

As one born in the 70s who grew up in the 80s, one of the biggest things for 80s kids were the Care Bears. And I'm not sure why, but I've always been partial to Grumpy Bear. Grumpy Bear had the rain cloud on his stomach, and rarely smiled. But he was also a good friend, would tell things as they are and say what needed to be said, and was an important part of the team. I wasn't known as a very grumpy child, but one of the first books I had was "The Land Without Feelings," a Care Bear Book where Grumpy Bear where he falls under the spell of an evil Professor, Coldheart, who takes his feelings but the others through their powers are able to get their friend back at the end of the book.

As we all know, all of our emotions are important. And though I have no idea who the screenplay writers were for the Pixar film "Inside Out" which also focuses on feelings, including sadness and also anger. Perhaps like me the writers grew up in the 80s and so were well acquainted with the Care Bears.

Grumpy Bear is of course a fictional character who has a bit of a temper, but did you know that many saints were known for being a big ornery and angry too?

For instance, consider the following:

The Gospels tell us that Saints James and John were called the “sons of thunder” (Mark 3:17) — perhaps because they wanted Jesus to call down fire from Heaven to destroy an inhospitable town.

St. Benildus was a teacher, who once remarked of his difficulties as a teacher, “I imagine that the angels themselves, if they came down as schoolmasters, would find it hard to control their anger.” Yet he was loving towards his students and cared for them too.

Then there’s St. Jerome. A great Scripture scholar he had a brilliant but prickly personality and was famous for his arguments with other Church figures, including St. Augustine, conducted through letters that were often vitriolic or sarcastic. St. Pammachius, a former Roman senator, corresponded with Jerome, and tried to get him to tone down his language, without notable success; the Roman widow St. Marcella also corresponded with Jerome, sometimes challenging his ideas and once scolding him for his trigger-quick temper. It should be noted on Jerome’s behalf, however,

that in addition to being gentle with the poor and downtrodden, he was well aware of his weaknesses and performed great acts of penance (such as living in a cave) because of them.

St. Francis de Sales and the holy French priest St. Vincent de Paul — had to work very hard to overcome their tendency toward anger and contentiousness. St. Vincent said that, without the grace of God, he would have been “hard and repulsive, rough and cross.” Saint Francis de Sales confessed his blood would boil when overhearing certain jokes or humiliations. He battled his temper for over 19 years until he finally had it under control. This experience would help form his *Introduction to the Devout Life*, where he wrote extensively on anger.

Bl. John Colombini was a rather greedy merchant, particularly known for his bad temper. He flew into a rage one day because dinner wasn't ready when he arrived home. Hoping to shame him into better behavior, his wife handed him a book about the saints. John threw the book onto the floor, but then — ashamed of his temper — he picked it up and began to read. He became so engrossed in reading about the saints that he forgot his dinner; indeed, he was completely converted by the experience. He

subsequently gave away most of his wealth, turned his home into a hospital, and personally cared for a suffering leper. When his wife urged him to be prudent in his charities, John —who was no longer easily offended by rebukes — gently reminded her that she was the one who had hoped for his conversion (to which she is supposed to have responded, “I prayed for rain, but this is a flood”).

And then there’s Mother Angelica, founder of EWTN. The Poor Clare nun, who changed the face of Catholicism in America, was well known for her witty, down-to-earth wisdom. She too was known as a “hothead” and struggled to keep her strong feelings from boiling over. Mother Angelica was a passionate woman who was extremely stubborn and – when she believed injustice or error was involved – would even squabble with the Church hierarchy.

She had some great one-liners, and gave evidence of her own struggle with losing her temper when she said, “St. Jerome used to hit himself with a rock every time he lost his temper. I’d be dead as a doornail with no ribs if I did that.”

I think many of us can relate. For me, I've always had anger that crops up. Sometimes it's being angry at a person or parish situation. Often it's about things in the world and what I see as indifference and injustice. I get a bit angry over politics, and am passionate about issues such as abortion and civil liberties. The question is what is the Christian to do with anger?

