

TOPIC OF DISCUSSION – LENT – A SEASON OF REPENTANCE

(The following is an excerpt from Catholic Digest, 4/27/2006, by Father William J. Byron, a columnist for *Catholic Digest*, answered a reader's question about anger relating to sin.)

How sinful is anger? Isn't there such a thing as righteous anger? Didn't Jesus himself get angry when he drove the buyers and sellers out of the Temple? I'm not trying to enter a not guilty plea to all accusations of anger that I bring against myself, but I wonder at times how guilty I really am.

You're right. Christ did drive the money changers out of the Temple. All four evangelists record that event (Matthew 21:12; Mark 11:15; Luke 19:45, and John 2:14), and although they don't use the word anger, the actions they describe (making a whip out of cords, overturning tables, and driving the offending vendors out of the Temple, suggest that it was done with more than a little vehemence. St. John reports that the disciples of Christ, who witnessed the event, "recalled the words of Scripture, 'Zeal for your house will consume me?'" [Y]ou could call it righteous anger on the part of Jesus, who, being like us in all things but sin, did this without sinning.

So what about us? We all know anger from personal experience. Anger can be with self. When driven deeply inward, anger can turn into depression. When turned outward toward others, anger can lead to violence, even to destruction of property and persons. Anger must, therefore, be managed, and one way of managing it is to accept it as a reminder that you are alive and well, but at risk of doing harm to yourself, others, or both. Knowing that you are in harm's way, you become cautious.

In the old days, traffic engineers referred to the yellow or amber light between red and green on a traffic signal as the caution light. Slow down; move cautiously.

And so it is with anger. Be slow to anger. Let the emotion blink you down to a slower speed. Out-of-control anger can be nothing but harmful to yourself and others. The fact of the matter is that anger can kill. Sure, you can punch the wall and claim that it makes you feel better, but all that does is move you a few notches closer to hurting yourself or someone you love.

At times, you can use those angry feelings as an excuse not to repair relationships at home or at work. You can substitute rage and revenge, for your need to rightfully participate in activity that strengthens human community through applications of compassion and understanding. [Don't!]

No one's perfect. But neither is anyone exempt from the duty of holding himself or herself in hand when emotions rise to threaten the peace in human relationships. Not to do so is to encourage the assault of anger on all that is good, and decent. So admit that anger can be sinful, and don't let yourself off the hook too easily when your patience wanes and emotions of anger rise. On the other hand, don't confess ordinary testiness as anger just to have something to say when you participate in the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Take those moments of self-examination and repentance as a good time to reflect on the need for anger management and your ability to hold yourself [accountable and in check].