

Prior to the change in the dismissal a few years ago, Mass typically ended with the words “Go in Peace.” And while today we use a slightly different translation, going in peace is really still a primary aim of the Mass. Being nourished by the Body and Blood of our Lord, and hearing His word, ideally we grow closer to Him and one another and leave Mass in a better condition to be a people of peace, love and mercy.

Unfortunately, as we all know sometimes that just does not happen. We squabble. We bicker. We get angry. Sometimes by the time we’re in the parking lot the kids are fighting and we can be angry about the traffic waiting to turn. And sadly, sometimes it gets even worse. For there are some people who can become so engrained in an endless cycle of sin that it never seems to get better, and what can happen is a person becomes blind to the sins they are committing, and those impacted by their actions become jaded or numb so that the peace they would like seems impossible to find.

This can be especially true in family situations. While we all have just a touch of dysfunction, in some you have situations where siblings don’t talk, where parents did not live up to their vocation, and there is anger or even

worse, abuse. And while it can shatter a person's life, what would happen if rather than holding onto anger or resentment, a person tried to change a situation with love?

In a story about her mother, Delores Liesner, who is a Christian writer, speaker and columnist, recalls a day that began with so much pain as memories came flooding back, but ended with a changed attitude and relationship between her and someone who seemed so cruel, her mother.

Driving in the car with her granddaughter and her mother, her granddaughter detected something was wrong. She asked her if she was okay. But Delores knew her granddaughter was seeing through the pain she had thought was well hidden.

As they drove into the dusty little town, Delores silently reviewed the call that began an inner prompting to revisit her past, and her granddaughter's willingness to leave her job for several days so she did not have to make the visit unaccompanied.

Delores had a tough childhood; she doesn't specify if it was abusive, but it was clear there was intense emotional pain. Her mother had been largely absent from her adult life. But, after a dinner out celebrating Delores' birthday, she preceded her husband into the house as he parked the car and heard the answering machine in his office beeping that they had a message. Automatically, Delores stepped into the dark room, pressed "play" and then gasped when she heard the familiar but thready voice signing "Happy Birthday...dear daughter." That was all. The clock and "end of messages" notification from the answering machine left her standing in mute shock.

Ken came in, alarmed to find Delores frozen to the spot, staring at the answering machine with her arms wrapped around herself. He asked her if it was bad news, and held his wife to comfort her. As she played the message again, she asked "why now, after all these years?"

Continuing to hold his wife, he prayed for her. He'd known her story and married her despite all the "baggage" as she called it that she brought into their relationship. He had been her protective knight through traumatic visits and volatile "episodes." As time slapped by, she thought she had

grown immune to the painful memories, yet here Delores was, years later, trembling in fear from the sound of her past. Still a feeling grew. Delores knew she needed to go. Perhaps her call meant there was hope. Ken's prayer relit a faith in Delores that believed God would lead her every step of the way.

Her mom's doctor confirmed there had been occasional losses of memory dementia; and while this might cause her mother to forget the past, Delores resolved that before it got worse, she would need to visit her mother. Her granddaughter Aimee joined her so she would not be on the trip alone.

Weeks later, as they passed the familiar sign announcing her hometown, she was disappointed with herself for feeling 11 years old again, and allowing her granddaughter to see memories she thought had been left behind now roaring over her.

She apologized to her granddaughter saying she didn't expect it to hit her like that. Clearly she needed to "refuel" spiritually before she could make the visit.

They spent the night nearby. The “fixer” in Delores was clamoring. “What should I do? What should I say?” She thought. She felt so responsible to cleanse all the past, when she didn’t even know how much of it her mom would remember. But, as she dropped onto the blue easy chair in the corner, the book fell open to the marker left from a recent Bible study, the yellow highlighting on the page ironically announcing the little phrase without words. Delores knew instantly that was her answer. She did not have to say anything; she just had to be there. She quietly chuckled at God’s sense of humor. Now that would be a miracle. She was stunned at the simplicity, but was filled with peace because she knew God would enable it to happen. Once the choice was made, she slept peacefully, and morning came quickly.

