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Minnesota Catholic



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Christian Wisdom for the Holiday Season



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The holiday season brings the comfort of seeing familiar faces, long lasting family rituals, and, of course, unresolved family drama. Many people come to me seeking counsel for navigating a perpetual difference with a family member or conflicts that get swept under the rug. Is it the Christian's duty to just put on that happy face and pretend like we enjoy each other's company? Let's turn to Christ for inspiration for navigating family dynamics during the holidays.

“Why do you notice the splinter in your brother’s eye, but do not perceive the wooden beam in your own eye? How can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove that splinter from your eye,’ while the wooden beam is in your eye? You hypocrite, remove the wooden beam from your eye first; then you will see clearly to remove the splinter from your brother’s eye” (Matthew 7:3-5).

Before we can seek reconciliation with another family member, it is always important that we do an inventory of our own sin, faults, and failures first. It is easy for us to see the world's problems, but we often have a blind eye to our role in a given conflict. How often do I see someone excuse his or her faults “because he/she made me do it!” Think about how we are often more open to reconciliation when the other person leads with “I am sorry” versus a critical jab.

“Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, ‘Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?’ Jesus answered, ‘I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times’” (Matthew 18:21).

The need for forgiveness implies that there is some debt that is owed to you from the other person. Christ follows Peter's question in the Gospel with the parable of the unmerciful servant. In the parable, the Master forgives a servant of a large debt, but the servant is harsh with someone else who owes him a smaller amount. Christ reminds us that we have a large debt to the Father that can't be repaid, but we are called to be merciful with others around us when they may have caused frustration.

This doesn't mean we have to ignore that the offenses have occurred. In the parable, the Master is intentional about the amount of debt he is forgiving. This is a radical difference from being reactive and harsh to just plain ignoring the debt. I guide people every day who have a strongly-held point of view to choose another view with the intention to understand and repair. Part of repairing a relationship is being willing to hear each other's story without judgment. Christ modeled being able to eat and dine with sinners (Luke 15:1-2). I am sure he did not agree with some of their lifestyle choices. Christ showed that we must first connect with someone before we challenge or correct them.



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