

Daily Meditation 09/08/2021

Politics and Anger, Jesus and Aquinas

Good morning.

Today we continue our meditation on politics and anger, employing the wisdom of both Jesus and Thomas Aquinas.

And you really can't cover up the anger of Jesus; it certainly comes out in that big event which Bruce Chilton, a very fine New Testament scholar, lays out was not just Jesus getting angry and turning over tables in the temple of moneylenders, but rather it was a whole crew that Jesus led, a whole team, a whole movement to turn over the tables of the moneylenders in the temple. And this created tremendous crisis, not just with those who ran the temple, the religious leaders, but with the political leaders too, because they felt a real riot was possible.

And this had everything to do really with Jesus being murdered and tortured by the Empire at the instigation of some of those who ran the temple, and were making a very good living at it, you might say. But they were in cahoots with the worldly powers and some of the religious leaders overseeing the temple.

But Jesus' anger also comes out in his attacks and arguments with various leaders in his own community, the Jewish community: with the Pharisees, calling them whited sepulchers and all the rest. And he didn't hold back, really.

And so Jesus was not just about contemplation and centering and finding a place of peace and calm and tranquility. He was also about speaking out, which is a prophet's tool: "pro-pheto" means "to speak out." Two Greek words, to speak out, to hold truth up to power, and you often pay a price for it.

Now Thomas Aquinas reminds us that that anger can be a very positive thing: in fact, he says all the virtues are rooted not in the will but in our passions. So he sees passions, unlike the Neo-Platonics and Augustine, as very powerful and important energies within all of us: the passion of anger and outrage, and the passion of love, and the passion for joy and beauty, and the rest.

So he actually creates this whole sense of virtues which is the basis of his ethics -- not laws and commandments, but virtues. He says that they reside in our passions. So this is why passions are so wonderful when we learn to use them well -- of course they can run away with us, and that's why he says that anger can be a good thing, but for a certain length of time. So it's about our being able to steer the anger.

Now at the end of today's essay he says something very important. He says that anger is always related to injustice: that which provokes anger, he says, is always something considered in the light of an injustice. In other words we are angry because something we love is being threatened or endangered.

Anger comes from love. If we are angry, he says, with those who harm others, it is because those who are injured belong in some way to us, either by some kinship or by friendship or at least because of the nature we share in common. In other words, by our all being human beings. To me this is very, very rich teaching: that waking up to injustice is about waking up to your anger.

But again it's not about responding with anger and vindictiveness and blame toward others. It is about recycling it into creativity, into imagination, into alternatives, into organizing, into solidarity. And allying with others who feel the same anger for the very same reason, that this is inhuman, or it is harmful to those whom we love, whether in a personal way, or in a broader way, because they are human beings like we are, or in terms of the eco-crisis. They are beings like we are.

When we see what's happening to elephants, and to rainforests, and to whales, to the oceans, and all the rest -
- this too should arouse anger in us! It is not just about screaming, but we cultivate it, we turn it into action,
and into good law where there are bad laws, and we turn it into effective action, bringing love and justice
back

Thank you, we'll see you tomorrow.