

One of the sins that people confess most often is anger. "I got angry with my spouse. I lost my temper with children. I fought with my brothers and sisters." Anger may not be the sin we commit most, but it may be the sin that bothers us most. Everyone wants inner peace, but too often our tranquillity is bankrupt.

Let me tell you about two angry people. Marge was an only child. In her family, if she didn't get what she wanted by being nice, she could always get it by being angry. Now as an adult, she's one of the worst drivers in her carpool. She speeds to work, cursing every driver who gets in her way. She yells at waiters, sales clerks, and especially telephone solicitors. She usually gets her way, because she gets angry. A lot.

George grew up in a larger family. He has lots of experience fighting with brothers and sisters. Now the father of three boys, he can't stand to see them yelling at each other, so he shouts them down--every night, when he gets home from another tense day at work.

We yell at two different groups: Strangers, who will never see us again, we psychologically hit-and-run; and people we love, who will see us again and again, because we naively expect them to know in spite of our tirades just how meek we really are.

We have trained ourselves in anger. We've learned that when things don't go our way or there's too much tension in our life, getting angry helps us blow off steam. We need a way to prevent getting angry at the wrong people.

Did Jesus ever get angry? Definitely. He stormed the buyers and sellers out of the temple like a white tornado. But he did not lose control in today's Gospel. And you'd expect him to. His disciples have just come back from the first missionary journey; he's proud of them, so he invites them to some time off, a little vacation on the other side of the lake. But as soon as they arrive, they see the crowd has run around on land ahead of them. Just when they wanted to get away and relax, now there's more work to do. It's like going to the lake house to find out you never did repair the plumbing. Does Jesus say, "Leave me alone!"? No, he takes pity on the crowd and teaches them, and Mark says he taught them "at great length."

How did he do that? Where did Jesus get the strength to work when he really wanted to relax? Why didn't he get angry? Jesus liked to do what he had just invited his apostles to do--he used to go off by himself to spend time with the Father. This time away must have filled Jesus with a reservoir of inner peace from which he could draw at a time like this.

My brothers and sisters, we need that kind of rest. We need the chance to store up peace. Some need solitude, some need a friend, some need a hobby. Peace is a skill, like playing music. We need to practice peace every day. If we have a reflex for anger, we can retrain our reflex for peace.