

Earlier in the Book of Romans Paul says; "I appeal to you ... brothers and sisters, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your minds, so that you may discern what is the will of God — what is good and acceptable and perfect" (12:1-2).

He then went on to explain in detail what that means (chapters 12-15).

Christians are to love their enemies (12:9-21);

to subject themselves to authorities (13:1-7);

and to love one another (13:8-10).

Then Paul says that faith must give rise to appropriate conduct. Christians must "lay aside the works of darkness and put on the armor of light" (13:12).

What does this mean for us today?

Pope Paul VI maintained that the two great needs for the Church and the world are **mentors and models, teachers and witnesses.**

It's through our Baptism that each of us is called to be mentors and models for others.

Is this easy? Of course not.

We live in relationship to others, and every relationship has its ups and downs.

In our own lives, we know how easily relationships can be damaged and how difficult it is to heal them.

To live out our baptism by being confronted for our own wrongdoings and confronting the wrongs of others can be painful;

yet healing and reconciliation are only possible by an honest exchange.

This is not always easy or comfortable.

I remember a time when I was with the St. Paul Police on patrol. We received a call to go to a certain corner on the East side where a large group of youth was gathered on the street.

They were blocking traffic, and as we were the closest squad, we got the call to go and break them up.

When the officer and I arrived we were getting out of the squad to tell the kids to move along when all of a sudden there was a loud bang.

Apparently some of the youth had swung around the back of the squad as we were getting out, and a chunk of pavement hit the door behind me on my side of the car.

Now what I want you to understand is that police officers regard their squads as their own private office. Also, both police and chaplains are in uniform.

In other words there was no mistaking who we were.

I couldn't believe someone had thrown a rock at a marked squad car.

The cop I was with was not a happy camper at this point.

I couldn't believe that someone would throw something at a Chaplain; I could have been hurt if the rock had hit me.

I had on my light weight summer jacket, in great big letters on my billboard sized back it read
CHAPLAIN.

To say that we were both angry and a bit frustrated would be an understatement.

We called for backup and several of the youth were arrested. I was called in as the Chaplain to
meet with one of the arrested youth.

It turned out it was the one who threw the rock.

In the first reading today God appoints the prophet Ezekiel to confront the wicked.

In the gospel Jesus calls all members of the church to confront sinners in the community.

Well here was my chance to confront a sinner.

What was I going to say, how was I going to treat this fellow who I was angry with?

In the gospel Jesus teaches his disciples how to deal with conflicts and strife in the church.

The challenge he lays down is the hard work of addressing rifts **directly, honestly, repeatedly,
and prayerfully.**

The desired outcome of the entire process is **repentance and reconciliation.**

So there I was with a young man who I felt had done me wrong.

Here was my chance to chew him out; I knew he had already heard an earful from the cops.

I looked him in the eye. He was trembling slightly. It looked like he might have been crying but I
wasn't sure.

That's when I remembered an uncomfortable truth.

I am a Chaplain and I am a Deacon in the Church.

With my whole being I wanted nothing more than to shout at the young man who stood before me, who had frightened me.

In our reading from Romans Paul says; "Owe no one anything, except to love one another..."

We have an obligation — the obligation to love — that does go on and on. Just as we receive ongoing love from God, as God's followers, we are to give ongoing love "to one another."

This is easy to do with family and friends, but we are called to extend love to all with whom we come in contact — our neighbors in the broadest sense.

Paul calls for the difficult task of real love for real people who are met in everyday life.

So there I am and I have my chance to say what's on my mind to this young man.

I think he knew what I wanted to say, but before I got the chance, he told me he was sorry.

With that simple statement the wind in my sails was gone.

We went on to have a conversation about his life. He was actually a survivor of sorts, given all the challenges he had to face every day.

Listening to him as he told me his story I realized that I had judged him before I even knew him.

I've read somewhere... "The giving of love fulfills three purposes.

First, it blesses the person who receives love. Many people are desperately in need of a kind word or some small demonstration that someone cares about them.

Second, the Christian who shows love for his/her neighbor becomes a powerful witness for Christ.

Third, as Paul states... "...for the one who loves another has fulfilled the law"

I shared with you the story of the young man to remind you how important it is to take a breath, step back from a situation you may find yourself in, and recall that your faith must give rise to appropriate conduct.

I just about blew it as a Christian because I conveniently forgot that I too am a sinner.

Did you ever notice in the Gospels that Jesus is not upset at sinners? He's only upset at people who don't think they're sinners.

We are Christians and Christianity is primarily about love, love of God and love of neighbor.

There is really only one commandment which is universal and covers every situation, and to which we are always obligated—the commandment of love.