

peace with all people, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord: looking carefully lest anyone fall short of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by this many become defiled...”
(Hebrews 12:14-15)

As we write this article, we are on the verge of Holy Week during which time we will hear the angry and hate-filled voices of the mob shouting, “Crucify Him! Crucify Him!” Our Lord did not raise his voice or harbor bitterness, but in love forgave those who crucified Him. In contrast, we have been lifting our own voices during the Great Fast with these words from St. Ephraim the Syrian:

O Lord and Master of my life!

Take from me the spirit of meddling, lust of power, and idle talk.

But give rather the spirit of chastity, humility, patience, and love to Thy servant.
Yea, O Lord and King! Grant me to see my own sins and not to judge my brother,
for Thou art blessed unto ages of ages. Amen

+St. Ephraim the Syrian

These words, embodied in our homes and parishes, will transform us and create spiritually fertile ground for our hierarchs, clergy and faithful to grow ‘fruits worthy of repentance.’ May it be so!

Lust of Power, Anger Management, and Creating a Spiritually Fertile Environment for our Hierarchs, Priests, Deacons, and Faithful

By Bp. THOMAS (Joseph) and Fr. David Hyatt

No matter what provokes it, anger blinds the soul's eyes, preventing it from seeing the Sun of righteousness.”

St. John Cassian, On the Eight Vices

“In a story circulated among an ancient monastic community, a vicious warlord intimidated whole villages, sending its entire population into the hills to hide in caves, waiting for the ruler to move on. One day the warlord entered a small village and asked, I presume all the people have fled by this time?” “Well, all but one old monk who refused to flee,” the aide answered. The warlord was beside himself. “Bring him to me immediately,” he snarled. When they dragged the old monk to the square before him, the commander shouted at him, “Do you not know who I am? I am he who can run you through with a sword and never even bat an eye.” And the old monk gazed up at the commander and replied, “And do you not know who I am? I am he who can let you run me through with a sword and never bat an eye.”¹

The warlord in this story embodies the lust of power that often manifests itself in our lives, and consequently in our parishes. No, we do not tend to threaten impalement of others, but we do desire control over our own lives, relationships, and community. In

¹ Joan Chittister, *Between the Dark and the Daylight*, The Crown Publishing Group, 2015

contrast with the spiritual virtue of self-control, many of us also desire to control others. We think that if we could just get people to act the way we think is best, then our relationships would be better. We also desire the control of the circumstances of our lives, thinking that if we could just control the economy, political winds, and societal norms, then our lives would be more peaceful. And if we are honest, we desire to control God. 'If God would protect me from hard times, illness, and the stupidity of others, then I would know that he loves me and is with me.' You see, lust of power is not only a vice of those in power, but also for those who aspire to it.

All too often, the lust of power manifests itself within the life of the Church. Conflicts over both large and small issues, desires to have ministries run the way we think they should be run, critical comments about how the clergy spend their time, as well as judgmental attitudes and words against the hierarchy of the Church reveal our tendency towards the sin of lust of power. Rather than a loving, freely given obedience to God and His Church, many unfortunately look to their local parish as a place where they can gain some control, and where they should be served.

This, however, is not the mindset of a true Christian. St. John Climacus, in *The Ladder of Divine Ascent*, writes, "Obedience is the tomb of the will and the resurrection of humility." (Step 4.3) As children, we are called to obedience of our parents because it is one of the most important ways that we learn to be obedient to God as we grow older. St. Paul writes, "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. "Honor your father and mother," which is the first commandment with promise: "that it may be well with you, and you may live long on the earth.'" (Ephesians 6:1-3)

In the Church, we are also called to a life of obedience – following the example of those who have been given to us by God to lead us in the path of His commandments. In his epistle to the Hebrews, St. Paul writes, "Obey those who rule over you, and be submissive, for they watch out for your souls, as those who must give account. Let them do so with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you." (Hebrews 13:17) This kind of life of obedience, at home and parish, is for our salvation. Obedience cultivates humility, and humility draws the

hatred toward the person who offended us. So even though we may have succeeded in silencing our lips, our hearts may be spewing hatred. St. John Cassian writes, "More beneficial than controlling our tongue in a moment of anger and refraining from angry words is purifying our heart from rancor and not harboring malicious thoughts against our brethren. The Gospel teaches us to cut off the roots of our sins and not merely their fruits." (*The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, p 86) St. Paul's words of wisdom, "Do not let the sun go down on your wrath..." (Ephesians 4:26) "And let the peace of God rule in your hearts..." (Colossians 3:15)

3. "...and the end is an imperturbable calm under the breath of unclean winds."

