you need to, take some time to calm down first, but don't put it off too long.

-- I can remember when someone called me because she was offended by the behavior of a member of my staff in a previous parish. I asked if she had talked to him, telling her to come back to me if there was still a problem. She said she had not yet, but had wondered whether I thought she should. She talked to him and, evidently, that resolved the issue.

-- Sometimes that doesn't work. Then, it is taken to the next level. Those in the military and other highly organized institutions are familiar with

the “chain of command.” Parishes aren’t the military, but there are levels of responsibility we should respect here as in other areas of life.

-- As Jesus said, when all means have been exhausted, we may have to exercise some community discipline on an offender. But even then, remember how Jesus treated so-called “Gentiles and tax collectors”?

-- He didn’t simply shun them. He still maintained a relationship with them, trying to bring them back to God’s people. And he was far more effective than some of the religious elite of his day who would simply isolate those people.

-- Why should we follow these steps the gospel sets out for us?

Organizations like the military follow their chain of command for the sake of good order.

-- While that may be a factor for the Church, the main reason is that it is a sign of love. That is what Saint Paul speaks of in our 2nd reading: The greatest debt we owe to each other is to love one another.

-- And the true test of that love comes when we bump heads with each other, and how we deal with it. Venting with our buddies or burying the hurt does not show genuine love. Authentic love may involve a type of confrontation—but one not motivated by anger or self-righteousness.

-- Sure, that can be difficult at times. Most of us don’t enjoy this type of confrontation. Many who do turn it into an exercise in self-satisfaction. But the true Christian sees this as an opportunity to put love into action.

-- God did not establish a Church community thinking it would be free of conflict. But the true test of an authentic Church community is whether it deals with conflict in love.

-- How do we stack up????