One of the things with anger is it has a way of building upon itself, and snowballing.

While certainly sometimes there is justified anger when we see an injustice or want to right a wrong, as we all know there is the kind of anger that emerges that festers and keeps growing. We've all seen it, and maybe experienced it. And unless it's corrected, so many people look back and have to ask the question, was it really all worth it?

A few years back, a gentleman by the name of Michael T. Smith, who is a project manager, found himself still brooding and upset with one particular member of his family.

Christmas was coming, and like the Christmas before, they didn't send Christmas cards; they called his family in Canada. His wife Ginny and he talked to his mom. They spoke to uncles and aunts. He hadn't seen any of them in 7 years and Ginny hadn't met them yet, but she hoped to one day.

Those calls were completed, but Michael couldn't relax. He still had one more call to make, and he was afraid. He paced the house. He wasted time at his computer. He needed to call but couldn't.

Five years before, he had received an e-mail from his brother. At the time, Michael had been out of work for a few months. His life was very stressful. His brother's email was nothing terrible, but something about it made him angry.

And so he wrote back. As he typed, his anger grew. Months of frustration flowed into his nasty response. He said things that were not nice, but he hit "send" anyway. More thoughts occurred to him, and he wrote a second email that was just as cruel.

Michael admits he basically told his brother to go to hell. He did not care if he ever heard from him again.

The next day he received another email from him. He didn't read it. He just deleted it, and blocked his brother's email address.

For five years, he tried to get through to Michael, but Michael ignored him. Michael had lived with terrible guilt. He thought about contacting him, but was ashamed of himself for what he had said.

Finally, he realized that it was time to fix things. He picked up the phone and stepped outside. He wanted privacy. Ginny did not know he was calling his brother. He took a deep breath, blew out a cloud of his breath into the cold December air, and dialed the number. Even after 5 years, he still knew it by heart. A phone rang 3,700 miles away in Nova Scotia.

There was no answer. He left a message. "Bob, it's Mike." He paused to take another breath. His hand holding the phone shook. "Bob, I guess I'll start by saying I'm sorry. I

said some things I regret. I want to wish you and Delores a Merry Christmas and hope all is well with you. I realize you may not want to talk to me, but I thought I would try. I want to make it right again. If you want to talk…" He left his number and hung up.

Michael walked back into the house and looked at Ginny. "I did it," he said.

She looked puzzled. "You did what?"

"I called Bob."

She walked up and put her arms around his neck. "I'm glad. You needed to do it. It's family Mike and it's been too long." She kissed him, and told him he did right.

Christmas that year came and went. Mike waited for the call that never came. Mike prayed for his brother's forgiveness. The phone didn't ring. Then a week after he called. He got an email. His brother left a message on his Facebook page. He said he listened to his voice message over and over and knew that Mike was sincere. In the weeks to follow, they emailed back and forth. The healing began.

Mike asked himself, why had he let 5 years of his brother's life slip through his fingers? Why was he too proud to call and say that he was sorry?

He admits if he had the answers, it never would have happened in the first place, but Mike knew he didn't want it to happen again. He had wrecked his relationship with his brother. Like a jigsaw puzzle that has been dropped, the pieces had scattered everywhere. It was now time to gather them up and try to put them back together.

Since then, they have grown close again. Even though Mike hasn't been able to afford the trip home, he says they are still family. Swallowing his pride he says was a good thing, because after all, Bob is his brother.

In our first reading this week from Sirach, we are told ***"Wrath and anger are hateful things, yet the sinner hugs them tight."*** I know this is very true for me. I have a long memory, and it can be hard for me to let go of things. As humans, we can hold grudges, and it can be very hard to let go of the past. Sometimes this leads to, as in Michael and Bob's story, separation. In other cases it leads to revenge. But in pretty much all cases, it leads to sadness, because either in this life or the next, our eyes are opened to the fruitlessness of prolonged anger.

