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The Gift of Anger

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The Gift of Anger

How can anger be considered in a positive light, when it seems so often to be opposed to that interior sense of peace which is one of the key signs of God's presence? We know the role that anger has in some very negative attitudes, words, and behavior. We have all witnessed the actions of those who are consistently angry, and who project their anger onto others, judging, condemning, and attacking. But the proper fruit of anger is not the destruction of others, but the summoning of energy in the service of love, especially when we encounter some injustice.

For many of us, the experience of anger is so uncomfortable, and so often connected with painful experiences, that we might believe that all anger is bad. But anger really is one of God's gifts to us. When anger spontaneously arises in the presence of some injustice, we are empowered to deal with the occasion as best we can. Anger calls our attention to whatever disturbs us, and helps us focus on the problem we are facing.

As with all of God's good gifts, anger can be misdirected. Some people attempt to evoke anger in us in order to manipulate us for their own purposes. Abusive, disordered expressions of anger lead to injustice, not the resolution of unjust relationships. The stronger the sensations of anger, the more care we need to take in deciding what to do. Anger is a feeling, not a decision; anger makes energy available that can be used either for helpful or for hurtful words and behavior: our choice.

God did not make us capable of anger to tempt and test us. Anger often appears to us and to others as having the power of ruling and controlling, but, as with every car on the road, the drivers do the steering, not the engines. We are the directors of anger-energy, not the other way around. Usually, anger moves us into words and deeds that cause harm only if we tell ourselves and others that we are not angry when we really are. But anger recognized and acknowledged can be channeled, and considered rightly to be a grace and a gift from God.

Once, Jesus was angry about those who misused the Temple for their commercial interests. His anger arose from the injustice he witnessed, giving him energy for action, and a power of righteousness which people recognized, though they probably did not appreciate it. His was not an instance of that negative self-willed harm that people can inflict on others with whom they disagree. Rather than the aggression of

imposing his will, the power he manifested was that of truth. People "get it" when the energy of anger is justified, when it fits the situation. Petulant anger, selfish anger, or generalized anger is almost always disordered. But anger about a specific injustice is a sign within us that something in particular is out of order and requires our attention.

Anger can give us power to think more clearly, and to consider a wider range of options than if we were untouched by the situation. It does not have to flame up into an explosion. Anger that seems to be burning and dangerous to us or to someone else can be properly managed by bringing it to God, and asking for guidance or for healing, according to our need. But we must first acknowledge and admit that we have feelings of anger before we can work through them or be released from the barrage of thoughts that cause our heads to tighten and our hearts to pound.

One practice for dealing with anger is to begin by thanking God for the gift that it is meant to be. By first putting the feelings into a positive faith perspective, we can more readily find insights and inspirations that enable us to decide what to say or to avoid saying, do or not do. Sometimes an experience of anger is profitable for us simply by occasioning a sense of our frailty and of our need for God. Anger is not most people's favorite feeling, but we who are created in the image and likeness of God do well to accept anger as a gift.