

Others won't help? Ask God.

"Our Lord's famous teaching, "Judge not, that ye be not judged" speaks to the frustration that rises within us when others don't do what we want them to do. Angrily, we judge and condemn and say things like, "You are so selfish! Why don't you listen to me or at least compromise? Why does it always have to be your way? You need help!"

Well, maybe so, but the one whose will has been thwarted is also in need of help. One of my good friends recently made this pithy statement: "If 'no' is not a legitimate answer, then yours was not a legitimate question!" So true. "No" can be a perfectly good and righteous response to a request. But boy does it make people mad at times. Just recently I finished a semester of teaching and posted grades. A number of students (and parents!) asked if I would "improve" the grade the student earned. When I said "no," what response do you think I got? It was not all sweetness and light!

In my opinion, a watermark of spiritual growth is the level of equanimity we maintain when we are told "no." Our life of faith teaches us that all will be well. So when we don't get our way, our faith is put to the test. Is everything still going to be OK? Sure it is. How can we know that? Because God will get us what we need, even when others don't cooperate. At times, we will not get what we think we need, but we will have divine help to sustain us as we do without. Either way, we win.

But what do we do when the other person is being stubborn and is so obviously in need of correction? Well, Jesus taught us to take it by faith that we ourselves have blind spots and irritating characteristics that others too have to bear with—so why should we not bear with theirs? "And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me cast out the mote out of thine eye; and lo, the beam is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye." (Mt 7:3)

It being the case that we cannot see the beam in our own eye (like maybe never on



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this side of heaven), it surely will be quite some time before we are then free to "help" with the mote that is in someone else's eye. Hmmm. Then what are we to do about their aggravating ways?

At this point Jesus gives a teaching that is truly hard to digest. He said, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before the swine, lest haply they trample them under their feet, and turn and rend you." (Mt 7:6) What? Is Jesus calling those we are aggravated with dogs and swine? That seems to reinforce our own convictions! That's not what He means. Jesus' usual way of teaching is by making a surprising comparison. In this case, Jesus makes the point that we would not give a religious object (a Bible perhaps) to a feed a dog, nor would we give jewels to feed pigs (since those things are not edible for them and will only create indifference or aggravation) so, in the same way, we are not to give our "holy corrections" to others IF THEY AREN'T ASKING FOR THEM.

That is the point. Unless we are in a God-given place of authority to correct others (parent, teacher, supervisor) it is just not our business to try to straighten-out other people. The only time that is appropriate is if THEY ASK US for counsel or correction. And frankly, people who are humble enough to seek out correction from others are probably are in a better place spiritually than we who are only too ready to dispense our "pearls" of wisdom.

Yes, but what are we to DO? For none of us like to sit idly by when aggravated with others. Jesus gives two more directions in succession. "Ask, and it shall be given you; seek, and ye shall find; knock, and it shall be opened unto you: for every one that asketh receiveth; and he that seeketh findeth; and

to him that knocketh it shall be opened." (Mt 7:7)

This teaching from Jesus, giving us the certainty that what we seek from God will in fact be given, holds two thoughts. One, when convinced that someone needs straightening-out, rather than taking matters into our own hands (which won't work anyway), we ask, seek, and "knock" at God's door for Him to deal with that person. And the promise is that He will. Our role is to wait and keep trusting. This takes faith, of course. Is God really active over all things or not?

The second aspect of this promise is that the things we need or want from others (which they so rudely refused!) will be taken care of by God. God will be our sufficiency.

Finally, Jesus sums up the matter in what we call the Golden Rule. "All things therefore whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, even so do ye also unto them: for this is the law and the prophets." (Mt 7:12) Jesus gently but firmly turns the whole matter of our being aggravated onto ourselves. "Why spend your energy aggravated with others? Your heavenly Father has selected to take care of your concerns. You can trust Him, even when the way is dark. Instead, why not spend your energy in divine love, doing for others the very things you would like them to do for you?"

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