

Homily. 24th Sunday in Ordinary Time. Year. A. 16/17 September 2023.

Right off the bat I think that it's important to get something straight. Anger and getting angry isn't wrong or sinful in itself any more than is any other spontaneous emotion or feeling. In fact, there's such a thing as justified anger, the sort of anger that arises when a person or persons or an institution treat us with rudeness, contempt, disrespect, and injustice. Justified anger can also arise when we see someone we love or a value that we highly regard being hurt, insulted or tossed aside. When justified anger hits us because of such appalling behaviour from a person or a group, it can serve as a vital spur that energetically sends us into action to right a wrong and to preserve our good name, due rights and integrity.

Feelings of themselves have no moral value because they aren't under the command of our free will. What is under our free will and choice is what we do with our feelings when we become aware of them. It's this choice, our behaviour, that does have moral content and it's to this that the readings refer to when they say that resentment and anger are foul things and both are found with the sinner. In summary then, our feelings just are what they are. It's what we decide to do with them that turns them into something for the good or feeds and festers them for the worse, even into something terrible and destructive.

When we get into a feeding, nurturing and festering mode with our angry, resentful, jealous, greedy or lustful feelings then we've entered very troubled and dangerous territory indeed. The result of all of this fills up the daily news cycle, the police stations, the courts, the prisons and leads to the broken hopes, dreams and lives of many. On a bigger scale, this

takes us to corporate greed and corruption, and internationally to conflicts and wars between peoples and nations. When this happens we know full well that what is right and true become the first victims to fall in the battle.

So, for us who believe in Jesus and his gospel way the answer, both personally and communally, lies in acknowledging that the life and death of each one of us does have its influence on others; that we're never entirely private or isolated; that we're always involved with others for good or for ill, and that if we strive to live for the Lord and die for the Lord then we'll always belong to the Lord. Our model is what Jesus said, chose, did and lived. It's at this point that the gospel story of seventy- seven times unlimited forgiveness and mercy kicks in and makes sense. We take our feelings, and by holding them up to the light of our faith in Christ who has lovingly forgiven us even to his death, we then decide in the Holy Spirit what we're going to do about what we feel.

This prayerful pause puts us in control of ourselves, giving us the freedom and power to decide how we'll act, rather than just react. We become like the King in the parable, who chose to forgive all of the huge debt owed to him, and not to be like the servant who angrily threatened and throttled his fellow brother or sister. Here we step into the shoes of God, into the sandals of Christ our King. When all's said and done this is the way of God's life and holiness that resides at the heart of Christ's followers, of the Church itself and it's the meaning and message of our Eucharistic communion in mercy that we're sharing and celebrating here once more.