

Do we have to get along with everyone? (Fr. Andreas Agathokleous)

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Some people say, and believe they're right in doing so, that we should 'get along well with everybody', meaning our behaviour shouldn't cause people not to like us and that we should be friends with everybody. But do Christians who wish to have Christ in their lives really have this as their aim?

Saint Paul advises: 'If it is possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all'. (Romans 12, 18), hinting that it isn't actually possible to have peaceful relations with everyone, even though that's what we would prefer.

In another Epistle (2 Cor. 13, 11), Saint Paul urges us to 'agree with one another, live in peace, and the God of love and peace will be with you'. And elsewhere, writing to the Christians of Thessaloniki, he calls upon them 'to have peace among themselves' (1 Thess. 5, 13).



Peace is certainly an important element that should exist among people who have 'the same spirit', the same outlook, the same faith, the same view of life. But it's not the case with all those who live in close contact with others. There will inevitably be disagreements, a different view of things, which, in the end, make us not 'of the same spirit'.

The effort to make it seem that we agree with everyone, so that we 'get along with them', demonstrates a hypocritical disposition which isn't in accord with the spirit of the Gospel. Because it's one thing to be peaceful and another to agree with everybody.

Christ said openly that He had not come to bring enforced peace to the earth, but discord (Matth. 10, 34), meaning the divisions that His teaching would bring, since not everyone would accept them.

It's obvious that our society isn't based on the Gospels, nor is it true that all those who were baptized as children are raised in the spirit of the teachings of Christ and the Church. Each of us has the freedom to choose our own course.

This is why there are people we're 'at peace' with as being of the same mind and the same faith, and others with whom we'll disagree and clash verbally, without being untrue to our Christian spirit by disliking or being hostile towards them.

It's one thing to try and keep the peace, even if we disagree, and another to want to get along with everybody so that they have a good opinion of us. Certainly, such an attitude to life is an expression of vanity, which, according to the Fathers, is a sickness. This is why it results in upsets and tensions instead of peace. There's an extrovert attitude and a sociability involved that doesn't have a spiritual base and smacks of bootlicking.

Of course, there's the saying that if you want to please everybody, you'll end up not pleasing anybody. Ordinary folk are good judges and know that the attempt to please everybody is shallow and selfish. But if we recognize that this is conceit, then, painful as it may be, it's possible that it'll bring us to repentance, which calms, gladdens and completes us.

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