

17. September 2023

## Overcoming resentment and anger

Eccles 27,30–28,7

*Anger and wrath, these also are abominations, and the sinful man will possess them. He that takes vengeance will suffer vengeance from the Lord, and he will firmly establish his sins. Forgive your neighbor the wrong he has done, and then your sins will be pardoned when you pray. Does a man harbor anger against another, and yet seek for healing from the Lord? Does he have no mercy toward a man like himself, and yet pray for his own sins? If he himself, being flesh, maintains wrath, who will make expiation for his sins? Remember the end of your life, and cease from enmity, remember destruction and death, and be true to the commandments. Remember the commandments, and do not be angry with your neighbor; remember the covenant of the Most High, and overlook ignorance.*

This reading is closely related to today's Gospel (Mt 18:21-35), in which Jesus, through the parable of the merciless servant, gives Peter to understand that he must forgive his brother seventy times seven times. The reading refers to anger and resentment against one's neighbour, and not to the so-called "holy wrath" that is kindled by seeing God being offended by sin. As an expression of this latter anger, the Jews would tear their garments.

But no, today's reading refers to anger and resentment directed against a person, not against their evil deeds. Often it is not easy to make this distinction and, instead of directing anger at the act, we turn it against the one who commits it and are hardly willing to forgive that person. In this way, we keep a kind of "debt account" against him to accuse him, and we assume a certain position of power vis-à-vis the offender.

Today's reading and Gospel make it clear to us that, if we act in this way, we cannot expect to count on God's forgiveness. In fact, we ourselves block His access and close our hearts to Him, for our hearts are dominated by anger.

Therefore, the first thing we must do when these feelings of anger arise in us is to make a decision. If we do not make this decision not to be dominated by anger, we will never be able to get rid of it. The distinction I made earlier, between the acts themselves and the person who commits them, needs to be clearly established.

The word of the Lord is clear: *"If he, a mere mortal, bears a grudge, who will forgive his sins?"* This applies to the person who persists in his resentment against another. He overestimates himself and believes he is entitled to anger. However, Scripture tells us quite clearly, *"Does he have no mercy toward a man like himself, and yet pray for his own sins?"*

A step of humility must be taken. Indeed, every person who is driven by anger and is not able to restrain it, believes he is right. Thus, persisting in anger becomes a sin that poisons the heart of man.

The words that follow in the reading are even clearer: *"Remember the end of your life, and cease from enmity, remember destruction and death, and be true to the commandments"*. This exhortation carries great weight, for when we think of death and question whether the Lord would welcome us in this state of anger against our brother, we would quickly come to a very realistic conclusion and - hopefully - change our attitude.

Perhaps anger and resentment towards people in general or towards specific people, perhaps even against God Himself, has settled in us. In this case, it may be negative experiences we have lived through that we have not been able to forgive and overcome; wounds that have accumulated within us and that poison us from within. So, anger is not only ignited in certain situations; it can be activated very often and very easily, with anything that comes our way.

Here again a distinction has to be made: Does the anger in me come from those deep-seated wounds I have just described, or is it simply an expression of my pride, which manifests itself as soon as things do not go my way?

In the first case, a long and persevering process of healing is necessary, asking the Lord again and again to intervene through His Holy Spirit, as we say in the Pentecost Sequence:

"Rays of healing light impart (...);  
heal our wounds (...),  
solace give in our woe."

At the same time, we must insistently implore Him to grant us the grace to be able to forgive.

In the second case, if we find that anger is a manifestation of our pride, we must perseveringly ask the Lord to give us humility, so that the spirit of pride is weakened and we learn to look at situations from God's perspective, thus detaching ourselves from our self-centredness.

In any case, whatever its motive, we must renounce anger and try to overcome it with God's help.