

**Leadership Circle**

**February, 2017**

**“Charity”**

**“Virtue Corner”**

“Knowing that our own words can be so easily misinterpreted, we must each humbly admit that our own interpretations of others’ words might not always be accurate, either. It would be nice if we each had our own personal magisterium to help us correctly interpret others’ words, but we don’t. We do, however, have teaching from the magisterium of the Catholic Church that I think can be helpful. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (2478; quoting St. Ignatius of Loyola) instructs as follows:

‘Every good Christian ought to be more ready to give a favorable interpretation to another’s statement than to condemn it. But if he cannot do so, let him ask how the other understands it. And if the latter understands it badly, let the former correct him with love. If that does not suffice, let the Christian try all suitable ways to bring the other to a correct interpretation so that he may be saved.’”

Jim Blackburn, “In All Things, Charity”, May 31, 2013

“Now, what does the Church have to say about charity?”

You can read a fuller treatment of charity in the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* in [section 1822–1829](#). For our purposes, I will note [CCC 1829](#):

‘The fruits of charity are joy, peace, and mercy; *charity demands beneficence and fraternal correction*; it is benevolence; it fosters reciprocity and remains disinterested and generous; it is friendship and communion: Love is itself the fulfillment of all our works. There is the goal; that is why we run: we run toward it, and once we reach it, in it we shall find rest (emphasis added).’

Charity demands fraternal correction. Why? Because charity must be at the service of truth, without which it is blind, [as Benedict XVI once noted](#). And, of course, fraternal correction cannot be delivered with a hammer because ‘truth without love would be like a clanging cymbal.’

Michelle Arnauld, “Where Charity and Love Prevail”, June 4, 2014

## **Arrivals/Cocktails/Buffer Dinner (30 Minutes)**

***Share a quick meal and wine together before beginning the circle. Catch up on the last month, and on how you did with last month's resolution.***

## **Gospel Reflection (30 minutes)**

### **“Brotherly Correction”**

#### **Matthew 18:15-17**

“If your brother sins against you, go and tell him his fault, between you and him alone. If he listens to you, you have gained your brother. But if he does not listen, take one or two others along with you, that every word may be confirmed by the evidence of two or three witnesses. If he refuses to listen to them, tell it to the church; and if he refuses to listen even to the church, let him be to you as a Gentile and a tax collector.

I tell you solemnly, whatever you bind on earth shall be considered bound in heaven; whatever you loose on earth shall be considered loosed in heaven.”

#### **Questions for Discussion:**

1. Context. Where are we in Matthew's Gospel? What is the first question Jesus answers in Chapter 18? How is that related to his teaching on charitable interaction with others?
2. The first step. What is the first practical step Jesus advises us to take when someone wrongs us? How easy or difficult is it for us to take this step? What role does last month's virtue (Humility) play in this?
3. “The two way street.” In what way is charity a “two way street.” How does Jesus recommend we react to charitable correction when we are on the receiving end?
4. “Take one or two others along with you.” What do you make of this advice? How is this different than “ganging up on someone?” Do you agree this is a good next step?
5. Church teaching. What role does Church teaching play in helping us to exercise Charity? Why do you think Matthew ends this section on brotherly correction with verse 18?
6. Love. Time permitting, re-read Paul's passage on Christian Love which we mediated on last year. (1 Corinthians 13) How does Matthew's passage on Charity relate to Paul's epistle on Love? Are Love and Charity the same thing?

## **Case Study (30 Minutes)**

**2 ways to go about it.** *Read the Case and discuss afterwards how it can apply to your leadership, parenting style? Or ask a member to voluntarily offer their challenges in practicing humility at home, in the work place or in their lumen action (volunteer work). The circle can offer some personal experiences on how they have confronted and resolved similar difficulties.*

### **“The Misunderstanding”**

I recently had a conversation with a gentleman whose daughter had severed all communication with him over an email misunderstanding. His daughter had very narrowly misinterpreted his words in a family email in a derogatory way. He understood how his words *could* be misunderstood but it was devastating that his own daughter would choose to act so uncharitably toward him. His attempts to assert a correct understanding of his email were met with obstinence and eventual estrangement. Tragically, his daughter seemed to have made up her mind as soon as she read the email and rashly misinterpreted his words.

