

INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

Saint Francis de Sales Oratory, Saint Louis, MO

Quinquagesima Sunday, March 6th, 2011

Seven Deadly Sins Sermon Series – Wrath

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Charity is patient, it is kind...it is not provoked to anger.

As we pursue our course of violet Sundays and our series of sermons, we discover that these Sundays are perfectly in accord with the traditional ordering of the Seven Deadly Sins. The list begins and ends with the most spiritual of these vices. We began with the two most miserable, and we will end with the one most diabolical. Today we begin to consider the four other deadly sins, the four that go together because they are the most human – they can exist only in the human soul. Devils are incapable of committing them, though our human language may often attribute these sins to them. And the first of these is the deadly sin of wrath.

When we considered the sin of sloth, we saw that there are two kinds of sadness: the sadness from God, and the sadness of the world. “The sadness which is according to God worketh penance unto salvation, but the sadness of the world worketh death.” We should know that there are also two kinds of anger: anger according to God, and the anger of man. The anger which is according to God is nothing other than holy zeal for the rights of God and of His Church. This righteous anger is often found on the lips of the Psalmist: “zeal for thy house hath consumed me;” and Our Lord Himself showed us the greatest example of it when He overturned the tables of the money changers in the Temple and violently drove out all those who would make His Father’s House a house of traffic. Who cannot be inspired by the example of the holy martyrs who so patiently endured violence against their own person, but who would nevertheless fly into a rage if anyone of their persecutors dared to blaspheme the holy name of God? There is certainly nothing wrong with this sort of anger. On the contrary, there is something very wrong with someone who never feels it. The Sacred Heart teaches us to be meek, not weak.

The anger of man, however, cannot claim any divine inspiration. As St. James warns us: *Let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to anger. For the anger of man worketh not the justice of God.* Anger is a movement of man’s soul, a passion, and like all the passions, anger is neither good nor bad. Often our anger can be used for good. Everyone knows the old trick of getting his anger up so that he can get out of bed in the morning or run that last lap. It is when we allow our actions to be controlled by anger rather than right reason that sin enters in.

Anger may be defined simply as “the desire to get revenge.” And nearly always, it is not the rights of God or of our helpless neighbor that we are seeking to avenge, but our own ruffled pride. The smallest child displays this behavior. If his brother hits him over the

head with a toy, he might be surprised the first time and just cry from the pain, but the second time his first thought will be to settle the score, with a little more thrown in for good measure.

The fact that sins of anger are often only venial should not put us at ease. Never forget that, after original sin, the first mortal sin recorded in the Scriptures was a sin of anger. Cain fell from grace long before he finally rose up against his brother. As Our Lord said from the Mount: *you have heard that it was said to them of old, thou shalt not kill, and whosoever shall kill shall be in danger of judgment. But I say to you that whosoever is angry with his brother shall be in danger of judgment.*

St. Francis de Sales tells us: “It is a matter of great importance to make our conversation agreeable. To do so it is necessary to appear humble, patient, respectful, cordial, yielding in all lawful things to all. Above all, we must avoid contradicting the opinion of anyone, unless there is an evident necessity for it. In that case, it should be done with all possible mildness, and with the greatest tact, without in the least outraging the feelings of the other party. In this way we shall avoid contests which produce only bitterness and which ordinarily spring rather from attachment to our own opinion than from love of truth. Believe me, there are no dispositions more inimical to human society than those which are given to contradiction, just as there is no person more commonly loved than he who contradicts no one.”

Some people are never in control of their temper, but most are able to avoid being an ogre in public; their own vanity keeps their anger in check. Tragically, it most often with those to whom we are closest – our friends and closest family members -- that our wrath knows no bounds. With them we are, it seems, ready to fight to the death over the smallest matters. In some households, snapping, cutting down, and a hateful tone of voice are a way of life – or rather, a way of death. The initial reasons for a quarrel are soon forgotten; all that matters is winning the battle at hand. One side tries raising the voice; the other fishes for whatever he can come up with at the moment; slanderous remarks about others, exaggerations, even outright lies. He is offended by every word or glance which could be perceived as an affront to his dignity. In his thoughts he nurses his anger, revisits old grievances, holds grudges. He spends the day imagining new fights and new arguments where his rights are finally vindicated. Then even vanity can no longer restrain the wrathful man. Like the man of Jericho in today’s Gospel, he is blind. He defies God Himself, for he says over and over again in his heart, *vengeance is mine; I will repay.*

Let us hear again the counsel of our holy patron: we must be “patient, respectful, cordial, yielding in all lawful things to all. Above all, we must avoid contradicting the opinion of anyone, unless there is an evident necessity for it. In that case, it should be done with all possible mildness, and with the greatest tact, without in the least outraging the feelings of the other party.” What a program for Lent! For most of us, following this counsel is nothing less than the Way of the Cross, a complete emptying of self. Examine your conscience on any given day, and recall all the times that you have crossed others in thought, word or deed. What were your reasons? Was it to defend God’s holy Name? To defend the truth and keep others, especially children, from learning error or falling into

sin? Were you moved by charity to defend your neighbor from cruelty? Did you hope to defend your own good name from grievous slander? In all these instances, you may humbly thank God for giving you the courage to say what was right. In all other cases, you may be sure that your anger got the better of you.

Do not get angry at yourself about it. Cry out to God with all your heart: *Lord, grant that I may see!* Heal me from my blindness, and grant me the grace to see the misery which my anger causes me and others in this life and will surely cause me in the next unless I learn from You, who are meek and humble of heart. Let not one more sun go down upon my anger, but let me bury it today in the abyss of Your mercy. Amen.

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