When they arrived at her mother’s home, together, Aimee and Delores helped an unexpectedly quiet and subdued little woman to shuffle behind the walker they folded into the trunk of the car and began their journey.

Delores purposefully planned more than a day would hold, hoping there would be no empathy opportunity for an “episode.” They visited some new restaurants for meals between little drives across the countryside,

ostensibly to show her granddaughter where Delores grew up and went to school. It was treacherous emotional territory, and much small talk in the car. There were no life-changing conversations or heavenly reconciliation scenes, but there as a constant opportunity to show honor and love as the memories carried both of them into some good places of their past.

Each time feelings of tension or fear crept in, remembering the little phrase “without words” kept her calm and reminded Delores that God could work out His plan without any help. How, she wondered throughout the day, would her unusually silent behavior be interpreted? The day’s end told all.

“Before you go,” her mother asked, “would you help me to change to my slippers? It’s hard to bend down now.”

As Delores folded one knee down before her and reached off to slip off a shoe, her mom rested her hand on her head like a benediction, nothing with surprise that her little girl had silver in her hair. Kneeling there, barely restraining the tears, Delores looked up and swallowed. Their eyes met and held, and Delores could not speak for what she heard.

“Thank you,” her mom said, her eyes mirroring a response to words she had not had to say. “I love you too.”

There is no getting around the fact that life can be so hard, and sadly made difficult sometimes by the people who should love us the most. Sometimes a person doesn't see how they treat others; other times there is the pain of silence. But while sometimes the response to being mistreated or to being hurt is to up the ante and hurt others, when we instead look to the Cross, and see how God responded to anger, hate and violence, we can be reminded that if we can strive to do that with one another, what a difference it can make as God's love working with ours begins to transform.

In our second reading from Ephesians, Paul says it best: ***“Brothers and sisters: Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.”*** Paul's point is that our faith requires a response, and the Holy Spirit gives us the strength to confront difficult situations with love. The Christian is called to imitate the love that the Lord

has for them, as Jesus handed himself over “as a sacrificial offering to God” for the benefit of others.

With other people, particularly in families, that can be so difficult. I think sometimes it would be a lot easier to volunteer than it would be to call up someone who has caused us pain, or to say “I forgive you.” But a question we should always ask is how can we strive to live out Paul’s words of wisdom? How can we truly go in peace and make peace with others?

Two things before that happens: First and foremost, we can do what Delores did and pray. We pray for wisdom. We pray for strength. We pray for those people who are both easy to love and hard to love. And we meditate on God and His love for us. Sometimes through prayer it can help to just look at the crucifix, and to think about all that Jesus did out of love for us. Hate, betrayal, mental anguish; it’s all there. And when we think about that we can recall that if God went through this for us, and still said “forgive them they know not what they do,” maybe we can forgive that person who has wronged us.

As we do that, we have to honestly look at the situation. Sometimes it can't get beyond prayer at that moment. If a person is in an abusive situation, they have to get out immediately. If a person suspects an abusive situation, there should be no question about it, they should call the police to make sure the other person is safe. And it could be that even if the abuse was years in the past, it's not safe to be around a person and it's just not possible to have a relationship with them other than through prayer. But if we are talking about a situation not of abuse, but of a fractured relationship, and our conscience is saying "try to make peace or work for something," how like Delores can we end up trying to get to a point where healing can transpire and we truly put on love, compassion and forgiveness?

We remember first of all that we aren't alone. Notice Delores spent time in prayer, she had her husband Ken and Aimee her granddaughter. It's important we have people who will give us strength, people who will listen to us and show empathy but also give us strength and sound advice about how to deal with someone who is challenging.

It's then important to get at the root of what is causing bitterness, fury or anger or whatever is going on. For instance say a couple or siblings fight

over money, when in fact the real issue is a decade of jealousy that needs to be addressed, or that someone maybe has an addiction to gambling or alcohol. Once two people determine the true reason for conflict, it will be easier to start the healing process.

