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ALL SOULS' DAY REFLECTION

Fr. Reginald Martin, O.P.

Theologians can write volumes about what we believe, but the articles of our faith – the things we believe in – are usually expressed pretty succinctly. The elements of the Creed are a good example and so is what the Church teaches about Purgatory. Each of us probably has an idea what Purgatory is like. Many of these images have come from Dante, and our imaginations have provided the rest – pictures vivid enough if not to scare us into being good, then certainly scary enough to frighten us into being careful.

Our friends may be interested to learn that the Church has this to say about Purgatory

The souls of the just which, in the moment of death, are burdened with venial sins or the temporal punishment due to sins, enter Purgatory.

The twenty-five words of this statement are as remarkable for what they do not say as they are for what they proclaim. The only declaration the Church makes about Purgatory is that God has provided a means by which the dead who are not altogether prepared for His Kingdom will be purified so they can worthily enter heaven.

Purgatory is not a second chance; it is the next-to-final step in a journey that leads us to God. Our faith tells us God provides a grace appropriate for each step of this journey, and Purgatory is the fulfillment of Jesus' promise that he will be present at the last step with the same love that greeted the first.

A motto on the face of old sundials reminds us, *Omnes vulnerant; ultima necat*. It refers to the hours of our life and says: "They all wound; the last one kills." The preface of the Mass for the Dead gives the lie to these words. It reminds us that death is an hour in our lives, but not the final one. "For God's faithful people, life is changed, not ended." For God's faithful people, life is always changing.



Silhouette by Sr. Jean Dorcy, O.P.

The changes begin at Baptism, when we become a new creation through an action that unites us with Christ's death. One day, the sign gives way to the reality and Christ's death actually becomes our death, Christ's life our life. The sea change promised at our Baptism comes true, and we are transformed into something rich and strange.

Necessity forces us to say good bye when death intervenes, but God wills nothing be lost, which means that all of us are united to one another in Christ's love. On All Souls' Day, when we remember all those who have died, we claim our connection with them in the communion of God's saints, and we acknowledge their – and our – power to do good for one another. Even after death.

Throughout the month of November we will offer Mass each day, remembering your friends and beloved family members who have died. Please use the enclosed form to send us their names.

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THEOLOGY FOR THE LAITY

The Capital Sins: Part IV

ANGER

By Father Reginald Martin, O.P.

ANGER AND OUR SOCIAL RELATIONS

In his Letter to the Ephesians, St. Paul writes,

If you are angry, let it be without sin. The sun must not go down on your wrath; do not give the devil a chance to work on you.

These words are part of a larger instruction on the relations that ought to characterize Christians' dealings with one another. Elsewhere in his letter, St. Paul counsels the Ephesians – and us – to put away falsehood and speak only the truth, and to work not only to meet our own needs, but those of others. And then he adds

Let no evil talk come out of your mouths, but only such as is good and edifying...that it might impart grace to those who hear...Let all bitterness and wrath and anger and clamor and slander be put away from you, with all malice, and be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another...

Key to St. Paul's admonition is his understanding that although we have been created as individuals, we are part of a large, complex society. Living in a community, as we do, means we must consider the goals and goods of others, not simply our own. The gift of reason, which sets us apart from the rest of God's creation, provides the key that enables us to live in harmony with others.

THE MORAL CHALLENGE OF SOCIAL LIFE

When he considers the many challenges to our common life, one contemporary writer, Kevin Vost, observes, "[anger] is a failure of our reason to rein in our irascible appetite that seeks to fight back against things that thwart our desires." (*The Seven Deadly Sins*, p. 173) Our experience teaches us that sin and virtue stand at opposite ends of a moral spectrum, and Vost reaches out to St. Thomas Aquinas to lay an easily-grasped picture of what we seek when we sin.

St. Thomas observed that virtue seeks a single good. This means the many good things we encounter in life finally lead us to embrace the Supreme Good, which is God, the source of all good. Sin, on the other hand, abandons the singular goodness of God, to seek out and embrace the many lesser goods that capture our fancy. Our regard for ourselves lies at the heart of either choice, and when he considers the Capital Sins, St. Thomas Aquinas notes, "Sin is caused by a self-love in which we turn toward things of the world and away from God." (ST, I-II, 72.7)

St. Paul was an apt observer of our human nature, and a very perceptive psychologist. To live with others means we will, at least occasionally, find our desires

thwarted. The result is quite apt to be our experiencing a feeling of anger that we have not "gotten our way." But if we are angry, St. Paul says, "let it be without sin." If we look back and take another look at anger's unsavory companions on St. Paul's list of things to avoid, we might wonder how anger could possibly not be sinful. And here both the Scripture and our theology come to our assistance.

GOD SETS THE STANDARD

In his letter to the Romans (13:3-4) St. Paul admonishes us to obey those in authority. The ultimate authority, of course, is God, and our obedience should be easy because "[he is] not a terror to good conduct, but to bad...[and] he does not bear the sword in vain..." A valid, earthly authority "...is the servant of God to execute his wrath on the wrongdoer." What we should notice here is that God sets the standard for anger. If we are angry, we must be angry as God is angry, which is to say, our anger must be within reason, and it must be properly directed.