### **Question for Discussion:**

1. How does Charity come into play here?
2. Is there any lessons here in terms of how we use written communication?
3. Have you had any similar interactions (verbal or written) with others recently? How did they play out?
4. What is the most difficult challenge for you in living charity with your children, wife or colleagues?
5. On a scale of 1 to 10, 1 being most charitable, how would you grade yourself?
6. Is there something you can do this month to move the needle over one number?

## Core Value Assessment and Resolution (10 minutes)

What struck me in this circle and how I might apply it to my THINKING. What CRITICAL ISSUES am I facing? What is the biggest CHALLENGES with these issues I face and what OPPORTINITIES does it present.

*Prayer:*

*Family:*

*Business:*

*Lumen Action:*

What ACTION STEPS can I take now or long term? Develop a concrete resolution for how you can improve in your efforts to exercise Christian charity in you interactions with others during the next month. Your resolution should be a specific action or activity that is easily measured.

## **Further Reading**

**From “Where Charity and Love Prevail”:** Michelle Arnauld, June 4, 2014

**"Offering charitable criticism"** How do we balance defending the truth while acting in love?

**Choose your venue carefully.** If you are offering a personal opinion, publish it in a place where you can take full responsibility for your opinion. If you have a personal blog or social media page, that is preferable to posting your opinion on other people's pages or on sites that may not want to be roped into hosting your opinion. For example, for the most part I avoid "naming names" on the Catholic Answers Blog because I do not want readers to mistake my personal opinion for Catholic Answers' official opinion. If I have a personal opinion to offer, I usually do so on my personal Facebook page.

**Avoid anonymity.** Anonymous commenting is the bane of the Internet. It can be helpful in some circumstances if a commenter is judicious and uses prudence, but it is all too easy to speak harshly when your name is not associated with your opinions. Having to sign your name to your opinions, especially when they can then be archived in Internet search engines in perpetuity, will very likely act as a moderating influence on your rhetoric.

**Substantiate your opinions.** In this blog post, I have mostly avoided providing links for the very specific purpose of not reigniting controversy, especially when it would distract from the purpose of this post. But in most of my blogging, I am very careful to link to news articles, Church documents, and essays that substantiate the assertions I make. It is important to give your readers the opportunity to compare your assertions to the relevant evidence so that they can decide for themselves whether or not you are a credible witness. Likewise, if an online commentator *does not* document the claims he makes (or if he links *only* to other commentators who agree with him and not to independent sources), that is a sign that the commentator is not trustworthy.

**Consider criticism.** Anyone who has an opinion to offer on the Internet is going to experience blowback from those who disagree. You cannot allow every negative word spoken about you or written about you to dissuade you from stating what you believe to be right and necessary. But you can keep an eye out for common themes in the criticism you receive. If multiple individuals, unknown to each other but united in their opinion of you, tell you that your rhetoric is harsh, or condescending, or unkind, or judgmental, you should think about that and consider how you might adjust your style.

**Protect tender souls.** As St. Paul noted, we have a duty to protect the vulnerable. That may mean deleting blog posts or social media posts that instigate widespread or sustained controversy. Keep in mind that your posts will not be entirely eliminated from Internet search engines, but you can at least do what you can to make them harder to find. And, in some cases, protecting tender souls may mean making it impossible for them to be harmed by what you say, even if that means blocking individuals from a personal page. Such blocks should not be construed as uncharitable but as a protection offered those unable to bear reasonable critique.

**Accepting criticism in charity** Offering criticism is easy compared to accepting criticism of one's own work. But those who choose to enter the arena as public figures have a duty to allow people to have and

to offer negative critiques of their work. If you cannot bear to hear any dissent from your views, then I can only recommend that you save your nuggets of wisdom for memoirs to be published after your death. Otherwise, dodging rotten tomatoes is one of the occupational hazards of becoming a public figure.

Here are some suggestions for growing a thick skin:

**Consider the source.** In the course of my apologetics career, I have been called crude names which I cannot repeat here and told that I am leading people to hell. Since these opinions have been offered on web sites where the Pope is disparaged on a daily basis, the ordinary form of the Mass is mocked, and the authors of these comments are generally unpleasant to anyone who crosses their radar, I do not take such criticisms personally. I merely laugh and move on with my day. If crudities and viciousness are slung your way, dodge and ignore. There is no better revenge than to allow your enemies to believe they have not been noticed.

