

## 6<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

### Cycle A-2026

Within my family, I am the priest, my dad was the deacon, but mom has always been the saint. For several years, I have been fond of saying that if I get to heaven, my heaven will be better than mom's because I really had to work at it, but it seems so effortless for her. When it comes to faith, I have always had a heart for bringing my personal relationship with Jesus Christ into every dimension of my life, how I see reality, and how I relate to other people. My father had a passion for the intellectual dimension of understanding the Sacred Scriptures and Catholic teaching. My mother has always put us to shame in how she loves and serves other people. It is most evident in how she dealt with the issue of ANGER. Earlier in my life, I would hold onto grudges in my heart and wallow in hurt, resentment, and self-pity. Dad would lash out with blunt and harsh words, and most of the time, refrain from cultivating lasting anger in his heart. Mom, on the other hand, had the gift of maintaining her composure and practicing self-control in

her thoughts, words, and actions. She was quick to forgive and not forever hold something against you. Over time, through the grace of God and my mother's example, dad and I became more like her in how we handled our anger, but we never reached or surpassed her level.

Jesus addresses the issue of anger in today's Gospel in the most surprising and challenging manner: "You have heard it said, you shall not kill; and whoever kills is liable to judgment." But I say to you, whoever is angry with his brother will be liable to judgement." He goes on to list three forms of anger and how they make us liable to the judgment of God. The Greek words used for anger reveal that the first form of anger is a long smoldering one. Like I did for the first half of my life, we actively nurture hurt and resentment in our hearts. Jesus calls us to reject and turn away from an anger that broods over injury, refuses to be quenched, or that seeks revenge.

The second and more severe form of anger is to despise someone and to view and treat them with utter contempt, in our hearts, and through our words and actions. It can flow from the hurt they afflicted upon us,

or from our belief that we are vastly superior to them, and they are significantly beneath our dignity. It can also arise from a spirit of envy about “who” another person “is” or “what” blessings and giftedness they “have.”

The third and most severe form of anger is to hurt and destroy someone’s name and reputation through gossip. I like to joke that “where two or three are gathered, there will be gossip.” The reality is that gossip is no laughing matter. Unfortunately, gossip is often viewed as socially acceptable, and at the very worst, only a minor sin, regardless of the severity and the damage that it inflicts. Jesus Christ begs to differ. The new cycles and social media have contributed to our more permissive and secular view of gossip. We have so many communication venues to listen to and personally participate in putting people down, or rejoicing in, or scoffing at, their sinfulness, inadequacies, hypocrisy, and loss of reputation and livelihood.

St. John Vianney stated that gossip is like going to the top of a hill, ripping open a feathered pillow, allowing the wind to take the feathers in different directions, and then trying to gather all the feathers. It is completely

impossible. Whenever we gossip, we cannot control or forecast the damage it may bring about to another person's reputation, relationships, and inner spirit. We bring about this harm by telling lies or unnecessarily sharing information about them with other people. Even if it is true, Jesus does not give us permission to pass it on.

For the sake of clarification, it is not gossip for us to talk to trusted individuals, professionals, or authorities about someone whenever we have good intentions. Our motivation is to receive spiritual and personal guidance in an attempt to help someone, work through our own thoughts and feelings in a constructive and Christian manner, or to facilitate necessary corrective or rehabilitative measures. It is also permissible to periodically vent with a spouse, family member, or trusted friend, when we can trust in their confidentiality and objectivity. The important thing is that we avoid developing a chronic, angry and negative spirit, or purposely attempt to damage or destroy another person's reputation or relationship with the person we are venting to.

The startling thing about today's Gospel, is that Jesus equates these three forms of anger with murder. In the first form of anger, we have a murderous heart in that we keep putting a log on the fire of our resentment and fury. It progressively poisons and kills our own spirit. In the other two, we have a murderous heart that leads us to attempt to kill the reputation, relationships, and inner spirit of another person. How we handle anger in our hearts and with other people is important to God because of our dignity of the dignity of every human person. It is the dignity of being made in His "image and likeness" as His beloved daughters and sons.

One of the transformative messages of Jesus in today's Gospel is that the cultivation of our inner thoughts really matters to God. Whenever we actively and consciously dwell on something that is sinful, whatever that anger or anything else, we become personally responsible for that sin before God. It changes our hearts in a manner that can bring about varying degrees of spiritual deterioration and alienation from God, others, and our truest and best self. This remains true whether or not they become flesh through our words and actions. In reality, the sinful

thoughts we eagerly and habitually dwell on eventually reveal themselves through our speech and actions.

Jesus is calling us to conscientiously guard our thought patterns and not to give anything sinful room to grow in our hearts, since it will simultaneously deform our souls. We are called to be proactive in re-directing our attention to prayer and to the practice of that virtue which is opposite of the vice we are being tempted to embrace. At the same time, just because less than virtuous thoughts spontaneously enter the screen of our minds, it doesn't mean we have sinned. They only become sinful under three conditions. First, we actively stirred up the thoughts and welcomed them with open arms. Second, we didn't invite them in, but once we become aware of them, we embraced them and allowed them to entertain and poison our souls. Third, we put ourselves in situations where we know we are highly vulnerable to those thought patterns getting the best of us, and it is within our control to completely avoid or minimize our exposure.

Jesus is calling us to go beyond the mere letter observance of the commandments. We are invited to

embrace the heart and the soul of them, by approaching them from the perspective of love and mercy. Jesus's standard is beautiful and liberating, but it can be quite overwhelming because of our blessed but broken human nature. We can draw hope and strength by keeping the grace and mercy of God in the forefront of our minds and hearts. As Morgan Harper Nichols reminds us: "When I stumbled, I stumbled not backwards, but forward. So, when I fell, I fell into grace." If we are open and responsive, the grace of God gradually empowers us to desire, and more faithfully live out, the more challenging standard of love and mercy that Jesus has set before us. It is the path that liberates us. It is the path that heals and revitalizes our relationships. It is the path that transforms and saves our immortal souls.

