

Tough Love
09/10/17

I am going to speak to you today about something called tough love. Maybe you've heard the expression before; maybe the term is new. Before I get into that, however, let me pass along some ideas from Chicken Soup for the Soul, as told by my friend Fr. Joe Robinson.

When we see geese flying south at this time of the year, there is a reason why they fly that way. As each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately following. This uplift that is provided by the V formation allows the flock to get to their destination more quickly and easily. They are traveling on the thrust of one another.

It would seem logical that people who share a common direction can reach their destination more quickly and easily by traveling together and supporting one another. Apparently God thinks this is a good idea too, so He gave us the Church. We can more quickly and easily reach our home with Him if we travel together. We have an excellent guide in this journey and it is Jesus, for He tells us in today's Gospel: "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them."

There is another thing science knows about geese. When one of them falls out of formation, they quickly feel the drag and resistance of trying to go it alone and they get back into formation for the lifting power that is provided by the others. Unfortunately, when we humans try to go it alone spiritually, we are often slow to realize we are making no progress spiritually or we are even going in the wrong direction.

If we have as much sense as a goose, we will stay connected with those people who are headed the same way we are. It's also interesting to note that if a bird gets sick or is injured, and falls out of formation, two others fall out with it and follow it down to give help and protection until it either gets well or dies. Then they will either launch out on their own or join a new formation until they can get back to their group. Likewise, we have a responsibility to care for each other. St. Paul tells us today that

we are to “owe nothing to anyone except to love one another for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law.” Which brings me back to tough love.

If you have a friend or family member who struggles with an issue, whether it be anger, an addiction to drugs or alcohol, an over-inflated ego or something that is simply not good for the person or those around him or her, Jesus suggests we talk it over between us and try to settle the matter ourselves. But in the case of addiction for instance, it’s not generally that simple. Often the addict is paddling madly down that river in Egypt, de Nile. And this an example of where it’s critical to apply the principle of tough love.

You see, in the case of an addict or alcoholic, if the person continues in the grips of the disease and we turn our heads, we are doing neither them nor us any good. That’s when we have to apply the tough love. We have to tell them we are no longer willing to put up with the behavior. We are no longer willing to supply the time and money to support the habit. And if they still don’t listen, we bring in others, as Jesus suggests. We confront them with an intervention.

In some cases, there have to be consequences and sometimes those consequences are severe: loss of job, loss of house, loss of family – the list goes on and on. We have to assure the person we do in fact love them and that it’s that very love that causes us to take the actions we do.

There is a Peanuts poster which shows Snoopy as the perfect friend. It shows a line pointing to his head with the caption, “Full of great advice.” The line pointing to his eyes says, “Always happy to see you.”; the line to his mouth, “Loves to share a smile.”; the shoulders, “Available to lean on.”; his chest, “Warm spot here for you.”; his paw, “Good for holding and helping.” And the line to his feet reads, “For standing by your side.”

You and I know there is really no such thing as a perfect friend. But Snoopy’s attributes are a good start when it comes to applying tough love. Remember them next time a loved one is in need.