



## Third Sunday of Lent B March 4, 2018

- ◆ Why is Jesus mad as hell in today's Gospel
- ◆ Practical suggestions for dealing with anger

### Why is Jesus very angry in today's Gospel?

In today's Gospel, we are presented with an image of Jesus that we may find difficult to visualize. In the reading, Jesus is 'mad as hell' with what's going on in the Temple area, a place of prayer. Can you imagine Jesus outside our church knocking over my book tables and whipping my book salesmen? Whoa! We might wonder: "What's up with Jesus? Isn't his reaction to commercialism outside church a bit over the top or, more accurately, way over the top?" So why is Jesus so angry?

At the time, selling animals and changing money in the Temple are not bad in themselves. In fact, they're a necessity because only a certain type of coin is permitted in the Temple. Cattle and sheep are sold for sacrifice so that people don't have to drag their animals through miles of desert. What enrages Jesus is the cheating and manipulation. Money changers give people \$2 for \$3, while others overcharge for animals needed for sacrifice. Jesus gets 'mad as hell' because God's house, which should be a place of true worship, has become a place of greed, where the poor are taken advantage of. This outrages Jesus as it outraged the prophets. Listen to what God says through the prophet Amos regarding worship that doesn't lead to care for the poor:

*I hate, I despise your feasts, and I take no delight in your solemn assemblies.  
Even though you offer me your burnt offerings and cereal offerings,  
I will not accept them, and the peace offerings of your fatted beasts I will not look upon.  
Take away from me the noise of your songs;  
To the melody of your harps I will not listen.  
But let justice roll down like waters;  
And righteousness like an ever-flowing stream.*  
(Am 5:21; also see Is 1:12-17; Hos 6:6; 8:11-13)

Our monthly practice of bringing to church food for the poor is a good reminder that true worship of God must lead to concern for the poor, or God will be very upset, to put it mildly.

### Should we have a problem with the way Jesus expressed his anger?

Can you imagine what kind of society we would have if we all followed Jesus' example and expressed our anger as he did? Also, is there a danger that abusive persons might use today's Gospel to justify abusive behavior? So why does Jesus display his anger the way he did? I don't have a clear answer. I read many commentaries on this Gospel but none of them spoke to this question.

We might say that Jesus wanted the people to never forget the point he was trying to make. After all, if Jesus had merely told the money-changers, "Lads, I think you shouldn't be taking advantage of the poor outside God's Temple," I doubt that they would have gotten the point. They would have simply blown away his remark as one of a young fanatic. But the way Jesus expressed his outrage would be remembered for a long time, especially by his disciples.

Also, the Bible has other examples of very unusual actions by the great men of God. They did something most unusual to get the people's attention, for example, the 'loincloth incident' (Jer 13:1-11) and the 'eating of the scroll' (Ezekiel (2:1-10).) Both incidents, like the one in today's Gospel, are very dramatic ways of getting the people's attention. If we read the Gospel, we will find Jesus angry numerous times, especially with the Pharisees, but he never displayed his anger in such dramatic or violent way. And neither should we.

### 'Righteous Anger' and 'Unrighteous Anger'

Righteous anger is the anger we should feel in the face of a great wrong or injustice done to us or others. Dr. Martin Luther King and his co-workers and Nelson Mandela had righteous anger about racial prejudice. Many people in our church had a sense of righteous anger towards bishops for the way they handled the sex abuse scandals. Many are still angry.

### Dealing with Anger

The following is taken from my article on *Dealing with Anger*. (See my writings on our website. Scroll down to Miscellaneous Articles.)

Psychologists tell us that anger is the emotion we most often feel—with sadness coming in as a distant second. This will surprise most of us because we are such experts at repressing our anger. Learning to deal with our anger in a constructive way is one of the most important life skills that we can learn and teach our children. This article has lots of concrete information about anger, an emotion around which there is much misunderstanding. It also has several concrete suggestions on how to deal constructively with one's anger.

