

AN OVERVIEW OF ANGER

Definition: Anger might best be defined as an internal state in response to being hurt. In effect, anger is a social event. It involves two or more people and within this conflict one usually feels *wronged*.

Responses to anger:

1. Yell back or scream; in some cases this might turn physical.
2. Sulking, chronic complaining.
3. Passive aggressive behaviors (convenient forgetting, sabotage).
4. Tense or constricted thinking.
5. Victim mentality or self righteousness.
6. Obsessive thinking or preoccupation, ruminating.
7. Seeking revenge.
8. Medication, drinking, other escape mechanisms.

In general, catharsis does not work; arguing, yelling, letting it out does not make one less angry. You stay angry. However, a person might need to ventilate simply because of the hurt one feels. Catharsis “feels good” because it makes one feel vindicated. Prudence is required when deciding with whom to express it.

Restructuring thinking patterns as a means of dealing with anger:

1. Calm yourself (breathing exercises or physical exercise); get out of the situation.
2. What are my beliefs that make these feeling arise?
3. What is my “need” level at this stage of my life? What was it when the anger occurred?
4. Can I understand the other’s situation?
5. Cultivate a grateful heart.

Always remember:

1. It’s impossible to avoid anger; its part of life; it will happen; it usually involves others and feelings of being wronged.
2. The key is not avoiding anger; it is what do I do with it when I’m in it?
3. We have a right to be angry when some things happen to us. Its OK. But, again, what do I do with it?
4. Always ask yourself the question: Is this who I really want to be (when dealing with your anger response); or is this what I really desire?
5. Anger that leads to bitterness harms our moral lives.

Hints for Listening

Here are some points to help you refine your listening skills.

Make time. Since life gets hectic it's often necessary to make a special effort to stop and listen to someone else---and to God.

Show interest. Looking bored and fidgeting is discourteous. If you are unable or unwilling to listen just then, it's thoughtful to say so. Set another time.

Give full attention. It's easy to become distracted, yet thinking about dinner or the weather draws you away from what is important at that moment, the speaker.

Listen for feelings. Closer communication is likely when you attend to more than just the facts. "Hear" between the lines.

Ask questions. When posed with sincerity questions can yield valuable information to help you better understand the other person's point of view.

Don't think of your answer. Listening is more than just keeping silent until it's your turn to speak. Since you can listen and comprehend faster than a person can speak, use this time to mentally summarize their main ideas.

Let the speaker finish. When dealing with a loved one you may think you know what they're about to say because you know them so well. If you listen you may be surprised.

Keep confidences. Keep private matters private. Trust is a fragile thing and once broken the repair can be long and difficult.

Be respectful. There's a tendency to "write off" someone's remarks if you don't place much importance in them as a person.

Practice. This is a time-honored way to increase any skill.

Some Thoughts on Carrying Our Crosses

Jesus is Emanuel: God is with Us!

Accepting the cross in our lives means that we have to make peace with the unalterable fact that we are human and that frustrations, pain, illness, sadness and death are all part of being human and must ultimately be accepted without bitterness to experience the gifts of the Risen Savior: love, peace and joy. As long as we nourish the notion that pain is something we refuse to accept we will find ourselves bitter – bitter for not having accepted the cross.

Second, taking up our cross means that in our suffering we may not pass on any bitterness to others. When we are suffering we have a strong inclination to make others suffer. If I am unhappy I am tempted to make others around me unhappy. This does not mean that we can't share our pain with others but there is a healthy way of doing this as opposed to any unhealthy kind of sharing which subtly tries to make others unhappy because we are unhappy. There is a difference in groaning under the weight of our cross and unhealthy whining and self-pity that leads to unkindness. Jesus groaned but expressed no self-pity or bitterness.

Third, walking in the footsteps of Jesus as He carries His cross means that we must accept some other deaths before our physical death. If we live in adulthood there are a myriad of other deaths we will experience before we die physically. Christian maturity is about naming our deaths and mourning our losses and letting go of what has died. This allows us to claim our new births and receive new life and joy in the Spirit. These daily deaths and new births are the stages of spiritual growth and maturity. **Carrying our cross means that we must wait for the resurrection.** In this life all symphonies remain unfinished. So much of our life is about waiting, longing and battling self-centeredness. Jesus' invitation to follow Him implies living inside an unfinished symphony. The cross reminds us that God's gifts to us are often not what we expect. God always answers our prayers by giving us what we really need rather than what we think we need. The resurrection often does not come the way we expect it and rarely fits our notion of how a resurrection should happen. To carry our cross is to be open to surprises.