Third, try to step into the other person's shoes. To quote Dr. Phil, "no matter how flat you make a pancake, it's still got two sides." Trying to see the other person's side of the story and make an effort to understand why they acted as they did can help. Try not to judge as you do this; instead look at the situation from the bird's eye view. And as we do this, we need to look at our own role in the relationship too. Maybe we did something to contribute to a fractured relationship, or maybe we too said something hurtful.

Fourth, we have to remember the impact our actions have on others in the family too. If we truly put on love and compassion as Paul tells us, it will teach others, especially kids, to do the same. But if a child sees mom and dad fighting all the time, or parents see their grown kids fighting or only hears constantly negative mean things about their others in the family, that behavior is going to be learned. Peace in the family is so important to strive

towards, as it not only will make us more healthy, it will help others to have relationships with their relatives when we stop the fighting.

Fifth, we make the choice to forgive. It's right there again in Ephesians: forgiveness. Easier perhaps to ask for than to live out. It's a process; one doesn't typically say "all is forgiven." But we we choose to pray for that person, to ask for God's help in trying to forgive, to work through conversations with others or even a counselor about a difficult situation and get to a point where we forgive, we can find it very liberating. Notice Jesus said "forgive them" and they hadn't even asked for forgiveness yet; just as the father forgave the son and hugged him before He got a word out.

Sixth, extend the olive branch. Sometimes people wait forever for the other person to make the first move, and it never happens.

Once that branch is extended, talk. Delores didn't do much talking with her mother in the story, but they got to a point of peace. In her case due to her mother's illness, they weren't able to go through any family therapy or intense conversations. But silence can be such a poison; our Church's abuse scandal is a testament to that. We forgive but do not forget; and not

forgetting does not mean we hold a grudge or use the past to inflict pain in the present on the person who hurt us. But it does mean we should strive to work through things and talk them out, because we might find that is the path to true healing comes by talking through the past in a way that doesn't entail shouting and blaming, but listening, prayer and ultimately healing. And this also can happen after death too. Remember when we die, life is changed not ended - and we can continue to talk to God and pray that He will help a loved one with whom we may have had a challenging relationship change, and help us to heal too. We can pray for that person, for ourselves, and visit the cemetery and the grave and pray there. Olive branches can even be extended beyond the confines of time here on earth.

One last thought: never forget that this business of putting on love and kindness applies to all people. And over the course of our lives, it's amazing what can happen when we do that. A year ago, a man named Ken Parker, who a year ago was in Charlottesville Virginia with white nationalists as a new-Nazi, ran across Deeyah Khan, a filmmaker. But Khan didn't just film him, she showed him kindness. And he reflected "she's a nice lady. Just because she's got darker skin and believes in a different god than the god I believe in, why am I hating these people." A few months

later, Parker was still weighing those doubts when he saw an African-American neighbor having a cookout near the pool of his apartment complex. As the sun set and the crowd thinned, Parker and his then-girlfriend approached the man, William McKinnon III, a pastor at All Saints Holiness Church.

Parker didn't know McKinnon was a pastor at first, but says he knew there was something different about him.

"They sat down," McKinnon recalls, "and she said they had some questions for me, and I just asked them what were some of the questions that they had."

They kept talking, then decided to meet up for more discussion. Soon after, McKinnon invited Parker to the church's Easter service. And on April 17, 2018 — six years after he joined the Klan and just seven months after Charlottesville — Parker decided he'd had enough. A month later he stood before the mostly African-American congregation and testified. He said he was a grand dragon of the KKK, and then the Klan wasn't hateful enough, so he decided to become a Nazi." A lot of people's jaws hit the floor, but no

one after the service had a negative thing to say. Instead they came up, hugged him, shook his hand, and built him up instead of tearing him down.” A couple of weeks ago on July 21st, now with a white robe, he went into the Atlantic Ocean with other members of the same Church and went into the water and was baptized, rising up a new man.

Christ wants to make us a new person too. And inside of us there is so much power; to heal in a family; to say no to bullying or joining in bullying others whether we are kids or adults; to show kindness to others. Jesus is indeed the bread of life and the bread He gives is the flesh for the life of the world, His very body given out of love. May we not just pay lip service to that love, but use it to transform the world and replace anger and hate, with love and mercy.