

Anger & Forgiveness

We continue our journey through the seven deadly sins and the seven life-giving virtues by looking at anger and its antidote forgiveness. Once again, we begin by turning to the Catechism for a definition. Specifically, it defines **anger** as *"An emotion which is not in itself not wrong, but which, when it is not controlled by reason or hardens into resentment and hate, becomes one of the seven capital sins."*

Anger, then, is not necessarily a sin. It is a natural emotion to injustice. For example, St. John Paul II was angry at Communist oppression in his native Poland. A just anger is sometimes called righteous indignation. Anger becomes sinful when it hardens into resentment and hate, or when it becomes excessive and not motivated by love. For example, an irrational desire for vengeance is sinful.

In Dante's *Purgatorio*, the wrathful are forced to walk through thick acrid smoke that is darker than night. Consequently, they are unable to see the outside world. Poetically, then, Dante conveys that wrathful people do not see things right. Wrath blinds people and chokes them to virtues such as meekness.

Anger can take different forms. For example, a low form of anger is impatience (venial fault), while physical abuse, fury, or hatred are much more serious. In short, when self-control is lost, a tremendous amount of harm can be done.

The antidote to wrath is **forgiveness**. Forgiveness is a central tenet of our faith. The risen Jesus breathes on the frightened disciples in the upper room and says, *"Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained"* (Jn. 20:22-23). Forgiveness liberates. The prodigal son, who experienced his father's forgiveness, truly lives again (Lk. 15:32).

Authentic forgiveness does not mean you just ignore or brush over real hurts. Sometimes you must courageously and prudently address wrongs committed. This is done, however, to restore the relationship. In short, love – willing the good of the other – must be the context in which you address wrongs committed.

If you struggle with resentment and hatred, there are some things you can do. For example, take some steps to heal a broken relationship. Do not see it as "his problem" or "her problem," but

rather “our problem.” Speak to God and ask Him what you can do practically to begin healing the process (e.g., write a note, pick up the phone, or even smile at someone who has hurt you). If all else fails, consider getting him or her a puppy.

Additionally, ask the Lord for the habit of reflecting before acting. The Lord can help you pause and take a deep breath. Trust that the good Lord can help you master your emotions!

Furthermore, pray for the virtue of meekness, which is the habit of being mild-mannered and a willingness to tolerate the faults others. Sometimes, I suggest those struggling with anger to ask for the intercession of St. Francis de Sales. He initially had an irascible streak in his personality, but over time by God’s grace became mild-mannered. He is now known as the gentleman saint.

Finally, you can always turn to Mary. After searching for three days (and almost suffering from a heart attack) for twelve-year-old Jesus, Mary could have been bitter or resentful. However, she remained calm and listened as Jesus explained that He was about the things of the Father (Lk. 2:49). Like Mary, while you may not always understand what Jesus is doing, you can trust that He will bring about healing and resolution if you continue to seek Him.

~St. Thérèse, pray for us!



Anger Management

When angry with someone, it helps to sit down and think about the problem.