A DISTINCTION

The Ancients defined anger as a desire for vengeance, and this sounds quite terrifying. Until we consider that vengeance is different from vindictiveness. The dictionary defines vengeance as "the act of punishing another for a wrong or injury he has committed." Vindictiveness, on the other hand, is "the intention to cause harm." If we are angry because a person has done wrong, or because a situation or institution is unjust, our anger is appropriate – so long as we properly identify the object of our anger, and employ our anger to restore the order that ought to befit the Christian community.

VIRTUOUS ANGER

Jesus, who is our example in all things, offers an example of what St. Thomas Aquinas calls "zealous" anger when he drives the money-changers and livestock-dealers from the temple. Scholars can argue that these individuals were necessary for the temple sacrifices, but Jesus' point, apparently, is that they are practicing their trade in the wrong place. And in St. Matthew's account, Jesus remarks some of the traders' shady business practices, which have turned the temple "into a den of thieves."

SINFUL ANGER

And here we might allow St. Thomas to observe two attitudes that render anger sinful. The first is to become

angry too quickly, or without sufficient cause. The second is to allow our anger to linger. When St. John describes Jesus' anger in the temple he explains it with a reference to the Psalms, "Zeal for your house will consume me" (Ps 69.9) – a zeal that ought to consume us all. Each of the evangelists records Jesus' encounter with the tradesmen, but in all the accounts, once the incident is over, it is over; the sun has set on Jesus' anger, and he is on his way.

THE SOURCE OF ANGER

Our *Catechism* places anger among the first of the ills we inherited as a consequence of our First Parents' sin.

In the account of Abel's murder by his brother Cain, Scripture reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin, from the beginning of human history. Man has become the enemy of his fellow man. (CCC, #2259)

Jesus addresses this tragedy, in his Sermon on the Mount, when he says, "everyone who is angry with his brother shall be liable to judgment." (Mt. 5:22) So important is reconciliation in our Savior's view, that he tells us we ought even to interrupt our worship to seek peace.

If you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift.

THE LARGER PICTURE

Anger is a sin opposed to the Fifth Commandment, which obliges us not merely to respect the lives of those around us, but to strive – as Jesus commands us – for the common good of our Church and civil society. Although civil authority may have no choice, on occasion, but to employ force or other severe means to maintain public order,

If bloodless means are sufficient to defend human lives...and to protect...the safety of individuals, public authority should limit itself to such means, because they better correspond to the concrete conditions of the common good and are more in conformity to the dignity of the human person. (CCC 2267)

The point here is one we made earlier, vengeance may be necessary; vindictiveness has no place in Christian society. Thus, Thomas Aquinas observes, "[anger] may happen to be a mortal sin if through the fierceness of his anger a man fall away from the love of God and his neighbor." (ST, II-II, 158.4)

LAZINESS IS NO VIRTUE

The example of Jesus demonstrates that virtuous, zealous anger has a place in Christian life. We may admire those placid individuals who never seem to be angry, but if this apparent calm is the result of ignoring ills that ought to be addressed, it comes at a cost, which may be just as harmful as disordered anger. St. John Chrysostom cautioned

He who is not angry, whereas he has cause to be, sins. For unreasonable patience is the hotbed of many vices, it fosters negligence, and incites not only the wicked but even the good to do wrong.

MEEKNESS: THE REMEDY FOR ANGER

Dominicans are fond of quoting the maxim, *In medio stat virtus*, "Virtue stands in the middle." This is the spirit of moderation St. Paul urges us to embrace. And one aid to this goal is the virtue of meekness, which Jesus commends in the Beatitudes.

Meekness, like humility, is often misunderstood as a groveling, self-effacing attitude. In fact, it is far more, and has nothing to do with shyness, weakness of character, or a poor self-image. Meekness is the virtue that moderates anger. Thus, when Jesus says the meek will inherit the earth, he tells us that the meek are the same individuals who might very easily have taken it by force but who allow themselves to be restrained by the example of Christ who is meek and humble of heart.

ASK THE BULLIES

When Jesus promised the earth to the meek he was undoubtedly identifying his own people, subject to foreign, pagan occupation. His words in the Beatitudes echo Psalm 37, in which the Psalmist rejoices

Yet a little while and the wicked shall be no more... but the meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity.

The apocalyptic rewards for patient endurance still inspire many individuals, and for the economically disadvantaged and the politically oppressed, the beatitudes are a strong and hopeful promise of redress. But for most of us living in the developed economic world, circumstances are far different. For us to understand the blessing of meekness, we need to look at the world for just a moment from the point of view of the bullies.

St. Thomas says that "cruel and pitiless men seek by wrangling and fighting to destroy their enemies so as to gain security for themselves." Even if we are not talking about acres of land, who of us is not capable of wrangling and fighting until we get our way? The goal is security, and meekness reminds us that we will not find security through anger. Either a better fighter will come along or, if we get what we want by arguing, we feel so guilty we want to give it back.

