

THE BACK OF THE BULLETIN

Anger: A Matter Of Life And Death

I meet a lot of different human emotions in the people my work brings to me. Grief, guilt, sorrow, passionate love, regret, concern, fear: all of these powerful feelings must be coped with if life is to progress on an even keel. But one of the commonest things I meet is anger.

Not Always Where You Expect It!

Angry people ring my doorbell. A man who's spent a cold night on the street can be very angry, demanding my money as if it was really his already. If I can't or won't give it to him, I get a torrent of anger way out of proportion to anything I've done. I "inherit" the faults of all who have betrayed him or refused him, and I'm pasted in to the rogue's gallery he carries in his heart, to be bitterly remembered in time to come. I know how he feels, and I sympathise with him. But anger can appear in very different places. How about angry grief? A kind, gentle person is struck with suffering, and where you might expect tears and broken-heartedness, you find blazing anger instead. Mental suffering is the worst, and easily converts into rage with *all* the others - all the ones who appear so healthy and sleek - and above all with any who dare to offer their help!

Anger Makes Us Feel Whole

When we feel ourselves falling to pieces, when the things we've always relied on are taken from us or smashed to smithereens, it is a fearful thing. At such a time anger can make us feel we're getting ourselves together: it unites our fear and grief and what's left of our powers, and we hurtle into battle against whatever unfortunate enemy we've lighted on. It doesn't feel *good*, but it's preferable to the feeling of disintegration and annihilation it replaces. The onlooker sees very clearly the snag: that anger destroys the relationships we most need when we're falling apart. It kills off sympathy and erodes respect; it multiplies wounds, distorts the truth, blackens the sky and reddens the carpet. A short-term benefit, indeed! That's why it ranks as one of the deadly sins, even though it usually comes more as an affliction - part of suffering -

rather than a real choice. The Church tells us to fear it and to refuse it whenever we can, just because it brings so little good.

Lord Of The Living And Of The Dead

The stories of Jesus casting out demons comes to bear on this situation. He is Lord of the living, but also of the dead. When we're more than half dead ourselves, it is no use to us that others are concerned for us, and call to us across the widening gulf that separates us from our community, even our family. There are places lost sheep get into that are beyond human reach. Then we must cry out to the Lord of the dead, who has turned the sea into dry land, and made a path through the grave. I guess that this is the daily experience of those who pray for the relatives and friends they can see no way to help. Like those who carried a paralytic to Jesus, we must surrender them to the Christ who is their hope. When I think of that lonely possessed man, gashing himself with stones and howling amid the mountain passes, and his awesome power to break chains and fetters and all restraints, I see a dreadfully familiar image of the work anger can do in a human heart. Jesus is the one who can see him *peaceful, clothed and in his right mind* - even when others tiptoe towards him in wonder, still terrified of what he might suddenly do.

Turning Back To Life

Maybe you don't spend a lot of time meditating on demonic possession these days. But I bet you recognise what it's like to steer clear of an angry person. In anger, Death is in the driving-seat, and human beings have a keen sense of smell for it. The costly work of conversion, apology, forgiveness, reconciliation and healing is a long one. But it is the work of truth. It isn't instantaneous and imperious, like anger. It is creative and strong and quiet, and it requires the Holy Spirit's gifts. But the inheriting of those gifts is what we're here for. If we have to pass through the bitter valley of anger before we find them, even our worst moments can

become stages on our pilgrimage.
Fr Philip