

Saint Joseph Parish, San Mateo CA
Sermon of Trinity VI
Mt. 5:20-26
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You know it and I know it. Anger in all its faces is now a plague on the face of this earth. Anger can lead to murder.

In this part of the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us how deep the 6th commandment on murder truly goes. Our Lord knows how quickly our poor human hearts can go from annoyance and impatience to resentment and rancor, then to fury and the fire of violence against our neighbor. Without His grace, we are not at all equipped to set a backfire. Anger takes its toll not only on our opponent, our relation with him or her or them, but on our souls and bodies, our communities. It wreaks havoc on our mental clarity and our cardiovascular systems. We cannot lay down to sleep. We pay a dear price.. a price we tend to ignore He has already paid. So, for His sake, it has to be left aside.

Saint Gregory the Great tells us anger "is a great obstacle to

our spiritual progress, because if it is not remedied, we lose good judgment or mental poise, gentleness..which is the charm of our relations with others..and the sense of justice, for such passion blinds us to the rights of others. We wound the spirit of recollection, so indispensable to an intimate union with God. to peace of soul, to a ready compliance with the inspirations of grace."

Like a wind-driven fire, anger is too hard to keep from spreading..So from the gospel of our Lord this morning presents us instead with a call to perfection, His perfection, and **it is** a really tall order. What He says amounts to saying that we all already in the territory of venial sin with sparks of annoyance and impatience, and deep in the hole of mortal sin if we are deliberate and willful about it..if anger catches fire: "But I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of the Judgment..And whosoever shall say to his brother, 'Raca', shall be in danger of the council. And whoever shall say, "Thou fool" shall be in danger of the hellfire." Hellfire.

So, how to prevent or leave anger behind? Follow the one word example of our Lord..meekness. The One Who saves us calls us to learn and live meekness. What is meekness? One prayerful picture tells it all:

O Jesus, savior of the world, in the midst of Your sufferings, persecutions and revilings, You did not utter any threat or curse; you did not defend, excuse, or avenge yourself. You were spat upon, but you did not turn your face away; your hands and arms were stretched upon the cross, but there was no fist. In all things you surrendered yourself to the will of your executioners, in order to accomplish the work of saving us. This is a mystery of infinite mercy, but it is also the reality you call us to live. Thus, O Lord, You give us an example of meekness and patience in adversity. You teach us not to render an eye for an eye or an evil for an evil, but, on the contrary to render good for evil.

We reach up to the Cross, and in its shadow, we plead for God's grace to help us imitate Christ's meek example. Then we turn our wills to practice the virtue little step by little step until we walk

this habit into our being...

Meekness is first and foremost a grace from God and a gift of the Holy Ghost. Perhaps we have left it under appreciated. The Holy Ghost has been given to us to enable us to continue to be His hands in the world. Not our clenched fists. He invites us, saying, "Go; Behold I send you as lambs among wolves". He commands us, as He commanded the Apostles, to go without staff or arms of defense, though we know we shall meet struggles and enemies. Jesus, the Lamb of God, conquered the world by His meekness; so we too shall win the hearts of others to the degree in which, overcoming anger rising in ourselves, we become the lambs of meekness..ready like Him, to suffer rather than to assert ourselves and defend ourselves by force. Yes, it's a tall order indeed.

When we will to cultivate the virtue of meekness we are doing our part-as we must at all costs-to acquire that meekness of heart which Jesus was at pains to impart to us, for He Himself tells us this brings interior Peace as its fruit. "Learn of Me, because I am meek and humble of heart and you shall find rest for your souls." What a

welcome outcome..interior peace...rest for our souls!!

However, we have not yet acquired a sustained habitual meekness and that continual peace that accompanies it, if when we meet with unexpected insults, contradictions, injuries or offenses, our meekness fails and our peace of heart vanishes, at least momentarily. These daily experiences, although painful and humiliating, are healthy for our souls. Why healthy? Because, far more than any reasoning, they make us realize the insufficiency of our efforts and the dire need we have of God's grace. This help He has already given us in the Comforter. When the Holy Ghost moves us through this gift, He somehow quenches in us every trace of ill feeling toward our neighbor. He softens our weapon-like hardness and, so to speak, takes our heart in His Hands to establish it in meekness and habitual peace.

St. Thomas Aquinas says, "Meekness makes a man or woman a master of him-or herself." Without this interior control of all our fighting impulses-feelings of animosity,

antipathy, indignation anger-we might be able to present an appearance of meekness as 'worldlies" do when it is opportune, but we will never have the real thing which calmly faces all the trials of daily living. Even more, this total self-control is what Jesus said would enable us to dwell in peace on the new earth..to live in the vision of St. John's Revelation in a broader, more beautiful sense of the new land, that is, to inhabit the hearts of our fellow inhabitants.

O Holy Ghost, give us a simple heart which will not retire within itself to savor its own sorrows, a heart magnanimous in giving itself, which does not forget any favor received, nor hold rancor for any injuries done to it. We ask for the grace to make our hearts capable of bearing tranquilly all opposition, a heart which will love without expecting love in return. Let us be content to vanish by the example of your meekness into the hearts of others, sacrificing our wills before the heavenly Father. Then we shall have big and indomitable hearts, that no ingratitude can close and no indifference can weary, hearts tormented by the glory of Jesus

Christ, wounded by His love, a
wound which cannot be healed
except in heaven.
Amen.