THE BLESSING OF MEEKNESS

When he considers meekness, which moderates anger, St. Thomas Aquinas links it to the virtue of clemency, which moderates punishment. He finds immense value in these gifts, because – by enabling us to "resist evil inclinations" – they assist us in our quest for personal sanctity, as well as our striving for harmony with those among whom we live.

St. Thomas writes, "...anger, which is mitigated by meekness, is, on account of its impetuousness, a very great obstacle to man's free judgment of truth: wherefore

meekness above all makes a man self-possessed.” (ST, II-II. 157.4) Clemency, he observes, “...inasmuch as it mitigates punishment, it would seem to approach... charity, the greatest of the virtues, since thereby we do good towards our neighbor, and hinder his evil.” (Ibid.)

KEY TO A SACRAMENTAL LIFE

When we were small we learned that sacraments are outward signs, instituted by Christ to give grace. This means that Jesus has chosen certain elements of our lives to go beyond whatever meaning they have in themselves to allow us to touch Him.

To meditate on the Beatitudes teaches us that to be poor in spirit, to mourn, and to be meek is to cultivate a sacramental attitude toward creation – to find signs of the Kingdom of Heaven in the things that surround us in our everyday lives – and, even if we must be angry, to nourish attitudes toward the created world that will make us the ministers, here and now, of the life we look forward to enjoying fully in the future.

This is the challenge Jesus lays down when he describes the “...faithful and prudent steward whom the master will put in charge of his servants...Blessed is that servant whom his master on his arrival finds doing so. Truly, I say to you, the master will put the servant in charge of all his property.” (Lk 12:48)

A GIFT IN TRUST

In the gospel parables, the most trusted servant is the steward, who holds the keys that lock in whatever is valuable and lock out whatever is dangerous. To be God’s stewards is an immense honor, but we must not forget Jesus’ admonition, “much will be demanded of the one entrusted with much.” To be God’s stewards means treating creation the way God does, and it means living each day not as if it were our last, but as if God’s kingdom were already here, fully revealed in our midst.

This vocation, and its obligations, are worth pondering during this Year of Mercy. To embrace meekness means laying aside – or, at least, moderating – our anger, so our dealings with the world may more clearly resemble God’s. In *Misericordiae Vultus*, his letter on the Year of Mercy, our Holy Father is quick to remark that mercy does not diminish the demands of justice. However, Pope Francis stresses that mercy and justice are a united reality that result in love. By humbly accepting God’s mercy, we progress on our spiritual pilgrimage, guided by God’s love. Pope Francis writes, “...anyone who makes a mistake must pay the price. However, this is just the beginning of conversion, not its end....” (MV, 21)

THE EXAMPLE OF MARY

Pope Francis is only the latest of the Church’s writers to reflect on Mary’s merciful role in our salvation:

Her entire life was patterned after the presence of mercy made flesh.... At the foot of the cross,

Mary...witnessed the words of forgiveness spoken by Jesus. This supreme expression on mercy towards those who crucified him show us the point to which the mercy of God can reach. Mary attests that the mercy of the Son of God knows no bounds and extends to everyone, without exception. (MV, 24) Let us address her in the words of the Salve Regina...that she may never tire of turning her merciful eyes upon us, and make us worthy to contemplate the face of mercy, her Son Jesus.

We may be forgiven, these days, if we approach the morning news with dread, and mercy is probably not our first thought when we read of terrorist attacks that claim the lives of shoppers in Germany or an aged priest celebrating Mass in France. And yet, Jesus begged mercy for his executioners, and gave us his Mother as an example, that we might not forget how to beg – in meekness – that same mercy for those who wreak such havoc in our lives. ■

NEW TITLES

Mother Mary Coloring Book may sound like yet another volume for children, but it is a book for adults! This may sound too silly to be true, but imagine a few moments without your smart phone or tablet, time to quiet your mind and soul, by taking up some colored pencils or markers and – color! Whether you are at home, passing the time in a waiting room, or sitting in silence at church, this book provides a wonderful way to find peace and calm.

This coloring book not only provides a simple means to achieve something beautiful, it offers an opportunity for spiritual reflection. Consider the names given our Blessed Mother – Morning Star, Mother of Sorrows, and Our Lady of Light. Each page of this book includes a prayer or meditation to ponder, and a beautiful, original design to color.

Some time ago we told supporters of the Rosary Center to anticipate a new book, *Champions of the Rosary*, by Fr. Donald Calloway. The book has been published, at last, and we are certain our friends will find the volume worth the wait.

Fr. Calloway’s book comes with recommendations from a number of impressive individuals, including Archbishop Augustine Di Noia, who serves as Assistant Secretary for the Congregation of the Faith. He says, “In *Champions of the Rosary*, Fr. Calloway has written what is probably the most comprehensive book ever written on the Rosary. The author deftly negotiates the complexities of the story of the Rosary, weaving the historical, theological and devotional strands into a veritable masterpiece of scholarship and piety.” Your old friend, Fr. Reginald Martin, observed, “*Champions of the Rosary* is the most carefully researched book on the Rosary I have ever encountered. It is remarkably accessible, and the content in these pages will help us become champions of the Rosary.”

To obtain these and other titles visit our web page, www.rosary-center.org