

Homily 24th sunday of the Year

## Anger and resentment.

"Resentment and anger, these are foul things".

Isn't that a beautiful expression of something that affects us all? But we'll come back to that.

What I love about the gospel, is that Peter does a trick that many of us do in our hearts and is deeply rooted in humanity, and that is wanting a formula to solve everything, wanting a formula to gain salvation or wanting a formula to be the best, or so on.

It's just like the rich young man who came to Jesus and said, "Lord, tell me what I have to do to inherit eternal life", in other words, give me a set of jobs, or a set of prayers, or a rhythm to complete and that will do the trick for me. And Jesus is constantly rejecting that system, because it's a very system of religion.

And the Catholic Church has been guilty of giving 'formulas' too. Very close to the edge with things like indulgences and so on, although I believe they're still quite popular, to get an indulgence, but I'm not knocking them, I'm saying that it's very near the edge of earning, as it were, salvation. And Jesus sort of rejects that too. Peter asked Jesus if it was ok to forgive seven times. Jesus replies with seventy seven times - an impossible figure, not because he's saying that any old psychopath can come up to you and commit wrong and you keep having to forgive them, but he's saying that forgiveness is immeasurable, hence the 77 times.

Let's go back to this resentment and anger, these foul things. So it's there, implicit in the Old Testament, what Jesus was preaching about, about forgiveness and getting rid of anger. But you know, again it's too simplistic. Anger, it is an emotion. Jesus himself had anger. We see it many times in the gospel, that Jesus got angry at things. He got angry at situations. And obviously He didn't sin.

So what's the touchstone between a resentment and anger? The resentment's the clue, and anger that has resentment, that's personal to me, that's what's the foul thing. And there's a real good principle to guide our hearts. It's hard to practice, but it's a good principle. That if the anger I feel, this is a great principle, if the anger I feel is because of some injustice or wrong, I see happening to someone else, that I am enraged by the injustice or the awfulness of the situation that's nothing to do with me, but someone else, then it's usually good and just anger. Because it's an emotion saying, "I should react to this to put it right. I cannot just stand here and let this continue". And there's nothing personal to gain, it's not about my personal self or my dignity, it's somebody else's.

And if you look through the gospels, I challenge you, look through the gospels and whenever you see Jesus was angry, I would say it was always because of this. Nothing to do with his own dignity, but something that was wrong in itself. A just anger.

But the anger I think that Jesus is on about, in that forgiveness principle and in the Old Testament, "Resentment and anger, these are foul things", is an anger that comes from personal ego, from my dignity. Somebody's trampled on, or I feel somebody's trampled on my worth. And that gets dodgy, that anger. Because that anger is about me asserting myself over someone else, because of what I feel about me. And you can sense that in other things. You look at any anger you've had, maybe against a spouse, or a child, or a parent. And just weigh it up. What was that anger about? Was it more about me, or about them? Scripture says, "Do not let the sunset go down on your anger". And Jesus means this sort of anger.

When you go to bed, resentful and vengeful to get your own back. You can see why the Scripture says "do not go to bed with, on your anger, let go of it." Because it's an awful disease, a terrible worm that buries deep in the heart, and corrupts us and makes us foul. Resentment and anger, these are foul things. Remember that, it turns us into something sordid, when it's an anger based on resentment. Because it's an anger that can never ever be satisfied. The only way is, ironically, through forgiveness.

Forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person ultimately, reconciliation does. Forgiveness has nothing to do with the other person. Forgiveness is about stopping the rod that beats my back, that makes me really bitter. It's saying, "I will not let this pull me down". I forgive that person, doesn't mean I'm going to let them back in my life again, especially if they're a bit tricky. But it means, I'm not going to let this event rule my behavior and life. So forgiveness is the way to let go of that resentment that would make us foul.