

## **The Gift of Communication**

Homily of September 4, 2005

by Fr. Aidan McAleenan

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What things do we need to sustain life, just to live every day? (Answers from the congregation are: Food, water, shelter, love, and relationships).....yes others? Divine grace .... Absolutely! We also need relationships, don't we? We need one another. And it's so easy to love when somebody has been really good to us. (To congregation/assembly "Patrick when Carolina has been really good to you, bringing you your breakfast in bed, it's very easy to love her, isn't it? .... Did you get breakfast this morning in bed? .No?... Oh, NEXT Sunday!) It's so easy to love when the other, the beloved, loves you back. Isn't it? You know you have all those warm, wonderful feelings. Where it becomes really difficult to love is when the other person hurts us or does something wrong.

The gospel today speaks directly to our need to communicate and communicate well, this particular part of the gospel is sometimes referred to as the "community rule book" for the early Church and indeed for us. When we have people gathered together, you are going to have great joys and also communication problems, even in the Church. We have issues even in our own lives because this particular gospel can either be talking about the bigger Church or it can be talking about our individual lives and our individual communication styles.

Now we all learn communication from where? Where do you learn your communication style? Yes, we learn our communication styles from our parents. Most of the time, our parents learned from their parents and it goes on and on back. So we don't always have really great communication styles. For example, if you and I have a big fight (We could have a fight over this homily afterwards. OK?) and you could be just scrunching your face up at me and I'm looking at you and we could just get really angry with one another. And afterwards, we could have a big fight outside. And, if I come out all fired up and you're all fired up and I go over and say, "What was wrong with you? Why were you doing that to me?" I'm aggressive. I'm angry. That is not a good way to communicate with somebody. But if I go out to you afterwards and I say, "You know, I felt distressed and unsure when I saw you make faces during my homily and I was wondering what was going on for you," all of a sudden the lines of communication are a lot more open than if I do it the other way. So, often times in life, that happens to a lot of us. Our ability to communicate can be improved and depending on our awareness of our communication style we can re-learn and better our relationships by improving our communication style. Nine times out of ten, if you go and communicate in a non-attacking open way the issue will be resolved. You don't have to take the next step of bringing in a second or third witness, as gospel prescribes, because the other person hears or has heard your feelings or concerns. Paul tells us

today that communication “in the spirit of love and truth” is the answer to all the commandments. If you operate by that principle, it (your communication with the ones you love and others), will be successful.

But if it is not successful in the first instance what do you do next, what is the next step? The gospel is telling us, in a very practical and juridical way, you need to take the next step. You need to work it out because the goal is reconciliation, keeping the lines of communication open. And, so, for a lot of us, if you think of arbitration, lawyers or counselors that act as the third party or witness, then you can identify with the gospels second action when the first action is not successful. I have seen this second action played out in a very powerful way. We have a rule in our Church about divorce, (there was somebody here last night, and I knew her story of divorce, and as I told this, afterwards I reflected on it and realized she might be a little bit hurt because of I was talking about Retrouville and saving a marriage. She had lost her marriage. Yes, we have this rule that says marriage is forever in the Church, but some marriages are just not save-able. They're irretrievably broken. There is an organization in the Catholic Church called “Retrouville.”

Last year, I went to this Retrouville weekend. Forty-five couples from around Northern California whose marriages are at “This is the last moment to save this marriage.” We came together Friday night, when you could feel, among the couples, the chill in the air. It was chilling and when they first arrived the chairs were set together but they separated them. They made it really obvious. “We're not loving one another and we are here to try to fix this but I don't know....” But, as the priest told his story about reconciliation and learning how to communicate better, as the peer ministers talked, the lead couple shared about their terrible marriage history, (I lived and worked in the Tenderloin, and I worked with homeless people and I thought I had heard everything, but their marriage was horrible!) and really what it said to the people was “If (you hear) their story.....” (I can't tell you any of theirs because it was confidential, but it was really bad.) The thing about it was if their marriage was fix-able, if they could learn how to communicate effectively, if they could talk about it from the heart prospective, if they learned to communicate, then you could too. And out of those forty-five couples, only one split over the weekend. Over those few days (we discussed) these simple, simple rules that we should learn at the earliest parts of our lives, that we don't always learn. To see the couples just coming together, it was very, very powerful. And by the Sunday morning, the chairs were back together. Arms were around one another and they had to go through workshops and writing assignments like “Why do I want to live?,” “Why do I want to take another day with you?” The guys were in one room and the women were in another. I was with the guys and every one of those guys was crying, because he had to search his soul. And let's admit it, we guys are not really good with the whole emotion stuff, but you know, when it comes to a last ditch effort like this.... And so, through arbitration, by learning basic communication skills these people were brought together. We can learn even at the last minute to reach out and get help with our communication style.

