

16<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

July 21-22, 2018

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I'm angry.

There I was, on vacation last week, enjoying a chance to relax and rest.

And then... a friend of mine sent me the *New York Times* story about the former cardinal archbishop of Washington DC, who is now accused of abusing seminarians, youngsters, and children. Apparently, priests and others had notified church officials for years about the misconduct of this bishop, but the complaints fell on deaf ears. He kept abusing – and he kept getting *promoted*.

And here's a sad irony: he was one of the bishops who was in charge of implementing the new procedures to remove priests from ministry if they were accused of misconduct. Priests now get removed from ministry quickly, based on one accusation. Apparently, bishops were playing by a different set of rules.

I'm angry.

I'm also angry that 17 people died in that boat accident in Missouri. What were they doing out on that lake in that storm? Is it true that they were told they wouldn't need life vests?

I'm angry President Bush's heart surgeon was shot while riding his bike to work in Houston yesterday.

Some people are angry at the president's performance at the recent summit with the Russians. Others are angry about the way that the president's nominee for the supreme court is being savaged in the press. Some are angry about the separation of children from their immigrant parents. Others are angry about crimes committed by illegal immigrants.

And worst of all, I am angry that they tore down the most important and historic building in Richmond – the old Ukrop's store at Three Chopt and Patterson... (so many memories. So much fried chicken and white house rolls....)

Are you angry about anything? Do you know someone who is?

It seems to me we have an epidemic of anger in our culture, and we seem incapable of having intelligent conversations about how to deal with life's angers. So, many of us choose to sit in our

chairs, soaking in the angry rhetoric of whatever cable news network we watch, becoming exhausted by a sense of helplessness and hatred.

Satan would love for us to keep doing that. But we are people of *faith*... which means that we believe in a God who is bigger than any church scandal or presidential press conference.

If you have felt pulled under by a rip-tide of anger recently, I think the Lord is inviting you to read today's Scriptures again.

Yes, there are times in the Bible when it sounds like God is angry – angry with us, angry about sin and injustice. There are places in the Bible where God says, “Woe to you!” And sometimes we need to hear that, just as there are times when a parent has to correct a child's bad behavior, or a friend has to lovingly challenge another friend in a conversation that is hard.

But when God challenges us or corrects our injustices, God always does so in a way that allows us to experience hope, and change, and peace.

We hear that in today's reading from the Letter to the Ephesians. Three times in this short reading Paul promises that Christ has given us peace. Peace. Peace. Three times, Saint Paul reminds us that, in Christ, we find our peace. In Christ. Nowhere else. No one else. *In Christ*.

And in today's Gospel, Jesus invites his disciples to come with him, to come *to* him, to *be with* him, to *rest* with him, to be *focused* on him. The apostles have been busy. They've been out on the road, working hard, fighting evil, doing good even when doing good wasn't easy.

So in effect, Jesus says to his apostles, “let's take a little vacation.” But did you notice what everyone else was doing? They were trying to answer two questions – 1) where is Jesus right now? And, 2) how do we get close to him quickly?

All of those people, from the villages and countryside, understood something that I have forgotten this past week ... this past week when I was angry and worried and fearful. These folks in ancient Galilee lived in difficult and fearful times too. The Romans had taken over their land. Injustice was everywhere. The future was uncertain. Poverty was always a possibility. So was hunger, and illness and death.

They were angry, and afraid. But what did they do when they were angry, or afraid? They asked two questions: 1) where is Jesus, and 2) how to do I get close to him quickly?

They were focused on Jesus, centered on Jesus, bringing all their cares and worries to Jesus. And when they did that, they found... peace. No - their lives did not instantly become perfect. But

they always found peace when they brought their concerns, their worries, their joys, their lives, to Jesus.

And this is precisely what I've been failing to do in recent weeks.

When I spend most of my time reading disheartening articles in the *New York Times*, or watching unhinged shouters on cable news – I just get angrier about the things going on in the world.

But I've spent very little time bringing all this to Jesus, or focusing on Jesus, or asking Jesus what HE wants me to do about all of this. In other words, I spent lots of time “angering,” and very little time *praying*.

Staying angry takes work, and is exhausting. Ignoring Christ never brings me peace.

And when I fall into this ‘anger cycle,’ I actually behave like an atheist. I lose my sense of hope, or I despair because I think that the little pastor from Short Pump is in charge of fixing all of the problems of the church, or of the world.

But Christ already saved the world. It is not simply up to me. Christ is bigger than my fears, and stronger than my worries, and more peaceful than my angers.

So I'm going to try something this week: I am not going to spend lots of time posting angry Facebook messages about Planned Parenthood, or condemning every politician who disappoints me, or stewing in my anger over Cardinal McCarrick.

This week, before I do anything else, I'm going to ask: where Jesus is, and how can I get closer to him?

I need to pray, not pout. I need to listen to God, not shout. If I don't ask Christ what I should do, then whatever I DO do will probably be misguided. And if I do not focus on Christ, all I will see is my fear, and my worry and my anger. And none of those will bring me life, or bring me peace.

The precious children who are being baptized this weekend have been given the gift of life by our loving God, and are being given the gift of eternal life by Christ in the Spirit. For the rest of their lives, they need to be taught, by us, who Jesus is and how to get closer to him. They deserve to grow up in a world where adults show them how to find peace in Christ, and how to love each other, and how to stand for justice. For their sake, and for the sake of God's beautiful creation, let's choose to walk away from what makes us angry, and walk toward the Lord who gives us life.