### What makes people angry?

It might be an interesting exercise to track our anger for a day or two to see what gets us ticked off or infuriated. The following are some common triggers of anger:

- We do not meet our own expectations or others do not meet our expectations.
- We have a big need to control life or others.
- Long periods of caring for a loved one, our own physical limitations, injuries to ourselves or others, acts of injustice against us or others.
- It is normal for grieving people to often feel anger with their situation. They may be angry at God, the doctor, church, other family members, or just the situation they find themselves in.
- Psychologists remind us that most of our anger occurs when our need for *security*, *affection* and *control* is threatened. We certainly see this as we watch people deal with the economic recession. Also, our anger may be due to the fact that we are working too much and are stressed out, not appreciated, tired or powerless, etc. What makes *you* angry?

### Eight things to remember when dealing with anger

1. In discussing the topic of anger, we should differentiate between "*righteous*" and "*unrighteous*" anger. "*Righteous anger*" is what the prophets in the Old Testament expressed when they saw injustices and false forms of worship in their communities. It was righteous anger that motivated Jesus in today's Gospel to throw the sellers out of the Temple for turning his Father's House into a place of business. Jesus was angry at the exorbitant prices the poor were charged for animals used to offer sacrifice. In fact, we can say that our conscience is dormant if we do not feel *righteous anger* when confronted with a blatant injustice, whether involving ourselves or others. We can be grateful for the anger that moves us to right an injustice. *Righteous anger* impelled Martin Luther King to fight racism in this country. *Righteous anger* moved mothers to get

legislation passed against drunken drivers. Conversely, *unrighteous anger* results from *perceived* injustices, hurts and rejections. We express our anger in a destructive manner when, for example, we don't get our way.

We can say that feeling anger and rage and expressing it in an appropriate way can be a positive and Christian thing to do. Sometimes our anger is calling us to right some injustice.

2. Rarely are relationships hurt when anger is expressed in an *appropriate way*. In fact, when couples, friends or coworkers learn to express their anger in an appropriate way, their relationships and work situations are usually enhanced. On the other hand, when anger is repressed or expressed in a negative way, we can be sure relationships and work situations will deteriorate.

As a corollary to this point, we can say that *mentally healthy* people are not without anger. Rather, they have learned to deal with their anger in a constructive way. On the other hand, mentally unhealthy people may not have "too much" anger. Rather, they express their anger in a *destructive way*.

3. Sometimes the anger we feel is "our problem" and we shouldn't make a big fuss about it. We just need to deal with it and get on with our lives. For example, we may be mad when someone challenges our opinion or viewpoint. We may get "hot under the collar" and want to put down the other person in some way when we should instead be open and grateful for the other person's input. Of course such a response demands much maturity and humility.

4. St. Paul says: "*Be angry but sin not*" (Eph 4:26). It is good and healthy to feel our anger and to express it in an appropriate way. Sin only arises when we nurse it and *express* it in destructive ways, e.g., sarcasm, nagging, withdrawal, negative humor, cold silence, procrastination, sexual affairs, harsh sermons and "looks that could kill." The more we nurse our anger, the deeper it becomes. It can grow into the "poison of resentment." Harboring resentment is a sure way to kill a relationship. When we express our anger in a destructive way, we are simply adding more darkness to an already dark night. Before we can forgive a hurt, it is important that we give some expression to the anger around the hurt.

5. Allowing anger to emerge, taking time to befriend it, and expressing it in a constructive way is often the beginning of a more authentic life for those of us who tend to repress our anger in order to always appear "kind and nice" to others. Needless to say, it will not be easy

to move from being "Mr./Mrs. Nice Guy" to being one's real self, which always involves some experiences of anger. Most of us may need the help of a counselor to coach us through this transition. But the effort involved is well worth the cost when we experience our newly discovered feeling as we move from a spiritless, going-through-the-motions existence to a life that is more vibrant and in touch with what is really going on within and around us.

6. Sometimes the manifestation of our anger is *misplaced*. For example, we are mad at our boss but we take it out on our spouse, friend, co-worker, child, or the dog.

7. "Free-floating anger" is another important element of this emotion. We may be trapped in a bad marriage or with a permanently ill spouse, or in a job that we do not like. We may be in denial about a recent loss. We may be constantly mad because life is dealing us a poor hand. On a regular basis, we "fly off the handle" and get mad with someone who has done nothing to offend us.

