

Meekness

Meekness is the virtue that enables one to overcome the tendencies of anger, revenge, hatred and enmity. Many of its manifestations have already been listed under the heading of charity, because the principal incentives to anger come from the words or actions of a fellow human being. Thus meekness presupposes the virtue of charity or love of neighbor, which provides the motives and the means of overlooking insult, injustice and injury, real or imaginary, from others.

The vice of anger, to which meekness is opposed, is responsible for very much of the misery in the world. It is a vice in which an animal passion in man is permitted to dominate his words and actions as if he possessed neither reason nor free will. In the brute animals, anger is directed by instinct to the purposes of self-defense and self-preservation, as exemplified when a brute fights for food, or against an enemy, or in defense of its young. In man, anger is also designed by nature to be a means of self-defense and self-preservation, but, like all the passions, in him it is meant to be under the complete control of reason and free will. This means that even in a man who possesses merely natural virtue, all motivations to anger must be trained to submit to the judgment of reason, and that the will be permitted to act, not on the suggestion of anger but on the judgment of reason. A man who possesses supernatural virtue has all the teachings of faith to assist his judgment in deciding against the impulses of anger.

Anger, therefore, as a vice, is the habit of acting as the passion dictates without subjecting it to reason or faith. One who habitually acts thus, indulging in intemperate words and vicious actions, places himself below the level of the brutes. Brutes are guided at least by instinct.

Reason is to take the place of that instinct in man, and when it is abandoned there is nothing left but blind and selfish force

I. Mortal Sins

1. Have I deliberately permitted myself to become so violently angry that it destroyed my reason for a time and made me incapable of acting like a human being?
2. Have I hurt others seriously in anger?
3. Have I knowingly and deliberately made others angry to a point where they were bereft of reason?
4. Have I planned revenge against others, looking for an opportunity to do serious harm to them?
5. Have I actually taken revenge by doing serious harm, e.g., by ruining a person's business, by destroying his reputation, by stealing?
6. Have I permitted anger against others to become hatred, so that I wished them serious misfortune and refused to speak to them for a considerable length of time?
7. Have I refused to forgive others who had wronged me and who asked for forgiveness in a direct or indirect way?
8. After causing another to show signs of hatred for me, have I refused to show by any sign that I wanted to be forgiven?
9. Have I induced others to hate their neighbors by working on their anger and providing motives for continued hatred?

10. Have I, through jealousy of others, deliberately tried to destroy a good work that they were doing or to hamper it seriously?

II. Venial Sins

1. Have I taken part in petty quarrels and bitter arguments?
2. Have I given in to sudden spurts of anger by harsh words, by calling names, by abusive language?
3. Have I shown dislike and antipathy for others by snubbing them, by being sarcastic toward them, or by any unkindness?
4. Have I given in to moods of sullenness and moroseness towards others?
5. Have I shown sensitiveness and hurt feelings over trifling matters?
6. Have I carried and shown a grudge against others for some time?
7. Have I talked back peevishly to superiors when I was corrected?
8. Have I, as a superior, corrected others in the heat of anger?
9. Have I shown envy of others by picking at their characters, by lessening their esteem in the eyes of others?
10. Have I teased others until I made them angry?
11. Have I approved and promoted the angry feelings of others?