So what is it? Well, anger and wrath can be seen sometimes as always bad. We shouldn't jump to that conclusion though. Remember, the capacity to be angry is given to us by nature itself. The animated film "Inside Out" captures that point quite well; it's an emotion, and as put by the late Jesuit theologian and philosopher Fr. James Schnall, without it, we would be less than we are, we'd be crippled, lacking something that ought to be there. As he puts it, **tell me what makes you angry and I will tell you what you are, and the same point can be made negatively - tell me what does not make you**

angry and I will likewise tell you what you are. It's a good point isn't it? He goes on to write: ***"In the belated publicity about selling fetal parts, for instance, many people were angry, even wrathful, on learning of this atrocious commerce. Yet these same people were often not angry at the evil of abortion itself. That reaction, I suppose, is better than being angry at neither. It makes the point of greater and lesser evils proportioned to greater and lesser angers."*** And he's right; some people get very angry over the outcome of a sporting event, or what a politician says or writes, or of not getting a raise or promotion, or whatever it might be. But the things they should be angry about, they aren't. Fr. Schnall points out that anger and what we speak of wrath and anger (wrath being stronger than anger; in the sense that a typhoon is stronger than a downpour) it means that there is an emotion that says I must act to an evil or a disorder, even if I can't do anything about them because of free will. Hence God's anger and wrath would not eradicate free will; God could chose to do this and eliminate violence and evil and sin, but He wants us to have free will and come to the conclusion that we need to make the choice to love. Where anger gets out of wack is when it crosses over into revenge, going above and beyond wanting justice. Its when we want to get someone back and then some; when we shut someone out completely even if they are trying to reach out; when we use it to destroy the other person rather than build someone up.

So as a starting point, we ask ourselves where is anger in my life? Maybe you are angry at a person such as a former friend, a family member or co-worker, a neighbor or someone. Look at *why* you are angry with them. Maybe there is a real hurt there; and it's important to acknowledge that if you were wronged. Forgiveness can take time, and you can't just brush things like abuse, broken promises, lies and these painful things under the rug and say quickly "alls well." But maybe there is something you got too angry about, as in Michael's case; his brother may have been a little insensitive in an email, but he obviously blew it out of proportion. Maybe you're like that, and you were too hard on someone for not being a mind-reader and knowing what you were going through, or you just communicate differently, or your response has been to be hurtful back, or to cut someone out. It's important to identify these people in our lives and the situations where anger has gone too far, or maybe wasn't justified in the first place.

But so, too, is it important to identify things we should be angry about, and do something about them. Remember, anger isn't always a sin. Justice is also a virtue. And our faith needs to inform our morals and our political decisions; abortion should make us angry; racism should make us angry; attacks on law enforcement officers should make us angry. With people, seeing someone mistreating someone such as abuse or bullying, this should make us angry. On the good side of responding, we've seen in some cases peaceful protests against abortion, racism (most notably with Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement), and rallies for police. Pick your issue, and you can point to some good responses that have led to change. But so too have we seen in history violence against people such as the Troubles in Northern Ireland; bombing of an abortion clinic, and attacks on the cops that are not justified. And on smaller scales, we've seen social media fights that don't do much good either. Anger can get out of control in we do not respond to things as we should, not just with respect to being angry at people but the

issues we are passionate about. This is really important too with respect to our voting and involvement. If you're angry about politics, make sure you're angry about the right things and do something by informing your conscience. It's important to look at the issues we are passionate about, make sure we are passionate about what the Church teaches, and then make a decision to vote for the people we see closest aligned to the teachings of the Church while also remembering there are a hierarchy of moral truths; cheating on a test is bad. Stealing money from someone is worse. Taking the life of another is worse than both. The same is true in political issues; so read "Faithful Citizenship," which is a succinct summary from the US Bishops on what we believe as Catholics, and use that to be passionate and even angry by being involved not just on election day, but working to bring about a just world. And with respect to other things, if you're angry about something in a community or a church or workplace, we also have to say am I going to just complain, or am I going to volunteer, get involved, and be an agent of change? Am I going to accept that others involved here have opinions too, and it's not just my way or the highway? With other people, if you're angry at what someone is doing, are you just going to fume and ruminate or are you going to talk to them, and try to journey with them to become a better person? Just as a parent might be angry at a child's action but love the child and use the opportunity to help mold them into a better person, the same is true with other people in our life

So, knowing then a bit about anger as an emotion, and knowing that it can go from good anger to the bad kind, both at people we know and sometimes at politicians or the issues of the day where the anger leads to a lot of blowing off steam either online or with other people, when our conscience begins to give us the warning signs that there is the bad kind of anger involved, what then do we do about it?

