

**Homily for the National Catholic Development Conference
Lake Buena Vista, Florida**

**24th Sunday in Ordinary Time - Year B
September 13, 2015**

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My dear brothers and sisters in Christ, it is good that we are here for this celebration of the Holy Eucharist at the beginning of your annual convention for the National Catholic Development Conference. As the Episcopal Advisor of the NCDC, I would like to extend my gratitude on behalf of my brother bishops for the important work that you do in assisting organizations to raise money to continue the apostolic mission of the Church.

In a biography written about the famous investor and billionaire, Warren Buffet, there is a story about how, when he was 15 years old, Buffet was struggling to fit in at high school. While looking at his grandfather's bookshelf one day, he noticed a book titled, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, written by an author by the name of Dale Carnegie. Buffet saw the title and it was too much to resist, so he took the book and began

reading it, putting into practice the techniques suggested by the author, techniques which continue to remain with him.¹

This book, first published in 1936, remains one of the most influential and widely-read books in the world of business and other fields as well. The ideas presented in this classic are every bit as applicable today as they were when they were written almost eighty years ago. Reading the book is rather remarkable in that the insights offered by Mr. Carnegie are not a revelation of some secret formula that had never been discovered up to that point, nor does it present a highly complex system to follow in which to guarantee success. When it comes down to it, the principles suggested are fairly simple and common sense.

The book can be summed up by saying that the key to being successful in influencing people is in focusing our attention on the other person, meeting people where they are at, showing them that we are interested in them, that we care for them, and then inviting them to see things from a slightly different perspective. By taking the effort to make that personal connection, a relationship is formed and the person feels as though he or she is important to you, which goes a long way in leading people to understand our perspective and to buy into it.

As I said, these principles seem to be fairly straightforward, and in fact, they are not really all that different from how Jesus was able to convince people to His way of thinking. In our Gospel for today, we hear what sounds to be rather harsh words from Jesus. First, He rebukes Peter by saying: "Get behind me, Satan. You are thinking not as God does, but as human beings do" (Mark 8:33). I'm not sure this would be something Dale Carnegie would recommend in his approach to winning friends! Jesus then goes on to speak about the radical demands of being a disciple; that one must "deny himself, take up his cross" and to lose his life in order to save it (Mark 8:34-35). Once again, these don't sound like the gentle approach that has proven to be so successful in influencing people.

We have to be careful not to read passages like this out of context. If we just pick them out, they make Jesus sound like a direct and demanding person. And while it is true that He did not shy away from giving challenging teachings, we must also consider the powerful personal impact that He must have had on those who encountered Him.

Take, for example, the initial calling of these disciples while they were at their daily jobs as fishermen. In Mark's Gospel, the story is pretty brief, saying that Jesus invited them by saying: "Come after me, and I will

make you fishers of men” (Mark 1:17). The very next line says that “they abandoned their nets and followed him” (Mark 1:18). They left everything, having had just that one profound encounter with Christ, an encounter which would have been one which made them feel comfortable with following Him, trusting that He really wanted to be with them and to share His friendship with Him. In fact, in John’s Gospel, Jesus says: “I have called you friends” (John 15:15), and that friendship with His disciples was one rooted in trust and love.

It was out of this encounter with Jesus as their friend, as one who truly cared for them, took an interest in their lives and their eternal well-being, that He was able to offer those challenging words to His disciples. Nobody really likes to change, but when that call to conversion is backed up by that personal touch, it is then when hearts will be changed and steps can be taken to following a different way of living.

To a certain extent, there are some parallels to this dynamic in the work that all of you do in the work of fundraising and other development efforts. You are inviting people to see the cause which you are supporting as one that is worthy of their support as well. And when it comes to giving of one’s support, especially financially, that can be a difficult thing to sell.

The society in which we live is very proud of the accomplishments that we have achieved. We see our possessions, our time, and our especially our money as something that we have earned and something that we should be able to use for our enjoyment and our comfort.

So how do we go about encouraging people to look at their lives, their possessions, and their money as something to be shared with generosity, as taught by our Catholic faith? One possible solution is to quote the Scriptures which support such actions, such as the one we heard from our second reading from the Letter of St. James. He tells us that “faith of itself, if it does not have works, is dead” (Jas 2:17). Some might see that as using good old Catholic guilt to try to get people to donate to our cause, but it certainly is appropriate to call people to the higher ideals of our faith.

As important as it is for us to be reminded of the obligations that the Scriptures demand of us, ideals that are often quite challenging, we cannot neglect that human element by which we deliver those messages. We have to connect with people on a personal level, to the point that they feel as though we really care about them, that we are interested in them, and that what we are inviting them to consider is not just a pitch, but something in which we ourselves are convinced and that we see it as a way in which

they too can practice good discipleship and stewardship as they live out the love of God through love of neighbor.

This personal touch requires a lot of work on our part. It cannot be approached like a politician, trying to say the right words in order to gain another benefactor, as if he or she were just another number. Just as we are trying to invite others to conversion to seeing the worthiness of our cause, so too are we in need of constant conversion in order to see the importance of all people, their dignity, and their worthiness of our genuine attention and care as we invite them to that cause. It requires a giving on our part, not of money, but of time and effort. We can fall into the same trap of seeing things from a worldly, self-centered perspective, missing out on the opportunity for us to be generous in sharing of ourselves in the friendship that should be at the heart of all of our relationships as Catholics, whether that be with a benefactor or a family member.

As we prepare to receive the gift of the loving presence of our greatest friend, Jesus Christ, into our hearts, let us renew our resolve to follow Him and serve Him and His Church with generosity. When we do this, we will be more willing to engage others authentically, inviting them to that deeper relationship with Christ, a relationship which, when lived

well, cannot but yield the fruits of charity for others as we all work to build up the Kingdom of God.

May God give us this grace. Amen.

¹ Feloni, Richard, “12 timeless lessons from one of Warren Buffett's favorite books, 'How to Win Friends & Influence People'”, *The Business Insider*, <http://www.businessinsider.com/lessons-from-how-to-win-friends-and-influence-people-2015-4#ixzz3IFjWOG5S>.