

Spirituality for Today

Family Peace Begins with Patience

August 12, 2015
by Father John Catoir

Families are made up of fighters, compromisers, sore losers, and problem solvers. Are you a fighter for your rights or a compromiser; a sore loser, or a problem solver?

A fighter refuses to lose; a compromiser gives in, but ultimately may forfeit too much for the sake of peace; a sore loser walks away sulking, but a problem solver listens. Listening enables you to get at the root of the conflict to reach a peaceful resolution. Problem solvers know that the art of compromise rests on the well proven principle that a win-win solution is indeed possible. With patience, a good strategy, and the help of God, all things are possible.

Professional arbitrators know that if you listen to all sides, with sincere interest, the conflict has a way of resolving itself. Why not apply these professional standards to family spats? A good plan begins with the idea that each party has a point of view, and a right to have his or her reasonable needs met.

Write it down: “1.) Your right to meet your needs is equal to my right to have my needs met; 2.) No one has an absolute right to have all their needs met.” When disciplining children, everyone must respect the Bible mandate, namely, that the rights of parental authority are superior to the rights of the children. Nevertheless, listening respectfully to each child’s arguments will always be wiser than asserting full parental authority immediately.

In conflicts involving adults never start out by demanding that others give up their right to meet personal needs. Any assumption that rejects a reasonable presentation of all sides of the arguments is doomed to fail.

Here are some steps to take, one at a time:

1. Define the problem clearly. Put it in writing. Let all the parties agree on exactly what the issue is, and what needs are in conflict?. Listening will often generate solutions.
2. Brainstorm for more solutions; share ideas, make no judgments as people voice their ideas. Just put all the options on the table, and look at them without criticism.
- 3 Choose the most creative solutions, keeping in mind that some things cannot be compromised, like the laws of God, and the laws of legitimate civil authority.
4. Select the solution that gets the most support, and then implement it. Later, follow up to see that all promises are kept. Everyone may not get exactly what they want, but compromises can make the resolution more palatable.

Just having a plan of action often diffuses the emotional heat before the arguments escalate. Conflict is normal, and family conflicts are commonplace. Each person has differing needs, and when one person’s needs, at any given age, are not being met, there is usually a lot of frustration, which leads to emotional flare-ups. The way we control ourselves has much to do with the virtue of patience. We need to pray for the virtue of patience. Charity begins at home, with lots of patience.

We all have attitudes, which often govern our behavior toward others. Some arguments are more about underlying assumption, than about the issue at hand. There are an infinite variety of conflicts arising from hidden assumptions, like “I’m older than you”, or “Father is always right” “Kids should always conform”.

Whether the conflict is in a family, a factory, or a monastery: keep cool, and remember that a win-win solutions is possible.