First, in the moment, we need to calm down. We can pray for wisdom. We can not do what Michael did and click "send" on that email or on Facebook or social media or on the iphone text and re-read what we are about to send out.

Second, if we've been hurt by someone, or are really angry about a situation, we can also pray and seek counsel from others. We are emotional people, and sometimes we feel like we have to bury emotions. But that's not helpful. Asking God for help in getting past our anger, talking it through with someone who's a good listener, these can be really fruitful in helping us begin to overcome it.

Third, we need to be honest with ourselves. Is our anger justified? There are people who are going to let Donald Trump or Joe Biden ruin their lives for the next two months to the election, and then be angry about it for the next four years whoever wins. Is it really worth it? Do you really want to be that person? On a smaller scale, if you are angry with someone for something, the same is true. To be sure, there are some things to be rightfully angry about, but sometimes they aren't just that big, though we allowed them to become big. Bring this to prayer; ask God for clarity on it, and try to take the steps to sort it out and let it go.

Fourth, pray for the other person. We pray for people we like. But no matter who is in office, do you pray for them? Do you pray for that person you have a grudge with or don't speak to? Do you pray for those who wronged you? Do you pray for the dead, even those who you may have not gotten along with or who have hurt you in some way, knowingly or unknowingly? These things are hard. But when we look to the Cross, we see Jesus forgiving seventy times seven; we see Him saying "Forgive them, they know not what they do."

Fifth, we try to stop being so negative. We humans love to trash one another. And it's fine to be critical of actions or words said; but ask yourself are you criticizing the other side politically all the time or the issues? With people, do you find yourself gossiping and tearing down that one family member or co-worker or supervisor all the time? With yourself, if you're angry there, can you accept that you are human and make mistakes and not perfect? If so, what's the point of it? Try to be honest about a frustration with an individual's actions or belief, but not always belittling or tearing them down as people.

Sixth, remember there sometimes things out of your control. You can't control who will win the election other than your single vote which may or may not be for the winning candidate. You can't control traffic. You can't control the weather. You can't control how someone is going to react to you. You can't control when others chose to be cruel to you. But you can control what you do with those emotions; you can let them destroy you, or eat you up, or you can just ask God for the strength to let go of them.

Lastly, we act. Hopefully not five years after the fact like Michael. But when we are tempted to make excuses, hopefully we can say now is the time. Now is the time to pick up the phone, to write that email, to try to begin the process of healing. As we do this, we work through things with people; we can say "you are forgiven" or "can you forgive me," but I also think talking through what happened is so important too in all of this.

Bishop Robert Baron points out the opening line in our first reading is like holding a mirror to ourselves, and I know that's certainly true for me. I get worked up on political issues. And there are people in my life who I have a hard time letting go of bad memories and experiences with. This reading really hits home, because I'm good at holding anger in and letting it fester. But as a priest, when I hold the Eucharist, I have to remind myself when Jesus says "This is my Body, given up for you," there is not an asterisk there in the Roman Missal next to "you." God loves us so much, forgiving always, 70 times 7. From the darkness of Good Friday emerged Easter Sunday; the healing power of love the apostles experience when Jesus says "Shalom" to them. Peace and justice come about through the proper use of anger, which isn't hitting "send" on emails and social media or gossip, but by using anger properly - to bring about change in others, in ourselves and in the world for the better. What a tragedy to hug tight and be bound by the things we hate; what a joy when we can instead use love and forgiveness to liberate ourselves and one another.