Finally it means living a life that believes that nothing is impossible with God. It affirms that God is God and is greater than the human imagination. If we succumb to the idea that God can't offer us a way out of our pain it is because we have reduced God down to the size of our own limited imagination. If we believe in the Resurrection it is possible to carry our cross, to live in trust and not grow bitter. We can take up our cross when we put our faith in the Risen Jesus Who is always there to help us.

Matthew 11: 25-30:
Jesus' invitation to come to Him

In this passage from St. Matthew's Gospel Jesus says that His yoke is easy and His burden it light. Bu how can this be true? Doesn't each of us, at times, have a heavy burden to carry?

Nobody needs me to say what makes a burden heavy. Everyone can look at their own life and make the list. And even if there is someone who has no worries or sadness in their life, they must be a very lonely person if they are not carrying a burden for someone else whom they love.

So, in what sense is Jesus' yoke easy and His burden light?

To see why the Lord's saying really is true after all, consider the condition He sets for getting the gift He offers to us, the easy yoke and the light burden: **"Come to Me,"** Jesus says!

To come to someone is to let that person come into you. It is to be open to them, to let their will make a difference to what you yourself will and do. This is not safe, generally speaking.

But when the Person to whom you come is Christ Himself, the vulnerability which openness brings with it is more than matched by the love the Lord gives. In the gift of that love, everything that might be loss is turned into gift given and gift received, to be returned again in love.

Even death is like this. One does not have to face death as if it was a depredation. Within the love of Jesus Christ, what might be only irrevocable loss of one's life can become a sharing with the Lord too. One can offer one's life as a gift to Christ, with Christ and for Christ as one goes through death to arrive at life in love with Jesus Christ.

And if the heavy load of death can be lightened this way, what Christ says is also true about every other heavy burden: in coming to Jesus, in shared love with Him, we will find that His yoke is easy and His burden is light.

Praying with the Risen Lord

When we pray about the Resurrection stories we encounter the Risen Lord as He consoles His friends and disciples who were once scared, confused and despairing. St Ignatius wants a retreatant to experience the grace of **joy**. This is not just happiness which can come and go or even be induced. Joy is deeper than an emotion; it is a gift from God to be asked for. We can experience it in the company of others and in the beauty of nature. We experience it when what we are and what we do are in synch.

St Ignatius wants us to ask to experience that Easter joy of Jesus' followers when He came to them and said "Peace be with you; do not be afraid." St Peter tells us 1 Peter 1:8-9:

Although you have not seen Him, you love Him; and even though you do not see Him now, you believe in Him and rejoice with an indescribable and glorious joy, for you are receiving the outcome of your faith, **the salvation of your souls.**

We are not praying only about the actual resurrection events – they are a mystery beyond time and space. We pray to experience God's transformation of life, making all things new, as in a new creation – to understand that Jesus has conquered sin and death once and for all. We contemplate the Risen Christ consoling others and ask for that same experience in our lives. We see that Jesus is both divine and human and comes to us understanding our humanity and sharing His divine love and mercy with us.

The Spiritual Exercises instruct us: "I ask for what I desire. Here it will be to ask the grace to be glad and rejoice intensely because of the great glory and joy of Christ our Lord."

Litany of Transfiguration

R: Let me see only Jesus!

When I am tempted to look only at my faults. *R*
When troubled by the specter of doubt and defeat. *R*
When I can't see beyond the frustrations of the moment. *R*
When the horizon seems distant and dark. *R*
When I can't see the point of pursuing what is good. *R*
When complaining and cynicism invade my peace. *R*
When I can't face my problems. *R*
When the world looks bleak. *R*
When others measure and judge me. *R*
When beset by depression and fear. *R*
When friendship is far from me. *R*
When overshadowed by sorrow. *R*
When I fail to use my freedom. *R*
When it is hard to forgive. *R*
When things don't make sense. *R*
When I think I can't change. *R*
When confronted by suffering. *R*
When stress gets me down. *R*
When it is hard to go on. *R*
When blinded by sin. *R*
When the hardness of life overwhelms me. *R*
When hope begins to fade. *R*

Lord Jesus, I place my trust in You. Be with me and with those I love in the places and situations we most need you. Risen Savior, console and strengthen me as You consoled Your friends at that First Easter. Let me feel Your healing touch in my heart, in my mind, in my soul, in my family, in all of my life. Amen!
