

Being Family

By Santiago Lange



God never intended the Church to simply become an institution. Our Creator always intended it to operate as a family. When He decided to set the standard for human development God created the family unit, and it is this that is the foundation for the Church too. Churches that become overly institutional lose the power of what God intended for it to be.

When Jesus was hanging on the cross His thoughts turned toward family and the coming Church, and looking at His mother and the disciple John Jesus opened the door for what the Church would become, God's family (John 19:26-27).

In Christ we become "brothers and sisters". That is not just sentimental language, but a true picture of what we are as the Church. Granted, the family of God is a quite a mixed bunch. In it we find former demon possessed people, tax collectors, doctors, fishermen, political radicals, doubters, former prostitutes, gentiles, Jews, males, females, old people, young people, academics, blue collar workers, extroverts, introverts, etc.

Only God could take all these people and really make out of them a functioning unit. The truth of the matter is that the Church functions best when it is a true family, though made up of such radically different types, blended together in His grace and calling.

If we agree that the family concept is supposed to be an example of Church life, what IS a healthy family? One thing functioning families show is that each member is concerned about the others. Healthy families try to bring out the best in one another. Healthy families seek to help each member become everything they can before God. That is not always easy, especially in light of the variety of personalities and flawed humans that make up God's family. Too many Christians float around looking for the ideal Church family, but God's call is to love the one we are with. Someone once said: "Anyone can love the ideal church. The challenge is to love the real church".

Love is more than just an emotion. It also influences our conduct. Communion and fellowship are essential elements in a good functioning family. Nowhere does Scripture give us license for us to simply quit coming to Church based on anything someone else might have done to us. The early Church had their fair share of squabbles and disagreements, but they stuck together and worked through them.

When Euodia and Syntyche didn't get along with each other Paul encouraged the involved parties to work through their differences (Philip. 4:2). Paul and Barnabas once had a terrible fight over John Mark (Acts 15:36). And Paul withstood Peter face to face for his hypocrisy with the Gentiles and Jews. (Gal. 2:11).

There are bound to be those uncomfortable times with each other, but being ONE BODY, ONE FAMILY in Christ means we will work through them. It is immature love that makes us walk away from God's people. The witness of God's family is so powerful that Jesus said it would be by our love for one another that all men would know that we belong to Him.

There is a story about a banker who always tossed a coin in the cup of a legless beggar who sat on the street outside the bank. But, unlike most people, the banker would always insist on getting one of the pencils the man had beside him. "You are a merchant," the banker would say, "and I always expect to receive good value from merchants I do business with." One day the legless man was not on the sidewalk. Time passed and the banker forgot about him, until he walked into a public building and there in the concessions stand sat the former beggar. He was obviously the owner of his own small business now. "I have always hoped you might come by someday," the man said. "You are largely responsible for me being here. You kept telling me that I was a 'merchant'. I started thinking of myself that way, instead of a beggar receiving gifts. I started selling pencils -- lots of them. You gave me self-respect, caused me to look at myself differently." What's the point? The world may never see the Church as it actually is, but WE must!

Christ changes everything. In Him there is a real family that shares together eternal life. In Him we become "brothers and sisters", one family in spite of all other differences. These new family bonds will exist forever in Christ. Let's continue to spread that message to the world around us in word and in deeds. □