Finally, to be truly free, we must arrive at the stage of not taking an offense when we are insulted. This sounds almost impossible, doesn't it? But the lives of the Saints show us that it is indeed possible! St. John Cassian writes, "The final cure for this sickness is to realize that we must not become angry for any reason whatsoever, whether just or unjust. When the demon of anger has darkened our mind, we are left with neither the light of discrimination, nor the assurance of true judgment, nor the guidance of righteousness, and our soul cannot become the temple of the Holy Spirit. Finally, we should always bear in mind our ignorance of the time of our death, keeping ourselves from anger and recognizing that neither self-restraint nor the renunciation of all material things, nor fasting and vigils, are of any benefit if we are found guilty at the last judgment because we are the slaves of anger and hatred." (*The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, p 86) God's words to Cain certainly apply here: "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it." (Genesis 4:6-7) In this final stage, through the grace of the Holy Spirit, we have uprooted the roots of bitterness that fuel our anger. "Pursue

lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul?" (Matthew 16:24- 26) This is where we must begin – denying ourselves [renouncing our will], taking up our cross, and following Christ in His Church. After all, if we are to be great in the Kingdom of God, then we must be the servant – not ruler – of all.

Conquering the passion of anger is no easy task for those who are afflicted with it because it is an emotion. With any feeling that we have, it is not sufficient to simply say that we should not feel that way. What good does that do anyone? Instead, we need to learn how to appropriately respond when that feeling arises, in the short-term, and then, with the guidance of our Spiritual Father, dig down to the root sin that is generating that emotion so that it can be uprooted by the grace of the Holy Spirit.

St. John Climacus, in the Ladder, offers three stages to gaining freedom from anger:

1. "The beginning of freedom from anger is silence of the lips when the heart is agitated..."

This is the stage that we most often attempt to keep. "Zip your lips!" Believe it or not, just because we feel anger over a situation does not mean that we have to say anything. (Of course, we do not mean to overlook the abuse of another person.) But far too often, when anger is stirred, our lips become loose and say what should not be said. This is the first and most immediate stage of gaining freedom from anger.

2. "...the middle is silence of the thoughts when there is a mere disturbance of the soul..."

The second stage is to silence our thoughts, not just our lips. Refusing to rehearse the offensive words or injury to our pride, we quiet our minds and do not allow ourselves to make a home for that offense. If we do not, then a grudge will grow in our hearts which will lead to an unwillingness to forgive. Lack of forgiveness gives way to bitterness and

grace of God. St. Peter writes, "Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for 'God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble.'" (1 Peter 5:5)

What a contrast there is between the lust of power [control], and humble obedience! The former seeks to have all things in the way that we think is best, striving for the power to control circumstances, people, and even God. The latter willingly submits to the loving providence of God in order to work out our salvation, and in humility considers the needs of other as more important than one's own. A life of humble obedience, rather than lust of power [control], would transform a family, a parish, a nation, and our world.

So, what happens when, in lust of power, we do not get what we want or what we think is right and just? We respond with anger, an anger that is rooted in pride. To be clear, despite what we may want to tell ourselves, this is not a 'righteous anger' towards sin. It is the passion of anger that is stirred by our will being thwarted, our desires being denied, and our sense of justice being offended.

