

*“There is no sin or wrong in this life that gives a man more of a foretaste of hell than anger and impatience”*, this, according to the mystic and Doctor of the Church St. Teresa of Avila.

Why did she say this, 500 years ago, and why is it relevant today?

We live in a very angry world, don't we? It is the Christian's duty to know and make an honest assessment of it; to *be in the world but not of the world* according to St. John. We understand our cultural environment in order to evangelize and sanctify it; to communicate in word and deed the Gospel; to activate the grace bestowed on us in the sacramental life in order to conform ourselves and those around us to Christ.

And we understand the world to avoid the snares and traps of the Evil One and the sins he wants us to commit. Anger is one of the passions he plays on, and he seems to be doing a pretty good job of it today.

The Gospel message today is a powerful. This fifth Chapter of Matthew is framed by the discourse on the Beatitudes, the ideal of Christian living in the beginning, and closes with a call to *be perfect, just as Our heavenly Father is perfect*. And in the middle Our Blessed Lord teaches us about the law, adultery, divorce, oaths, retaliation, enemies, and anger. We disciples are not to be content with human standards of conduct nor merely obeying the Commandments. We are called to surpass them to the level of perfection.

This has always been a tall order, and perhaps especially these days since it seems people everywhere have a seething anger about something. And that anger is expressed without filters, at fever pitch, without apology, and worse rooted in entitlement. It is evident in our media, workplaces, our politics and, sadly even from some of the supposed Princes of the Church. St. Jerome says anger “darkens man's understanding and makes him act like a beast and a madman”. So true, isn't it? We can't get sucked into this anger vortex because *whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgment*.

St. Alphonsus Ligouri, the Church's Doctor of Moral Theology wrote that “anger resembles fire; fire is vehement in its action, and by the smoke it produces, obstructs the view, so anger makes men rush into a thousand excesses and prevents them from seeing the sinfulness of their conduct and thus exposes them to the danger of the judgment of Eternal Death”. That “anger is so pernicious to man that it even disfigures his countenance. And if it disfigures him before men how much more disfigured will it render him in the eyes of God”?

On the other hand, anger is an innate human emotion; part of our complex nature and free will. Like any of our passions, anger can be a source of virtue or weakness toward vice. “Anger for this very purpose is implanted in a man's nature so that it might be a flint of virtue and fortitude to sharpen them against vice and adversity” writes St. Gregory the Great.

All anger isn't sinful then. Anger can be the result of a just cause, something as basic as a parent angry with a child for an indiscretion and corrects them out of love and duty and metes out a just punishment. We all can and be angry with one another for a whole host of reasons, right? And where there is obvious sin, we charitably correct one another, which is both “lawful and praiseworthy” according to St Gregory. The other stuff, the small stuff, the nuisances and annoyances we have to let go of or else we will, as St. Teresa says, give our souls a foretaste of hell by letting this stuff stew. This opens the door to the evil one to do his best work.

The trap the Evil one has set for us; the bait thrown out there for our own destruction today is our reaction to the sinful, open and outrageous attacks against the body of Christ. I mean we bemoan that the world and our culture have lost almost all traces of Judeo-Christian principles that formed Western society. But the Church, whose foundational teaching seems to be crumbling, and for the whole world to see?

Sexual predators! Financial corruption! Outright heresy! The confusion caused by false teaching about human sexuality, marriage, the Eucharist, heaven and hell, the Priesthood and Diaconate, the heretical discourse and language memorialized in these supposed Synods! Is our anger justified? Of course!

Should we admonish it all? Yes. Call it what it is? Of course. Be angry, yes! But it must be rooted in charity, and restricted to our zeal for righteousness and justice, not erupt into serious harm to a neighbor, blasphemy, insult nor calumny in our conversations, texts, emails, blog posts. Remember Our Blessed Lord with the woman caught in adultery: *he who is without sin?* Anger must be directed to the sin and not the sinner or else we become the worldly, angry sinner and liable then to judgment. *The anger of man works not the justice of God* writes St. James.

This battle indeed is a spiritual one within ourselves and with others. As St. Paul reminds us our enemies are principalities and powers; minions of the Evil One and not the children of God, believers or not.

It is an angry world out there. Let us not fall prey to the evil one by becoming an angry world “in here”: in our hearts as and among the faithful. Many injuries are being inflicted upon Our Lord’s one holy, catholic and apostolic Church, and that means us too. *Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good.*

In these days of distress, we turn to Our Blessed Lord and ask for the grace of courage and patience. We turn to Our Blessed Lord, the truly wounded one who will remind us of our own sins that merit his justice too. We turn to Our Blessed Lord to dispel our anger and preserve in us his peace. We turn to our Blessed Lord to ward off the attacks of the evil one. We turn to Our Blessed Lord whose life and teaching inspires us to virtues that produce a foretaste of heaven rather than vices that are a foretaste of hell.

St. Teresa of Avila, pray for us.