

Commentary on the Gospel for Wed, Oct 7th 2015

“Have you reason to be angry?” Jonah 4:4

I have a tendency to think of anger as a given right. “Of course I have the right to be offended! Anger and frustration are things that happen to me, not reactions I choose.” Perhaps I am doing anger a disservice by not giving it the due discernment that I do other emotions. For example, I spend a lot of time discerning love. Is God calling my girlfriend and I to marriage? Perhaps I do not spend nearly enough time contemplating my anger or other negative emotions.

Today’s story of Jonah perfectly addresses the issue of petty anger. Jonah is furious that our merciful God will not punish the Ninevites. Jonah even grows angry over the death of a plant, which God had given him. While I smile about Jonah’s seemingly unreasonable and pitiless anger, there are too many similarities to my own emotions for comfort.

How often do I actually have reason to be angry? I am quite a passionate and extroverted person. These characteristics make it rare for those around me to need to question how I am feeling about a given situation, whether positive or negative. God’s question to Jonah is poignant and piercing. Have I reason to be angry? Why don’t I ask myself that question more frequently?

No discussion of anger would be complete without mention of righteous anger. It’s hard to find a chapter in the Gospels where Jesus is not calling someone a hypocrite, flipping a table, making a whip, insulting another group, or getting frustrated with His disciples. His actions were not sin. But they were indeed anger and they did indeed incite a reaction from his opponents. Heck, they didn’t kill Him for being a nice guy.

Part of the differentiation between Jesus’ type of anger and the type I frequently employ is reason and intent. Am I displaying anger for my personal gain? Or am I angry out of defense of someone or of morality? For example, we all should be disgusted and angry when we see the Planned Parenthood videos. At the same time, there are altogether too many times in life that I feel entitled to my anger.

While this topic is a much broader one, we would be remiss to not ask ourselves the cause, purpose, and goal of our anger every time we feel it come upon us. Particularly as we celebrate Our Lady of the Rosary today, let’s spend more time in prayer addressing the various emotions we have throughout our day.

Sam Pierre-Creighton University's House Staff Department