This Biblical passage is so pragmatic. It's about reconciliation and keeping the lines open, even to the extent when the other person doesn't want to. You go to the Church. It's just taking it up

to different levels. We call it “excommunication.” In our Church it’s been used quite a few times, but the goal is never to just push the person out totally. Its always to have that hand out. These rules always have to be, as Paul talks about, “with truth and love and reconciliation.” The ultimate goal is reconciliation. And we can all learn from that. There are ways to learn. We can own our own stuff. Do we all know our communication styles? Nobody knows their communication style in this Church. Wow! Do we have problems! We have to own what is going on in our own lives. We have to know and then we have to own what it is and then we have to do something about it. That’s probably an extra rule that you could add into it right at the very beginning, before you go to somebody else.

So, it’s about good communication, and I don’t care if you’re five years old or if you’re ninety-five years old, you can learn good or better communication, and always be better at it, be more loving, be more caring.

All of the elements that we talked about, (at the beginning of the homily) shelter, water, the things that sustain us in life, food, ....Our brothers and sisters on the Gulf Coast do not have those this weekend. I got an e-mail from friends who got out before the hurricane hit N.O. I’m sure there are quite a few people who have connections to people over there on the Gulf Coast. Already we have inquiries at the school from people living in the area who will be housing evacuees, wanting kids of these families to go to our school for a short while.

Today, we are going to take our second collection that would go to Religious Education, and the Pastoral Team has decided that it will go to victims of Hurricane Katrina, and yes the budgets will be hurt in our Religious Education, but they need it more than we need it. So, we’re going to communicate our love, our care, and our hope for these people by putting our hands in our pockets, by praying for them, and sending love.

(Fr. Aidan holding up a flyer for Give.org....Catholiccharities.org and a list of earthquake supplies) You can go to Give.org on the Internet. The is the Better Business Bureau website that gives you a list of all sorts of ways to donate, of reputable organizations. Christ the King, through the Diocese and Catholic Chariities U.S.A., ask us to make your checks payable to Christ the King with the notation "Hurricane Katrina Relief"

We have all seen the coverage on the T.V. One sticks out in my mind. The young man wearing a yellow Tshirt holding his baby and a toddler holding to him....crying that he tried to hold his wifes hand...and she told him..."let me go ...hold on to the babies." The man never saw his wife again...and he stood there in tears holding the children.... How devastating...how painful!

Let us help!

We can also help ourselves. We are in earthquake country. Who felt the ‘89 earthquake? Were we prepared for ‘89? No, we were not. I was only here a few years. I was sitting on Market

Street in a little open air cafe, with this friend of mine from London, and she stood up and screamed, and I said, "Sit down and shut up. It's just an earthquake." She went back to London the next week. She didn't like being here, because the ground shook. But I was an administrator of a homeless facility in the Western Addition of San Francisco and I didn't even think to have to go all the way back to the facility. Later I realized that we were not prepared. The building front walls had cracked and fallen off and the residents were very frightened. We were not prepared! We saw the devastation of that occurred in the Bay Area....we need to be ready for the next earthquake.

So, here's a simple list. We need to be prepared for the next "big one." We can take care of other people. Yes, we can pray for them. We can give money. But we need to all be very pragmatic and our communications, what the gospel talks about today, but also taking care of ourselves and our own families, having water, it says here for 72 hours. But you know what? We can see that it's more than 72 hours before the government comes. So let's prepare for the reality of several more days with out food or water or medical supplies.

Let us all remember that the disaster in the Gulf coast ninety thousand square miles, the size of Britain. So let's not beat up on the government too much. Let's learn from the mistakes collectively. It's absolutely devastating and they're (government) there now. And let's pray that these people get what they need from what we do and what our government does together. But we also can do a lot for ourselves because we live in earthquake country and we need to be ready. So, on the back of this sheet that I have prepared which I just took off the Internet...earthquake preparedness information. (You can go searching for this information on the net.) we can see all of the simple steps to be ready ourselves. So, in a spirit of love, communication, keeping our lines of communication open, let us give thanks to our God and let us stand and pray together.