

HOMILY 23RD SUNDAY Ordinary Time
September 6, 2020

A friend of mine was relaying an experience he had while driving shortly after it happened. He was driving on a road that had two lanes going in each direction. He was driving in the right lane and he was going the speed limit. Someone came up behind him and was clearly upset because he was only going the speed limit. He could not get around him because of the line of cars in the left lane. The car began to follow him very closely. He did not like the fact that he was tailgating so he decided to tap the brakes. This caused the car behind him to swerve into the other lane. Fortunately, there was a gap in the line of cars so he did not hit anyone, but he did not stay in the other lane. He got back behind my friend and started following him even more closely. My friend stepped on the brakes again and the car behind him ran into the back of him 4 times before they finally stopped. They both got out of the car and started yelling at each other and the other driver reacted by leaving the scene. My friend said, “legally the accident is not my fault.” He asked me, “What would have been a less self destructive but equally satisfying way to respond rather than hitting the brakes when I was tailgated?” Yikes!

All three readings today are about loving our neighbor and the responsibilities we have as Christians to help one another. In the first reading, the Lord tells Ezekiel that he has the responsibility to speak to someone when they are doing something wrong. We have that responsibility to someone, but remember it always must be done with love. First of all, you have to make sure you pick the right time. I did talk to my friend but he was still very upset at

the time we started the conversation, so I had to talk him down first. Acknowledge that the other guy was really being a jerk. Let him know that I understood why he did what he did, but eventually we got to the point where I said it is best to just ignore the guy and he probably would have just gone away. The satisfying part is that he would have avoided all the damage to the rear end of his car. Now this was a relatively easy conversation, but some are more difficult. Sometimes there is an elephant in the room that is tearing your family or your friendship apart and no one is willing to talk about it. Remember offer help with love. “I have been watching you suffer because of this addictive behavior and it is hard for me to watch because I love you. I will do anything I can to help you.” “I think there is a misunderstanding going on here and it is really bothering me because I love you and value your friendship. Can we talk about it?” “You seem to be struggling with your business and may be having financial problems. I would love to help you in any way I can.” The person may be irritated, but they will not stay irritated for long if you say it with love. The person may have been just waiting for someone to offer to help them.

In the second reading, we hear that we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. That means treating everybody with respect. That means the guy that is driving behind you and tailgating and acting like a jerk. That is the person on social media that you can blast in a way that is pretty anonymous. That is the person that just stepped on your last nerve when they sent that most recent text. That means the person that is having a really bad day at the Post Office and decides to take it out on you. Take a deep breath and treat them with love and respect. Love can stop the cycle of anger.

The Gospel reading tells us that when we have a conflict with someone, we have the responsibility to attempt to reconcile and heal. If someone sins against you, first of all you need to go to him alone. Frequently when we are hurt, we tell everyone else except the person that hurt us. And Jesus tells us that the person who was sinned against needs to initiate the conversation. Sometimes we are reluctant to say something because we believe we did nothing wrong. In my friend's story with the road rage, my friend was not legally responsible for the accident, but was he without guilt? In most conflicts between two people, both played a role.

We have the responsibility to speak. We have the responsibility to treat everyone with respect. We have the responsibility to try to reconcile and heal. And it always needs to be done with love. That is what it means to be Christian.