

6TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME – YEAR A (2026)

The things that make us angry are rarely the things that should: minor irritations, wounded pride, and not getting our own way tend to put us in a bad mood, and cause us to be petulant and spiteful, to shout and bang about. But the things that should make us angry – injustice, poverty, corruption, to name but a few – are usually far from our minds, mostly because they do not affect us directly, and because we have more pressing concerns of our own. But anger is one of the most powerful emotions; and one that, left unchecked, causes many of the woes that we human beings inflict upon ourselves and one another.

And Jesus understood that, which is why he addressed this all-too-human propensity to let anger get the better of us in the section of the Sermon on the Mount that we have just heard. In exhorting his followers to be reconciled with their opponents, and not to allow their anger to spill over into physical violence and words that cannot be unsaid, he is not merely offering practical advice; but is also setting an agenda for the type of behaviour that will characterise Christian living, and be an example of a better way to a violent, polarised and frightening world. Well, that's the theory, anyway.

Because, as we all know, in practice it isn't quite so simple: anger and the resentment that it causes to fester are two of the principal reasons for the breakdown of human relationships on a personal level, and of tensions between groups united by particular characteristics or ideologies on a larger scale. We

see the effects of this played out in the so-called 'culture wars' that continue to divide societies and communities along political and sectarian lines; and we experience it in our own lives when tempers flare, and things are said in the heat of the moment that may never be forgiven, and will be carried to the grave. And this is why it is so important that we not only heed the advice of Jesus, but also that of his Apostle S. Paul, who said, 'be angry, but do not sin', and 'do not let the sun go down on your wrath'. Both Jesus and S. Paul recognise that anger is intrinsic to the human condition; but that it must be tempered by self-control if it is not to get out of hand. Conversely, they also point to the positive consequences of anger: that, rightly channelled, it can lead to reconciliation, and to inspiring the very best of human endeavour, which challenges all that is contrary to the Gospel vision for human life and flourishing, and seeks to make our world a better place because of all that we believe about the dignity and value of human life. As S. Augustine put it, 'Hope has two beautiful daughters: their names are Anger and Courage. Anger at the way things are; and Courage to see that they do not remain so'. Righteous anger can be a powerful force for good; but, more often than not, our anger is born of self-righteousness, and an unwillingness or inability to admit that we are, or have done something, wrong. But Jesus' teaching does not isolate anger from other sins that cause us to lose control, to behave in ways that diminish and belittle us, and to use others for our own purposes and gratification: lust, envy, greed, and pride, all have the

potential to be our driving force and motivation – the fire that burns within us, and controls our behaviour to sinful ends. And we can see just how powerful these sins are, and the consequences to which they lead: the Epstein scandal, with its web of deceit, crime, corruption and immorality is a perfect, though horrific, example of just how many people's lives can be destroyed by the unchecked exploitation of wealth and power, and the pursuit of sexual gratification at any cost. Not only do our passions have the power to consume us; but they also cause us to degrade and dehumanise others, whom we make objects for our use, and thus deny their inalienable right to respect, protection, and properly-boundaried care, as those created in the image and likeness of God. And, again, Jesus understood the extent to which our impulses can drive us: it is unlikely that anger will cause us to commit murder, but it will usually make us petty and unreasonable. Likewise, lust might not push us actually to commit infidelity, but it will make us objectify others and demean ourselves, thus cheapening our human dignity. And when Jesus talks about the tearing out of eyes, and the chopping off of limbs, he doesn't intend that we should take his teaching literally, and mutilate ourselves: rather, by using hyperbole, he is warning us of the ultimate consequence of our failure to control our most basic desires; and of their destructive potential to ourselves as much as to others. And when we do allow those deadly, and indeed any, sins to get the better of us, we consign ourselves to what the Gospel calls 'hell fire' – this translation

referring to a physical place called *Gehenna*, a valley south-west of Jerusalem, which, in Jesus' day, was used as the city's dump – a burning rubbish heap – the symbol of filth, fire and destruction. And when we sin, we spiritually and metaphorically throw ourselves on the rubbish heap: we diminish our own value, and that of others, and become less fully the people that God has created us to be. This self-inflicted dis-integration is at the root of most of our problems, and the cause of the breakdown of our relationships with one another and with God. And Jesus' teaching this morning not only calls us to recognise this, and to take responsibility for controlling our worst excesses, but also points us to the God-given remedy for all our sins – the reconciliation and redemption that are only possible because of the Incarnation, death and Resurrection of his Son.

On Wednesday of this week, we will begin the season of Lent, in which the Church calls all faithful Christians to assess our lives in the light of the truth revealed in the life and teaching of Jesus Christ, and to use God's grace to lift ourselves off the rubbish heap, to be cleansed of the filth of sin, and to allow the fire of the Holy Spirit to consume those destructive passions that burn within us to degrade our souls and separate us from God. And, if we use Lent wisely, we will better know God's grace, and the hope that springs from the reinvigoration of our relationship with his Son. Lent is a season for repentance, but it is also a time for growth, and for recognising and realising our potential to become more fully alive. So, let Christ give you life; and stop putting yourself in the bin. Amen.