



# Bringing Home the Word



Fourth Sunday in Ordinary Time

January 31, 2016

## Facing Conflict

By Janel Esker

**D**o you avoid or engage conflict? Do you thrive on debate or prefer that everyone get along? I tend to avoid conflict. I know it is part of life and can be a source of creativity, but I'd still rather avoid it or quickly smooth it over. Unfortunately, avoiding conflict can be as harmful as aggression.

In today's reading, as often happened, conflict surrounds Jesus. No sooner has the crowd in his hometown synagogue lavished praise on him than they turn and criticize him as a simpleton, the son of a lowly carpenter. You can almost

hear them sneer, "Wait...is this only the son of Joseph? What could he possibly have to offer?" Jesus responds that his mission is not just for the locals but for all, including the outcast and the unwelcome. It's an insult to the crowd, who furiously try to throw him off a cliff. It's conflict-avoidance at its worst—remove the conflict by destroying the one with whom we disagree.

When prayers aren't answered "our way," when we're not given what we "deserve," when someone "unworthy" receives praise or recognition, we can feel anger—even fury—toward God. We may want to throw God off a cliff...or at least stomp away and seethe.

Instead, what if we invite God into our hearts even while we're angry? Welcoming the One by whom we feel wounded may lead us to a new understanding and a deepened faith. Giving God a second chance doesn't mean denying our anger; on the contrary, we offer our anger to God as a deeply human response and ask God to stay with us, to speak gracious words to us, and ultimately, to transform us. †

## Sunday Readings

### Jeremiah 1:4–5, 17–19

"I am the one who today makes you a fortified city, a pillar of iron."

### 1 Corinthians 12:31—13:13

"So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love."

### Luke 4:21–30

"They also asked, 'Isn't this the son of Joseph?'"

## A Word from Pope Francis



"Faith understands that something so apparently ephemeral and fleeting as a word, when spoken by the God who is fidelity, becomes absolutely certain and unshakable... The man of faith gains strength by putting himself in the hands of the God who is faithful... Saint Cyril of Jerusalem praised the dignity of the Christian who receives God's own name: both are called 'faithful.' As Saint Augustine explains: 'Man is faithful when he believes in God and his promises; God is faithful when he grants to man what he has promised.'"

—Lumen Fidei, 10

## PRAYER

Lord, I long to delight in your love. Give me the courage to change hatred to love, conflict to peace, and sadness to joy.

—*Joyful Meditations for Every Day of Advent and the 12 Days of Christmas*,  
Rev. Warren J. Savage and Mary Ann  
McSweeney

# Pro-Life Dilemma: When Treatment Becomes a Burden

by Fr. Mark Miller, CSsR

Case studies are an excellent way to approach ethical principles. Imagine, then, that a woman in her mid-fifties has just been diagnosed with ovarian cancer. Treatment provides little hope of cure and only modest hope of prolonging her life. The doctor proposes a course of treatment: she will undergo surgery to remove as much of the cancer as possible, then receive chemotherapy in an attempt to destroy any remaining cancer cells and prevent their carrying the cancer elsewhere in her body. She may also need radiation at the site of the tumor if surgery fails to remove all of it.

The treatment begins. The surgery is not as successful as they hoped, so radiation and chemotherapy are used. The doctor informs her that 36 percent of those who receive treatment at this stage are still surviving after one year. Without treatment, her chance of survival is less than one percent. Within two months, the woman has lost a great deal of weight. She is suffering considerably from the effects of the treatment, and test results for the presence of cancer are not promising.

At this point the woman realizes she is probably dying and begins to question whether she should continue treatment. She has lost most of her appetite and is “sick and tired of being sick and tired.” She asks her doctor if stopping treatment and receiving hospice, or palliative care, would be a good idea. Doctors are



REFLECTION  
QUESTIONS

QUESTIONS  
REFLECTION

- What can I do to resolve conflicts in my family, in the Church, and in myself?
- How do I foster faith, hope, and especially love?

very cautious about answering such questions and will not (or should not) make decisions for patients. At best they might say, “The treatment does not look promising, but it is your choice, knowing the consequences.”

The woman tells the doctor, “Enough!” As he is preparing to change her treatment to that of comfort (palliative) care, however, her family steps in and,

with the best of motives, encourages her to keep trying. Ironically, this situation is more common today compared to twenty years ago, when it was often the doctor who refused to give up.

This situation presents an ethical dilemma for both the woman and her caregivers. If the patient decides to accept the encouragement and prodding of her family, the doctor will abide by her decision, even though the treatment is not working but simply making her more ill. The doctor and other care providers can talk to the family about respecting their loved one’s situation and wishes. However, translating percentages into the reality of bearing the burdens of treatment is not simply a medical task. Any percentage may sound hopeful to someone who doesn’t want to lose a loved one, but a thirty-six-percent success rate means that sixty-four of one hundred treated women will only become more ill and ultimately die.

I caution families in these situations. We can’t (won’t) truly know what it is like for the patient to go through any treatment unless we listen to his or her voice. We can argue with the patient, even cajole him or her—but only if we accept the fact that sometimes a treatment can be more burdensome than the disease. The decision, which belongs to the patient alone, should then become how to care for a dying person rather than how to coax from painful treatments what they cannot give—and for which the patient pays the price. And doesn’t a person deserve proper care even while dying?

## WEEKDAY READINGS

February 1-6

Mon. Weekday: 2 Samuel 15:13–14, 30;  
16:5–13 / Mark 5:1–20  
Tue. The Presentation of the Lord:  
Malachi 3:1–4 / Hebrews 2:14–18 /  
Luke 2:22–40  
Wed. Weekday: 2 Samuel 24:2, 9–17 /  
Mark 6:1–6

Thu. Weekday: 1 Kings 2:1–4, 10–12 /  
Mark 6:7–13  
Fri. St. Agatha: Sirach 47:2–11 / Mark  
6:14–29  
Sat. St. Paul Miki and Companions:  
1 Kings 3:4–13 / Mark 6:30–34