

24th Ordinary Sunday
September 13, 2020
“Misused and Misplaced Anger”

Sir 27:30 -28:7

Rom 14:7-9

Mt 18:21-35

My Brothers and Sisters in the Lord –

At some time in our life, most of us have had to deal with anger. God gave us the emotion of anger so that we could effectively take action against sin, against evil, against any physical or moral force that would do us harm. However, for many, their anger has led to a host of other problems.

We begin to have a real problem with anger when we deal with it in inappropriate ways, which include physical and emotional child and spousal abuse, which I do not wish to address today.

Between 1974 and 1994, the actor Charles Bronson was the main character in the Death Wish series of films. His character sought to avenge violent street crimes perpetrated by hoodlums, but beyond the control of the police. However, he enjoyed taking revenge and killing those he raged against. He actually went looking for people who preyed upon others in the dark of night – and killed them! Of course, this was no way to deal with his personal anger for crimes against him or against others!

Another form that anger often takes is that of resentment for others who don't do what we think they should be doing. I once knew of someone in a religious community who practiced poverty by always eating left-overs – even at a Thanksgiving holiday dinner! However, this person was very hard to live with. Their self-righteous resentment characterized every interaction that they had with other community members. This person seemed to be always angry and even looked angry and unhappy most of the time!

This is only one of the things that our buried anger can do to us. We can also become depressed, turn to an addictive escape, and become unwell physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

The Book of Sirach urges us not to be angry and vengeful when we have suffered an injustice. Most of the time, the slights and hurts we feel are never intended. Certainly, people are not always polite or considerate – But they usually have no intention of hurting us.

However, even if the hurt was deliberate and intended, Sirach tells us to forgive, unconditionally, those who hurt us! As God forgives us, so must we forgive all others. Surely, we have sinned ourselves – sometimes in terrible ways. Only God knows the extent of the harm and pain we have caused others – especially when we intended to hurt them. And yet, God will forgive even the most horrific of our sins and crimes as long as we forgive others and are sorry, ourselves. But forgive others, we must!

Jesus deals with the issue of forgiveness, today, in the Gospel of Matthew. The servant was some high-ranking official in the king's court. He probably embezzled funds from the treasury for his own personal advantage. Some scholars speculate that it was as much as 10 million dollars! Since he had no way to repay it, the king planned to sell him, his family, and all his possessions. Thus, he and his family would become slaves! Nevertheless, when the man pleaded with him, the king relented and forgave everything out of true mercy and compassion.

However, the official didn't learn a thing. He, subsequently, had one of his colleagues put into debtor's prison to work off what was owed to him. When the king discovered the official's selfish treatment of the other man, he ordered the official tortured until he paid back all that he owed – which would be never. In other words, Jesus is telling us that hell exists, and awaits all of us who will not forgive all sins and hurts against ourselves.

In his letter to the Romans, St. Paul is dealing with self-righteous judgment and resentment. Some of the Roman Christians were doing more than what was required for the sake of true discipleship. Others, looked upon them as weaker because they took on more self-denial. The presumption was that they did so because of their personal sins and weakness.

So Paul tells them that those who judged the others had it all wrong. It doesn't matter how much extra we do or don't do. What matters is what is in our heart. Do we truly live our lives in God and are directed by God in all that we do? Or do we live for ourselves? God created us for Himself. He sent Jesus to teach us of His love and to save us from our sins! Moreover, when we die, we will still be God's creation and possession. So let us never forget: who we are – from whence we come – where we will go – and for whom we must live at every moment!

Oh, Lord, our God, deliver us from all unjust anger and any spirit of vengeance. May we forgive all others as You forgive us. And may we live and die not for ourselves, but for You who made us for Yourself alone!

Amen.

September 13, 2020

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