**Respond proportionately.** If you decide that a response is necessary—and **sometimes a response is necessary**—take care not to escalate the battle. If the provocation is made out of the public eye, do not insert the matter into the public eye unless there is grave reason to do so. If it *is* in the public eye, then respond within the venue in which the issue arose and in a manner proportionate to the offense given. For example, if someone makes a brief, off-the-cuff remark on her personal Facebook page, it is not necessary to write blog posts thousands of words in length to respond.

**Defend yourself; discourage defenses.** If you are the subject of a critique, it is your responsibility to defend your own self if you choose. Anyone else who steps up to swing their bats in your defense should be discouraged, kindly but firmly. Of course, people are going to publish what they choose and you can only do so much to discourage them from doing so, but you would look far more mature and gracious if you are seen to be doing what you can to put out fires set in the name of defending you. Going back to the example of the off-the-cuff remark, a like remark on your own page acknowledging that you are not offended or in need of defense, however well-meant, makes you appear admirable.

*(Nota bene:* Keep in mind that this applies also, to your personal friends and relatives—more so because you have more direct influence over them. Your inner circle may feel righteously indignant on your behalf, but they will make you appear weak and pitiable if you allow them to swipe at critics in your defense. Thank them for their indignation, and the love for you that their indignation demonstrates, but gently inform them that it is your responsibility to defend your own work.)

**Rise above.** Finally, what if you have done all that you can to present your best work in defense of your position; have carefully substantiated your assertions and moderated your rhetoric; and are confident you have spoken the truth in love? Let your work speak for itself. Either your work will disappear into the mists of time, never to trouble anyone again (as happened to Helvidius's pamphlet), or it will stand on its own as a testament to the truth (like St. Jerome's response).

### **The critical choices**

Ultimately, when it comes to giving and accepting criticism, you have a decision to make. Two pagan philosophers lay out the choices. The Greek philosopher **Aristotle** offered one option: "To avoid criticism, say nothing, do nothing, be nothing." **Cicero**, a Roman philosopher, offered another:

“I criticize by creation, not by finding fault.”

## Our Top Five Love Quotes from the Bible

Here we at Catholic Online have listed our top five favorite love verses. Enjoy!

### 5. Romans 5:5

"And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us."

*God loved us so much that He gave us the Holy Spirit. When we overflow in God's love, the Holy Spirit is present and touches our hearts with a love for God that runs deeper than the greatest ocean.*

### 4. Deuteronomy 7:9

"Know therefore that the LORD your God is God; He is the faithful God, keeping his covenant of love to a thousand generations of those who love Him and keep His commands."

*Most know firsthand that love between a man and woman is not always a faithful one. The pain that follows unfaithfulness can be crippling, but God will **never** be unfaithful.*

God will **always** be and will **always** love you. Never forget His love is unchanging.

### 3. John 3:16

"For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life."

*An oldie but a goodie. What says, "I love you" more than sacrificing your only son for the sins others committed?*

*It is a tremendous love God has for us, and though we don't feel worthy of such love it doesn't mean He will forsake us. After sacrificing His Son, there is nothing we can do that He will not forgive.*

### 2. 1 John 3:1

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God! And that is what we are! The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him."

*1 John 3:1 is to be read with excitement! Knowing you are loved by God isn't something you should take for granted, you should exalt in it and cry out to the world, "My God loves me!"*

*In today's world, believers are viewed with disgust by some and continue to be ridiculed. "The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him" suddenly comes into focus when you think of how unbelievers see us.*

*Despite the disbelief around us, God smiles and loves on us every day of our lives. So rejoice! We are children of God!*

### **1. Hosea 2:23**

*"I will plant her for myself in the land; I will show my love to the one I called 'Not my loved one.' I will say to those called 'Not my people,' 'You are my people'; and they will say, 'You are my God.'"*

*Hosea 2:23 was chosen as the number one love quote because the second chapter of Hosea describes what God does to the people who turn from him. It begins with a terrible punishment that takes time to enact but is followed by more love and tenderness than one can possibly endure.*

*God does not need to teach anyone to love Him, but a true lover of your heart will always take the time to show you the error of your ways and bring you back to what is right. God's words are powerful and in this verse He not only calls those who once sinned His people, he also allows them to claim Him by saying "You are my God."*

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