



The Holy See

POPE FRANCIS

GENERAL AUDIENCE

Paul VI Audience Hall

Wednesday, 31 January 2024

[Multimedia]

The following text includes parts that were not read out loud, but should be considered as such.

Cycle of Catechesis. Vices and Virtues. 6. *Wrath*

Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!

These weeks we are addressing the topic of vices and virtues, and today we will pause to reflect on the vice of *wrath*. It is a particularly dark vice, and it is perhaps the easiest to detect from a physical point of view. A person dominated by wrath finds it difficult to hide this impulse: you can see it in the way their body moves, in the aggressiveness, the laboured breathing, and their grim and frowning expression.

In its most acute manifestation, wrath is a vice that concedes no respite. If it arises from an injustice suffered (or believed to be suffered), it is often unleashed not against the offender, but against the first unfortunate victim. There are men who withhold their rage in the workplace, appearing to be calm and composed, but at home, they become unbearable to their wives and children. Wrath is a pervasive vice: it is capable of depriving us of sleep, making us plot continuously in our mind, barring the way to reason and thought.

Wrath is a vice that *destroys human relationships*. It expresses the inability to accept the diversity of others, especially when their life choices diverge from our own. It does not stop at a person's misconduct, but throws everything into the cauldron: it is the other person, the other as he or she is, the other as such, who provokes anger and resentment. One begins to detest the tone of their voice, their trivial everyday gestures, their ways of reasoning and feeling.

By the time the relationship reaches this level of degeneration, lucidity has been lost. Wrath makes us lose lucidity because one of its characteristics is that sometimes it fails to mitigate with time. In these cases, even distance and silence, instead of easing the burden of mistakes, magnify it. For this reason, the Apostle Paul — as we have heard — recommends to his Christians to address the problem straight away, and to attempt reconciliation: “*Do not let the sun go down on your anger*” (Eph 4:26). It is important that everything dissipate immediately, before sundown. If some misunderstanding arises during the day, and two people can no longer understand each other, perceiving themselves suddenly far apart, the night must not be handed over to the devil. The vice would keep us awake in the dark, brooding over our reasons and the unspeakable mistakes that are never ours but always the other's. It is like that: when a person is dominated by wrath, they always say that the other person is the problem. They are never capable of recognizing their own defects, their own shortcomings.

In the Lord's prayer, Jesus makes us pray for our human relations, which are a minefield, a plane that is never in perfect equilibrium. In life, we have to deal with trespassers who are at fault with us, just as we have not always loved everyone in the right measure. To some we have not returned the love that was due to them. We are all sinners, all of us, and we all have accounts to settle: do not forget this! That is why we all need to learn how to forgive so as to be forgiven. People do not stay together if they do not also practice the art of forgiveness, as far as this is humanly possible. Wrath is countered by benevolence, openness of heart, meekness and patience.

But, on the subject of wrath, there is one last thing to be said. It is a terrible vice, it was said, that is at the origin of wars and violence. The Proem of the Iliad describes the wrath of Achilles, which will be the cause of “infinite woes”. But not everything that stems from wrath is wrong. The ancients understood well that there is an irascible part of us that cannot and must not be denied. Passions are to some extent unconscious: they happen, they are life experiences. We are not responsible for the onset of wrath, but always for its development. And at times it is good for anger to be vented in the right way. If a person were never angry, if a person were never indignant before an injustice, if they did not feel something quivering in their gut at the oppression of the weak, it would mean that the person was not human, much less a Christian.

Holy indignation exists, which is not wrath but an inner movement, a holy indignation. Jesus experienced it several times in his life (cf. Mk 3: 5). He never responded to evil with evil, but he felt this emotion in his soul, and in the case of the merchants in the Temple, he performed a strong

and prophetic action, dictated not by wrath, but by zeal for the house of the Lord (cf. *Mt* 21:12-13). We must distinguish well: zeal, holy indignation, is one thing; wrath, which is bad, is another.

It is up to us, with the help of the Holy Spirit, to find the right measure for passions, to train them well so that they may turn to good and not to evil. Thank you.

Special Greetings

I greet all the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors taking part in today's Audience, especially those coming from the United States of America. Upon all of you, and upon your families, I invoke the joy and peace of Our Lord Jesus Christ. God bless you!

Tomorrow, Italy will observe National Day for Civilian Victims of War. To the prayerful remembrance of those who died in the two world wars, we add the many — too many — civilians, defenseless victims of the wars which, unfortunately, continue to bloody our planet, as is happening in the Middle East and Ukraine. May their cry of pain touch the hearts of leaders of nations and spark peace projects. When one reads [news] stories these days, there is so much cruelty in wars, so much! Let us ask the Lord for peace, which is always gentle; it is not cruel.

Lastly, my thoughts turn to *young people*, to *the sick*, to *the elderly* and to *newlyweds*. I invoke upon you the protection of Saint John Bosco, whom the Church remembers today, so that he may make each person's vocation in the Church and in the world fruitful. I give my blessing to all of you!

Summary of the Holy Father's words

Dear brothers and sisters: in our catechesis on the virtues and vices, we now consider “wrath”, the uncontrolled anger that may well begin with brooding over offenses received, but ends up being self-destructive and damaging to our relationships with others, leading ultimately to violence and even war. Jesus teaches us to forgive those who sin against us, while Saint Paul urges us never to let the sun set on our anger. Yet there is an appropriate kind of anger, which consists in righteous indignation before evil and injustice. As with all the passions, so too with anger: it is up to us, with the sustaining grace of the Holy Spirit, to govern and direct our emotions in order to serve God's kingdom of reconciliation, justice and peace.
