

XIX Trinity 2023

Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish

Father Craig Looney

*Ephesians 4.17-32 St. Matthew 9.1-8*



If we become angry, Saint Paul tells us, we should not let our anger lead us to sin, and we should not stay angry all day. We should never give the Devil an open door into our hearts.

Saint Paul is paraphrasing Psalm 4.4 when he says not to stay angry all day. In Psalm 37.8 we are told to let go of our anger and leave rage behind. We are not to be preoccupied because it will only lead us to evil.

Neither Jesus nor Paul, tell us not to get angry. There are plenty of things that can make us angry. We see anger and rage played out on the 6 o'clock news every night...to the point of overload. The question we have to ask ourselves is what do we do with our anger.

Anger serves a purpose. It is a God-given emotion we can use constructively. It can be a powerful tool for change for ourselves, and the world. But anger can also create tension, anxiety and depression and cause us to lose sleep. This can lead to all kinds of health problems.

Father Massey Shepherd, author of the *Oxford American Prayer Book Commentary*, writes about today's Gospel...

*...“Today we know physical health and spiritual health are intimately bound together, and that there is often nothing more healing in its power than the relief and the release that come from a consciousness and acceptance of God's forgiveness.”*

Both Jesus and Paul are concerned with how we manage our anger. Uncontrolled anger can lead to hatred. Anger itself is not sinful. We cross over the line when our anger turns to hatred. Hatred is not compatible with the Christian life. What Jesus and Paul want us to do is control our anger...not let it control us!

Instead, Paul says we should strive for the ideals of Christian behavior: We should be kind and tender hearted to one another...we should forgive one another...as God has forgiven us through Christ. Admitting we do get angry is the first step in controlling it, and

putting into practice what Paul is talking about. He gives us some very practical advice on Christian love overpowering anger.

Paul reminds us we are all members together of the Body of Christ. What affects one member affects us all and indeed affects the Church throughout the world. His message is echoed in the Church's Baptismal and Confirmation Liturgies...Our hearts and minds must be made completely new, and we must put on our new selves, and live our lives accordingly. Failure to do so...as Paul poignantly puts it...makes God's Holy Spirit sad.

We can sense Paul's anger and frustration in some of his letters to the various churches. We can sense Jesus' anger and frustration on the first Palm Sunday when he witnessed the Temple being desecrated by the moneychangers and vendors. But they never let anger or frustration control them...they controlled it.

There is a connection between today's Epistle and Gospel readings. Jesus knew, as Father Shepherd states, spiritual and physical health, are bound together. Anger and disease are both symptoms of the overall condition we call sin. The paralyzed man in the Gospel wasn't being punished for a specific sin. He and his friends showed great courage coming to Jesus for help. He assured the man his sins were given, healed him and sent him on his way.

Only God can forgive sins. Jesus claims the power to forgive sins for himself and backs up his claim by healing the paralyzed man. He healed the man spiritually and physically. He can do the same for us. Priests are commissioned to forgive sins in the Name of the Holy Trinity. It is a duty they must faithfully carry out.

Healing from uncontrolled anger and its consequences is possible. We can start by asking God to help us manage our anger and make certain it doesn't control us. We should ask God to make our hearts and minds completely new and focused on compassion, love and forgiveness.

And we should take Paul's advice. We shouldn't go to bed angry...it's not worth losing any sleep over.

