

III. ANGER & FORGIVENESS

Because hurt is everywhere, anger is everywhere. Scripture tells us “Be angry but do not sin” (Ephesians 4:26). This surprising advice from St. Paul points to the truth about anger: namely, that it is a normal part of human existence (like hunger) and that it is not sinful except when taken to excess. St. Thomas describes the sin of anger as an unreasonable, irrational, and immoderate desire for vengeance. Given our fallen condition, this is quite common. When somebody hurts us, we don't want mere justice that responds in equal measure to the sin we have suffered. We want overwhelming retaliation that destroys our enemy. This is why, for instance, the law of Moses finds it necessary to prescribe “eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, wound for wound, stripe for stripe” (Exodus 21:24-25). It's not because ancient Israelites were barbarians radically different from us. It's because they were barbarians just like us who would, if they could, render an arm and a leg for a foot, a life for an eye, or a life for a wound. The law of Moses was given in order to rein in our thirst to up the ante in the cycle of violence. But it was more than the law of Moses could do to break that cycle. Only Jesus can wash away the sin of the world by letting sin spend itself on him and then swallowing it up in mercy.

We must do likewise.

QUESTIONS FOR UNDERSTANDING

1. Read Mark 3:1-5. John 2:13-17 and CCC 1765. Is anger always a sin? When is anger justified and when is it a sin?
2. Read Matthew 26:50-54 and Luke 22:50-51. How does Jesus confront evil? How does Peter confront evil? What are the differences? According to Fr. Barron, what do the Fathers of the Church see imaged in this incident that teaches us about the difference between the sin of anger and the grace of God?
3. Read Romans 12:17-21. How does this way of confronting evil demonstrate both the power and humility of God? To whom does vengeance belong, and as such, how are we to respond when it seems that vengeance is needed?
4. Read Matthew 6:9-15 and Matthew 18:23-34. What is the condition Jesus puts on the prayer for forgiveness in the Our Father? What is the promise and the warning of that condition? What does the parable of the Unmerciful Servant suggest about the importance of the slights we receive compared with our sins that God has forgiven?

5. Read Colossians 3:12-13. What is the root and basis of our forgiveness of one another? How does St. Paul say we should treat one another because of this root of forgiveness?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION

1. Dante pictures the penitent angry as being inundated with smoke. How is anger like smoke? How can anger cloud our vision? How have you "cleared the air" of anger with somebody through forgiveness?
2. Fr. Barron says that forgiveness involves more than mere thought or a change in attitude, such as "not wishing harm on somebody." Forgiveness requires breaking the cycle of violence by letting evil spend itself and be met with love and mercy. He gives examples of the non-violent resistance of Martin Luther King, Jr. and of Gandhi. Have you ever been in a situation where you or somebody you know turned the other cheek? What was that like? What was the result?
3. Can you think of places in our culture where the forgiveness of sins is rejected as "weak" or wrong? How can we make it clear that forgiveness and mercy are the ultimate examples of the power of God?
4. Is there somebody in your life that you need to forgive? What one positive, concrete step can you take today to confront your sin of anger with the forgiving power of Christ?