

VI Trinity 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
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St. Matthew 5.20-26



Every one of us have at one time or another been angry...even very angry...with someone else. Was our anger justified...or not? Jesus understands human nature. He knows we can and will get angry. The question is what we do to keep that anger from growing.

There are very good and legitimate reasons we might get angry with another person...but our anger has to be the right kind of anger...motivated by our love of God...and the desire to see positive change in ourselves and others. Left unchecked...the wrong kind of anger...self-righteous anger...can morph into outright hatred and lead us into name-calling or worse.

The religious experts of Jesus' day held a literalistic view of the Sixth Commandment, "You shall not murder." Jesus makes it clear a literalistic approach to the Sixth Commandment is seriously flawed. He takes the Law to a higher level by explaining its true significance...and applies a deeper, spiritual meaning than what the religious experts were teaching.

He tells the people if they want to go to heaven, they have to be more faithful than doing lip service to the Law. They have to be more faithful than the religious leaders who claim to know the Law better than anyone else. What the religious experts were saying about the Law is true...anyone who commits murder will be arrested and brought to trial. Jesus adds a radical new teaching...anyone who gets angry at another person without a good reason has already murdered that person in the heart.

We have all heard the children's rhyme "Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never harm me". Words can indeed do a lot of harm. Words do mean something...words said in anger can't be taken back...they can tear down or build up relationships. We want our words to inspire others...not incite them.

Name-calling can lead to more serious actions. Today's Gospel is the only place in the Bible the word *raca* is used. *Raca* is an Aramaic word meaning "empty-headed". We

could come up with many other words...like *numskull* or *dummy*...to express our opinion about another person. All of these words suggest the other person is worthless...and no one is worthless in God's eyes.

Jesus warns his listeners against calling someone *raca*. It was a derogatory word that implied the other person was stupid or inferior. Calling someone *raca* was the same as murdering him in the heart. Jesus has just reinterpreted the Sixth Commandment...Do not commit murder...to include murder in thought and word...worthy of the most severe punishment.

We often use the word *fool* today to describe our opinion about another person without giving it much thought. The Greek word in the New Testament for fool is *moros*...the root word for *moron*...literally "mentally inert", "morally and spiritually dead", we might even say today "lights on, nobody home." Isaiah wrote what a *fool* says and does insults God. David wrote in Psalm 14 only a *fool* says in his heart there is no God. Jesus warns anyone who calls another person a *fool* is in danger of going to hell.

In the Bible, a *fool* is one whose thoughts, words and actions show utter contempt for God and his Commandments. A *fool*...is an *atheist*. We may have some idea what motivates another person by his words and actions. But we cannot know with any degree of certainty what lies in his heart. We should never resort to name-calling and the possible consequences of getting arrested and going to jail. That's a good reason we should think about what we are about to say to or about someone else!

God created us with free will to do what is good and right or what is wrong. Jesus tells us if we have hurt someone in thought, word or deed...we need to take action. We need to do everything we can to fix the mess...regardless of who created it. Refusal to reconcile with someone when it is possible to do so...is rebellion against God.

Jesus knows us better than we know ourselves. There are times we will get angry with another person. We must not let anger control us...we must let God's Holy Spirit turn that anger into selfless, unconditional love. And true Christian love...begins in the heart!

