

“Learn from me, for I am meek and humble of heart, and you will find rest for yourselves.” Meekness is a virtue with a bad reputation. Today, being known as “meek” is just above “pious” on the list of things we don’t want to be called. We think of being meek as being wimpy. But to be meek is not to be a wimp. Meekness is the virtue by which we gain mastery over our anger. I shared the gist of this homily a few weeks ago at daily mass, but I want to preach about confronting our anger again today because so many of us are wounded by anger about the past, and its bad fruit, unforgiveness.

How does this work itself out in our lives? We are, each of us, in large part, the stories we tell ourselves. Many of these stories are memories from our past. They’re how we make sense of the world. They’re who we are. But problems arise when we keep tell ourselves the destructive stories over, and over, again.

Today, I want to look in particular at those memories that set off anger in us. These are the stories from our past where we were

betrayed, or abused, or mocked, or attacked, or abandoned – by parents, spouses, girlfriends or boyfriends, friends, strangers. Imagine all those painful memories we carry around in our minds as YouTube videos. We keep watching them over and over, and every time the emotions come back. Think of how many views they would each have by us if they were such videos. The truth is that sometimes we can get a kind of pleasure re-living our pain and anger that springs from remembering those past incidents, so we can cling to them. They're our identity, who we've become.

But the Catholic spiritual masters tell us that we must practice detachment if we are to become saints. We must detach from material possessions to gain simplicity of life. We must detach from our own desires, and accept God's will. But they also say we must also detach from memory. That sounds strange. How can we live without remembering the past? True, some memories are necessary. But some are destructive. To move forward we need to stop remembering them.

Note: I don't say "forget" them. That may be impossible. But remembering, bringing them up to our consciousness, includes some participation on our part. To practice meekness, to master our anger, we should no longer participate in some painful memories. (I do realize that in extreme cases the destructive experiences of the past may be so traumatic that it's more complicated).

When Jesus tells us to put on His easy yoke He means for us to imitate His meekness. How? We Catholics sometimes speak of Jesus' Sacred Heart. Jesus offers us His very heart. He wants us to use it, and love with it, as our own. We are, after all, members of His body. We have that power and right. And the best illustration of what Jesus' heart is like comes from the highest (and lowest) moment of His mission – the Cross. On the Cross Jesus says, "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." [Luke 23:34]

There are two lessons here for us angry people to learn. First, Jesus prays for those who threaten, hurt, indeed, kill Him. One way to

get rid of the anger flowing from our memories and hurts of the past is to imitate Jesus and pray for those who hurt us. Instead of viewing the video again, when it pops up I should stop and say a short prayer of blessing for that person who hurt me: a simple, “Jesus bless X today from your cross.” And keep doing it. Stop watching the old video. You already know it by heart. Let it go. It may take many prayers, but eventually the memory and the anger that comes with it is softened and replaced by the charity of prayer. Plus, if it’s the devil prompting us to watch the video he will stop if he finds it just leads us to prayer.

The second lesson Jesus teaches us about meekness from the cross is that praying for those who have hurt us opens up the ability to forgive them. “Father, forgive them, they know not what they do.”

Sometimes the hurts of our past cause us to build up a layer of protective hardness, hate, and lack of forgiveness towards the persons who hurt us. The anger can help us survive and deal with the pain . . . we think. But our lack of forgiveness also keeps us from being healed,

and eventually the anger becomes as destructive to us as the initial harm we suffered. None of this is to deny the right to justice for those of us who've been hurt. Forgiveness doesn't mean we're wimps. But forgiveness softens our hearts. We can't be happy with hard hearts.

In the past, we may not have known how to turn to Jesus in our suffering and hurts. We turned inward, thinking we were abandoned by God, or even unworthy of His love. Now it's time to return to Him. Our healing flows through Him. Take into your daily prayers those who have hurt you, as Jesus did on the Cross. Ultimately, we can't deny forgiveness to someone we're sincerely praying for. If it's too painful yet to pray for that person, pray for the ability to pray for him or her.

To do these things is to be humble of heart because we can't do them on our own. We can only pray for, and forgive, them if we do so with the heart of Jesus. The knowledge that we are weak, but Christ is strong, is the root of true humility. And to gain the mastery over our anger from the past is heroic meekness. It's a strength, not a weakness.

What stories do we tell ourselves? We can keep playing back the old videos of our suffering – and remain angry people all our lives. Or we can remember Christ's words on the cross and make those words into our own story, and find rest for ourselves – and be Christ for our world.