8. As we deal with our anger, seeking to understand where we or the other person is coming from can be very challenging but also very helpful.

### **Learning to deal with anger in a constructive way**

We will begin to live our best life *now* if we decide to do what we can to learn to deal with our anger in a healthy way. Can you imagine how much more peaceful our family and social lives and the world at large would be if all of us learned to deal with our anger in a constructive way? The following suggestions are far from easy to embrace. They need motivation, lots of discipline, constant effort and great cooperation with the grace of God. Now for the practical suggestions...

Take time out to cool down. When our "anger button" is pressed, our immediate reaction may be to strike out and "get back" at the person who hurt or offended us. *A big challenge will be to take time out to cool down before we take any action.* This step demands much self-discipline, self-control, prayer, and a strong desire to become a wholesome person. Sometimes I use my journal to write down my thoughts and feelings. I may write a nasty letter to the offender, but of course I don't mail it. My journaling exercise invariably helps to defuse the anger. Physical exercise, meditation and deep breathing are other good ways to defuse our anger. I've often been very grateful that I have taken time to cool down before expressing my anger in a destructive way. When nasty words are said, it can take a long time to undo the harm caused by them. When we are caught up

in our anger, we don't *think clearly, speak rationally* or *feel compassionately*; hence, the absolute importance for taking time to cool down and reflect.

Take time to reflect and pray. Having cooled down, we should take time to reflect and pray about what is happening within us. What is causing the anger? Sometimes it may be very clear, but other times it may not be clear. We may blame the cause of our anger on one thing when, in fact, it is something else. We can ask the Holy Spirit to help us name the *true cause* of our anger. This demands much openness, especially if we are resistant to admitting and acknowledging a certain personality trait. For example, we may get angry when we can't control a situation or someone else's behavior. If this is the case, the problem is ours and we need to take care of it. This may mean letting go of our need to control someone else's behavior or letting go of an expectation that the other person cannot fulfill—at least at this time. Or we may become aware that we are making too much of what happened.

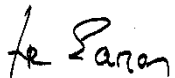
On the other hand, in our reflection and prayer, we may become aware of our tendency to repress anger, thus allowing others to take advantage of us. We may conclude that we have been violated in some way and that we need to do something about it. With reflective prayer, we will hopefully get some clarity on what we need to do with the anger we feel. Martin Luther King rightfully decided that his anger concerning racial discrimination in America was righteous anger, which motivated him to fight till he died for justice for his people. It would have been a terrible mistake if Dr. King had repressed his anger, or expressed it in a destructive way. In the aftermath of Hurricane Katrina, thousands of people experienced righteous anger at the local, state and federal government's poor response to one of the biggest disasters that we have ever experienced in our country.

Talk to a friend. Sometimes it helps to talk to a friend who can give us an *objective* opinion on what he/she thinks. We should avoid seeking the help of people who will only tell us what *we want to hear*. So we may need to tell our friend to be really honest with us. And our friend may also have helpful suggestions as to what action, if any, we need to take.

Experts in the field of anger remind us that anger *always gets expressed* either directly or indirectly. Many of us express our anger in an indirect way much more frequently than we may care to admit. We do this because we may not want to admit to someone, or even to ourselves, that we are angry. We may believe it is wrong to be angry. We may feel ashamed of our anger

or we may not want the person to know that he/she had indeed pressed our "anger button." Some of the common ways that people express anger *indirectly* are negative humor, sarcasm and displaced anger. The person we are angry at, or an innocent third party, may receive the butt of our anger. We may withdraw and/or give someone who has offended us the cold, silent treatment. We become *passive-aggressive* because we do not want to admit that we are angry and so we do things—intentionally or unintentionally—that will annoy and frustrate the person we are mad at. The feeling of being "bored with everything" is another way our anger can be indirectly expressed. Within marriage, some indirect expressions of anger are excessive drinking and extramarital affairs which often are a mask for the real issues: intimacy, closeness and emotional distance.

Have a blessed week,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Le Sarah". The letters are fluid and connected, with a prominent initial 'L'.