

DEADLY SINS—LIVING VIRTUE

Anger

Man in the Likeness of God

- The Power of God (CCC 268–71)
 - his might is universal
 - God’s power is in no way arbitrary
- The Wisdom of God (CCC 295, 299)
 - creation is ordered.
 - human understanding can understand what God tells us
 - the ways of providence are often unknown to us.
 - only at the end will knowledge be complete
- The Judgment of God (CCC 1039ff)
 - the full right to pass judgment on men belongs to Christ
 - he “acquired” this right by his cross—the Father has given “all judgment to the Son” (John 5:22).
 - punishment belongs to God
- The Anger of God?
 - cannot attribute the emotion of anger or wrath to God, who is unchanging
 - God is the judge who acknowledges good and punishes evil
 - justice sometimes appears as cruelty to those who are (justly) punished
- The Mercy of God (CCC 270ff)
 - God’s loving power is made perfect by his mercy
 - “he displays his power at its height by freely forgiving sins”
- Original Justice
 - grace of original holiness means sharing in God’s power, justice and mercy
 - man can do this only in free submission to God.

Effects of Original Sin (CCC 2259)

- after the first sin, the world is inundated by sin
- account of Cain and Abel reveals the presence of anger and envy in man, consequences of original sin
- man has become the enemy of his fellow man.

Anger

- a desire for revenge, a desire to do evil to someone who has harmed us
- a deliberate desire to kill or seriously wound a neighbor is a grave offense

- Causes of Anger
 - many different reasons
 - each person needs to consider the source of his own anger
 - the “spiritual tribunal” of confession and spiritual direction is the place for uncovering the source
 - Cain and Abel reveal the connection between fear and anger
 - apprehension of evil causes hatred and fear
 - either become sad at the evil or use anger to avoid it
 - sometimes we are confused about what is really evil
 - we attack uncomfortable feelings with anger instead of turning to God
- Offspring of Anger
 - strife
 - swelling of mind
 - insults
 - clamor
 - indignation
 - blasphemies
 - remembrance of wrongs
 - hate
 - hostility
 - self-justification

The Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5–6)

- “In the Sermon on the Mount, the Lord recalls the commandment ‘You shall not kill’, and adds to it the proscription of anger, hatred and vengeance.”
 - requires the forgiveness of offenses.
 - commandment of love extends to all enemies.
 - “So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect.” Matthew 5:48.
 - “So be merciful, just as your heavenly Father is merciful.” Luke 6: 36.

Avoiding Anger

- requires preparation and prudence regarding people and places
- ought to eliminate the cause beforehand if possible
 - avoid excessive attachments
 - strive to love more deeply those we do not like
- The Lord’s Prayer
 - “and forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us. mercy of God cannot enter hearts hardened by unforgiveness
 - this kind of mercy is impossible for man, but not for God
 - requires internalization of the mercy we have received from God
- forgiveness vs. excusing (CCC 2843ff)
 - love is incompatible with hatred of an enemy, but not with hatred of sin
 - Holy Spirit heals the heart and purifies the memory
 - turns occasion for anger into reason for intercession
 - love is stronger than sin.

- anger at our own sinfulness, and at the temptations of the Enemy, is beneficial
- seeking forgiveness
 - “first be reconciled with your brother”
 - not only forgiving others, but seeking their forgiveness for what we have done
 - no exceptions as to necessity and utility.
 - even an apology that is not “heartfelt” is still beneficial
- let go of resentment
 - not enough to avoid angry words and actions
 - must also root out brooding and resentment from the heart
 - must work for patience with people as well as with situations, objects, conditions

Developing Meekness

- not affected by praise or by criticism
- learn to accept insults and difficulties
 - at first, with bitterness and anguish of soul.
 - later, free from pain
 - finally, to think of dishonor as praise.
- growth in holiness leads us
 - to develop an affection for the contempt itself
 - to wish for its repetition, even from the same persons
 - to resolve to endure patiently even greater insults.
- means intentional acceptance of the Cross
- often happens in the context of life in common

Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good. Love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor. . . . Bless those who persecute you, bless and do not curse them. . . . Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned with what is noble in the sight of all.

If possible, on your part, live at peace with all. Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for wrath; for it is written: *Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.* . . . Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.

Romans 12:19ff.

Suggestions for Further Reading

Catechism of the Catholic Church: “The Fifth Commandment” (nn. 2258–2330); “And Forgive Us Our Trespasses, As We Forgive Those Who Trespass Against Us” (nn. 2838–45).

St. John Cassian. The Institutes. Book Eight: “The Spirit of Anger”. Translated by Boniface Ramsey, O.P. Ancient Christian Writers: The Works of the Fathers in Translation, Number 58. New York: The Newman Press, 2000.

St. John Climacus. The Ladder of Divine Ascent. Step Eight: “On Placidity and Meekness”, Step Nine: “On Malice” . Translated by Colm Lubheid and Norman Russell. The Classics of Western Spirituality. Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1982.

Lewis, C.S. Mere Christianity, Book Three, Chapter Seven: “Forgiveness”, and Chapter Nine: “Charity”. [First published 1952.] San Francisco: Harper, 2000.

Lewis, C.S. The Screwtape Letters, especially Letters 3, 6 and 26. [First published 1942.] San Francisco: Harper, 2000.

Please refer also to the general reading list provided with the course outline.