This kind of anger can emerge within us even over seemingly mundane details in our day. St. John Cassian, a monastic saint from the late fourth and early fifth centuries, writes in *On the Eight Vices*, "I can remember how, when I lived in the desert, I became angry with the rushes because they were either too thick or too thin; or with a piece of wood, when I wished to cut it quickly and could not; or with a flint, when I was in a hurry to light a fire and the spark would not come. So all-embracing was my anger that it was aroused even against inanimate objects." (*The Philokalia*, Vol. 1, p 86)

Perhaps, like St. John, you have noticed your own anger being stirred when things don't go your way at work, school, home, neighborhood, politics, or church. All our sin comes self-justified because it is rooted in pride – the centering of our lives in our Self – what I want, what I think, how I feel, what I desire. Pride is so pervasive that it undergirds all our sin and provides fuel for our anger. When we combine the lust of power [desire for control] with

anger, we create a deadly mix for both soul and body and blind the eye of our heart to the radiance of the Sun of righteousness.

St. John Cassian writes, “So long as [anger] dwells in our hearts and blinds the eyes of the heart with his somber disorders, we can neither discriminate what is for our good, nor achieve spiritual knowledge, nor fulfill our good intentions, nor participate in true life; and our intellect will remain impervious to the contemplation of the true, divine light; for it is written, ‘For my eye is troubled because of anger’ (Ps. 6:7, LXX).” (The Philokalia, Vol. 1, p 82) Abba Agathon says, “A man who is angry, even if he were to raise the dead, is not acceptable to God.” (The Sayings of the Desert Fathers, p 23) How much more so when we approach the life of the Church in an attempt to satisfy our desire for power and control, and then we inevitably run into obstacles and respond in anger. Lord have mercy!

St. Paul, in his epistle to the Church in Ephesus, writes, ““Be angry, and do not sin”: do not let the sun go down on your wrath, nor give place to the devil.... Let all bitterness, wrath, anger, clamor, and evil speaking be put away from you, with all malice. And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:26-27, 31-32) But rather than being angry with our own sin – for this is what St. Paul means when he says to be angry and do not sin, quoting from Psalm 4:5 LXX – we turn our attention to the sins of others and kindle the fire of anger in our hearts toward them. As we do, the demon of anger injects its deadly poison and blinds the eyes of our heart once again to the contemplation of all that is good and holy. Oh, what a pitiable state is this!

On a number of occasions, I have received recommendations from parishioners that one particular priest or another is in need of counseling for anger management. It is certainly the case that lust of power [control] and anger should have no place in the life of our clergy...and faithful. And when I discover that this is indeed the case with one of our clergy, I provide the pastoral ministry necessary for repentance and healing in their life and work for reconciliation with all those affected. However, quite often, I also

find that behind these recommendations lies a history of an epidemic, in some of our parishes, of numerous people who are angry about real or perceived offenses and who seem to be working overtime to do everything they can to oppose the ministry of our hierarchs, priests, and deacons. At times this anger comes out in direct confrontation, while at other times those afflicted by anger withdraw and hold their anger deep within where it grows more and more deadly inside their own hearts. In either case, the surrendering of our souls to lust of power [control] and anger is a remedy for destruction of both soul and body. And when in this state we try to correct the sins of another person, we are sure to do harm rather than bring healing.

When we consider the response of the old monk, in the story at the beginning of this article, we see a person who has mastered pride by humility, lust of power [control] by obedience, and anger by meekness. While the response of this old monk sounds humorous, it actually reflects the teaching of the Holy Scriptures and ascetic Fathers on our own need to conquer the sins of lust of power [control] and anger, and not to allow them to have a place in our lives or the Church.

So how can we gain freedom from the sins of lust of power [control] and anger? St. John Climacus tells us, in The Ladder of Divine Ascent, that it begins with the renunciation of our will. The need to be in control and to have things go our way, whether at home, or work, or in the Church, is fundamentally the manifestation of pride and is directly opposed to the grace of God. Renunciation of our will is the first step on the Ladder; it is the place that we begin. So, when we see a battle for power and control within the Church, it is evident that we are dealing with people who have not truly begun to climb the Ladder of virtues.

Our Lord set a different example for us when he said that he “...did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Matthew 20:28) Indeed, if we are to be Jesus’ disciples, then we must follow His example. “Then Jesus said to His disciples, “If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will