
10th SUNDAY AFTER PENTECOST -2020

1 Corinthians 4:9-16 & Matthew 17:14-23

O unbelieving and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you? How long shall I put up with you? Matt. 17:17

If you recall your Catechism lessons, the seven capital sins are pride, avarice, lust, anger, greed, envy, and sloth. These seven culprits are potent enemies that determine our character. These sins affect our feelings and our good sense of judgment. If we cannot control them, they will blemish our character. The first social sin in human history was a murder caused by anger. Cain, the son of Adam, killed his brother Abel. "When anger was in Cain's heart, murder was not far off." Emotions guided Cain but had common sense prevailed Abel would have lived. Our decisions can sometimes be irrational.

In *Currents*, Jim Taylor tells the following story about his friend, Ralph Milton: One morning, Ralph woke up at five o'clock to a noise that sounded like someone repairing a boiler on his roof. Still, in his pyjamas, he went into the back yard to investigate. He found a woodpecker on the TV antenna, "pounding its little brains out on the metal pole." Angry at the little creature who ruined his sleep, Ralph picked up a rock and threw it. The rock sailed over the house, and he heard a distant crash as it hit the car. In utter disgust, Ralph took a vicious kick at a clod of dirt, only to remember -- too late -- that he was still in his bare feet. Uncontrolled anger, as Ralph learned, can sometimes be its own reward. (Jim Taylor, *Currents*.)

When the power of our anger takes over, it can move us to do inappropriate actions. This anger includes verbal abuse. The human tongue is like a double-edged sword; it can be kind, but it can also be mean as a scourge from hell. Merciless and abusive words can have a devastating effect on us and those around us. Some people get angry quickly; others take much longer. The degree at which people boil determines their temperament and character. Generally, when people are wrong, they will not admit it but get angry instead. We are as noble or ignoble according to the measure of our anger.

Faced with confrontation, we react emotionally. Controlling our emotions is no easy. Our reaction can be rational or irrational, ethical, or harmful. It is useful when it is unselfish and wrong when it becomes selfish anger. Anger causes a person to sin when he loses his temper and flies into a rage, seeking revenge. "A mild answer breaketh wrath, but a harsh word stirreth up fury." (Prov. 15:1) From anger arises, hatred, quarrelling, cursing, and violence. It is usually motivated by selfish revenge and has the potential of many tragic results.

A little boy knelt by his bed. He thanked God for the good things he had enjoyed that day. He asked for some special favours, and ended the prayer with his usual, "God Bless Mom and Dad, and Peter and Joe. Amen." He stood up. He quickly got down on his knees again and added: "Skip Joe this time, God. I am mad at him. Amen, again."

How do we treat those who have hurt us badly? A brother cheats his sister out of a portion of her inheritance; a neighbour spread false and ugly rumours about us. How do we treat such people? Do we fight back?

Because anger is irrational, the innocent often suffer and are treated unfairly. Except in occasional cases of pure chance, anger never leads to a rational solution to any problem.

How does one control the passion of anger? It is especially tricky for a short-fused, hot-tempered person because such a person will hardly admit that he or she is wrong. One can make a conscious effort not to become angry, but this takes a heroic effort. There are useful guidelines available. One right way is to cool down before reacting, although this rarely happens, and agree to discuss the dispute with a third, neutral party. Another practical approach is that suggested by Jesus: "Just give in." Let the other party have his or her way. "If anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." (Matt. 5:39) Anger is easy to assess after calming down because one can usually see the confrontation objectively and decide whether the angered person was right or wrong.

Anger is justified when it is rational and unselfish. Some theologians call such passion "indignation." Our Lord was indignant when he cleansed the Temple of its Jewish entrepreneurs. "Jesus entered the temple of God and drove out all who sold and bought in the temple, and he overturned the tables of the money-changers and the seats of those who sold pigeons." (Matt. 21:22) Indignation is thus defined as just anger because it goes against sin and injustice.

Christ was also indignant against his disciples in today's Gospel text. His indignation was motivated by the sin of unbelief. The apostles failed to expel the demon because of their little faith, and because they relied on their efforts. The scribes mocked their failure, and the rest looked on in skepticism.

Unbelief in God is the greatest of all sins. God thunders forth from Heaven in anger with the sinner, but they ignore Him. Christ calls the unbeliever "perverse" because unbelief comes from stubbornness—and stubborn people do not listen to reason because of pride—and pride is idolatry. Whenever the temptation of doubt comes upon us, ask for help, as did the person did in Mark's Gospel "Help my unbelief,"(Mark 9:24) he begged. Such a statement may appear contradictory and ambiguous, but it is not. Rarely can a person express perfect faith!

The opposite of anger is the virtues of circumspection, patience, and humility. "Learn from me for I am meek and humble of heart," Christ counselled. Meekness is not weakness. In practical terms, it means "thinking before speaking," and considering all related circumstances before reacting. Patience, circumspection, and meekness prevent all forms of anger and revenge. They help us in maintaining our rationality.

Amen!