

Homily Sunday 7C Anger and Forgiveness

(24.02.2019)

Readings: 1 Samuel 26:7-13,22-25; Psalm 103: The Lord is kind and merciful; 1 Cor 15:45-50; Luke 6:27-38

Is it a sin to be angry? How do we understand anger, and is there a difference between feeling angry and anger?

First and foremost anger is a human emotion. It is a reaction to some pain or hurt that I have experienced myself or that I have witnessed.

It may be my emotional response when I am attacked by someone or it may be my response to an act of injustice towards other people.

And like any human emotion, it is neither right nor wrong, neither good nor bad. It is simply my spontaneous reaction.

It only becomes a moral matter when I deliberately choose to act on my initial anger. It is then that anger turns to hate and leads to thoughts and even acts of revenge.

The opposite path is forgiveness and reconciliation. Those who chose the path of hatred and revenge ultimately only hurt themselves.

But the way of forgiveness is not the denial of our feelings but rather to find a way to let go of our anger and to move beyond it. And we can only begin that journey when we first accept what has happened.

Some people go through life feeling angry, but they don't know why they are angry. We may say someone has a short fuse or needs anger management. But often what is happening is that they have experienced some hurt that is so deeply buried that they are not even conscious of it. But certain words or actions may touch that raw nerve and they erupt.

If we find ourselves in that situation, we often need someone to help us to name that hurt before we can let it go. Naming the cause of our anger and letting go of the hurt is often the first step towards real forgiveness.

Sometimes we hear the phrase: "Forgive and Forget" and because we can't forget what happened we conclude that we can't forgive that person.

We may still remember but we can also forgive.

What Jesus offers in Luke's gospel is a way to move forward and we discover that the path of forgiveness leads to mercy and compassion.

The human dimension of mercy was captured by William Shakespeare's classic line in *The Merchant of Venice* when Portia declares:

“The quality of mercy is not strain'd.
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heave upon the place beneath.
It is twice blest: It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.”

Shakespeare's insight has been shown to be true throughout the ages. To forgive is to find life; to hate and to seek revenge ultimately destroys the person who is unable to forgive.

That same reality is captured by the teaching of Jesus. It is not that God will not forgive us. God always forgives; God is always merciful. But if we are unable to forgive others, we close ourselves off from receiving forgiveness.

Our hatred blinds us and we no longer see our own need for forgiveness or we become so weighed down with guilt that we think God will never forgive us.

The Eucharist we share is also a Sacrament of Reconciliation. To be one with Christ is to be reconciled with God and that is why immediately before communion we share with each other a sign of peace.

“Peace” is much more than a greeting; to say “Peace be with you” is to share the mercy and forgiveness of God with each other and in that moment we commit ourselves to forgiving each other so that we become the one Body of Christ.

Paul Crowley

St Mary's Concord