

11. March 2022

## The unjust anger

Mt 5:20-26

*'For I tell you, if your uprightness does not surpass that of the scribes and Pharisees, you will never get into the kingdom of Heaven. You have heard how it was said to our ancestors, You shall not kill; and if anyone does kill he must answer for it before the court. But I say this to you, anyone who is angry with a brother will answer for it before the court; anyone who calls a brother "Fool" will answer for it before the Sanhedrin; and anyone who calls him "Traitor" will answer for it in hell fire. So then, if you are bringing your offering to the altar and there remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, go and be reconciled with your brother first, and then come back and present your offering. Come to terms with your opponent in good time while you are still on the way to the court with him, or he may hand you over to the judge and the judge to the officer, and you will be thrown into prison. In truth I tell you, you will not get out till you have paid the last penny.*

With the coming of Jesus into the world, mankind is granted a greater grace than in the times of the Old Covenant. We see this, for example, in the marriage regulations. In the Old Covenant it was still possible to have several wives without incurring sin, although it was still an imperfect law, which God tolerated, so to speak, because of man's "hardness of heart" (cf. Mt 19:8). But in the New Covenant this is no longer the case! A validly contracted marriage between two baptised persons is indissoluble. In this way, God's original plan for the relationship between man and woman is restored.

Due to the enormous grace that mankind has received through the coming of the Lord, the demands have also increased. Today's gospel shows us this. Even anger or offence against a brother brings with it a judgement, because the same power is already at work here, which can lead to concrete acts against him. We must therefore perceive this power in ourselves and overcome it.

Let us pause first to examine what happens in the case of anger... Sacred Scripture teaches us that *"for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God."* (Jas 1:20). There will be few cases in which one can speak of a "holy anger", such as that which was kindled in Jesus when he saw that they had turned the temple into a market place (Mt 21:12-13). When a person is angry, he usually believes that he has the right and the reason to be so, and turns his aggression against other people. This anger is often also accompanied by a proud attitude, for he does not even realise that, in the midst of his unbridled outburst, he is going far beyond a just

correction. How often anger has no justification whatsoever, even if it seems to have one! The victim of such unjustified anger remains totally defensive, hardly daring to say anything, lest the other person become even angrier. Thus, a very unfair situation can arise.

In short, we can say that anger has traits that can psychologically and emotionally lead to the death of the other. Anger is a world of injustice and unrestraint! In a way, it threatens the life of the person against whom it is directed; it intimidates the person and can make him or her fearful, especially when outbursts of anger are repeated frequently. Unbridled anger is also a danger, because it easily leads to unthinking actions, which have consequences.

This is why the Lord wants to make us understand the commandments more deeply. We are called to overcome anger inwardly, and if we have an angry temperament, we have to pacify and soften it under the influence of the Holy Spirit. We must become aware of the destructive force of anger, rather than justifying it or downplaying its seriousness. The latter attitude would be totally contrary to the teaching of today's gospel, and would deprive us of the strength to admit our error and take appropriate action.

The same as we have said about anger, applies also to offences, which hurt a person's honour. These also represent an attack on the life of his soul; they humiliate it and attack its dignity.

Here, too, we must watch ourselves carefully. If we discover such reactions in ourselves, we must take the necessary measures. And if it has even become our habit to offend or despise other people, we must constantly strive to overcome this attitude.

All these reflections will always lead us to the same point: we must implore purity of heart and strive for it. It will help us, through the power of the Holy Spirit, to clear the shadows in our hearts and to notice even the slightest deviations from the path of love and truth. A converted heart will not be able to tolerate, minimise or justify them. On the contrary, it will suffer from discovering such negative impulses within itself.

At the same time, however, this heart knows that the Lord has come to snatch us out of the kingdom of darkness (cf. Col 1:13). Therefore, it will turn to Him full of trust, asking Him for a new heart.