Saint Paul says in our second reading, "all bitterness, fury, anger, shouting and reviling must be removed from you, along with malice. And be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ."

Good advice indeed. But, Paul himself was prone to anger too. Let's not forget in Galatians 3, he writes "O stupid Galatians!" in a bit of disgust as some of them fall back into old ways. He also gets clearly irked by some of the people in the Christian communities he sets up, and has some blow up with his friend Barnabas where the two have it out and go their separate ways.

Anger of course isn't always sinful - there is a justified anger. As we all know though anger can cause big problems - both when we try to suppress

it and ignore bigger problems or get angry too frequently. How then can we be people who use anger to truly help make this world and one another better, by putting away the bad parts of it while using it in conjunction with our other emotions and in the right way?

As a starting point, *what* kind of anger are we dealing with is a question to ask ourselves. Remember, the feeling of anger isn't sinful. But we can control what we do with that feeling. Sometimes we suppress it in an unhealthy way (more on that in a moment). Other times we gossip, or go on a social media tirade, or take it out on others. Sometimes we see an unjust situation and need to act immediately; such as seeing an abusive parent or spouse; a defenseless child or person being bullied; a dog being neglected or abused, these things require action. Other times it's clear action is needed too; we maybe see the injustice of racism, of abortion, or of tyranny and our conscience says this isn't right. Anger may spur one to action to change minds and hearts, this is a good thing.

There are the other moments of anger that come up that we know we need to let go of. The driver on the freeway for instance; as my friend reminds me he tells himself "this person will be gone in 10 minutes or less" so he keeps calm on the road. Or maybe someone makes an honest mistake. Or

we may be tempted to “kill the messenger” who is calling our phone with a solicitation or giving us bad news. Or getting overly angry over a sporting event. There’s a great deal of things we can look at that are out of our control, and just not worth getting angry about because they don’t involve serious matters that would help or hinder one’s salvation.

But here’s the thing: anger needs to be dealt with. Saint Paul says *remove* that fury and anger, not bury it. And when we bury it we have a problem.

Sometimes with the things that bug us, dealing with it might mean more sleep, or getting exercise, and having hobbies. That’s healthy. But we also have to identify when we aren’t dealing with anger in a good way. There’s a number of bad ways and red flags to look for when dealing with anger poorly.

For some, they become passive-aggressive. Signs and symptoms of passive-aggressive behavior include: resentment and opposition to the demands of others, complaining about feeling under-appreciated or cheated, procrastination, stubbornness, inefficiency, memory lapses, sullenness, irritability, and a cynical or hostile attitude.

Another passive-aggressive expression of anger that psychologists bring up is the silent treatment. “I won’t talk to you because I’m unhappy with your behavior.” A person goes days or a week or more without speaking; this indicates immaturity and bad communication skills.

Sometimes too the anger comes out with irritating the other person; parents see siblings do this but we do it as adults too. It’s called revenge, with is sinful.

Then there’s outbursts. I’m not talking about the kind that come from losing a competitive game or watching a sporting event or momentary use of a colorful metaphor. This is the explosive kind of anger; the parent yelling at the coach or player too much; hurtful words in spousal arguments; blowing up at the kids. Fr. Tom Morrow, a moral theologian, who wrote a book on anger called “Overcoming Sinful Anger” points out if you have a problem with exploding anger and you want to be a Christian, you absolutely have to work hard to overcome it, and not say “well that’s just me.” A volcano doesn’t have to erupt very long for damage to be done and words can inflict much pain.

Lastly, some people are just perpetually angry. They are bitter. They bring up the past. A person has a right to acknowledge if they are hurt. But we also need to strive to forgive, not just use past mistakes as weapons to wound someone or win an argument. Some people even hang onto this bitterness and anger and it makes them, and other people, miserable too. This is why it's important to work through things, and to be introspective and ask yourself if you are happy in a career, in a relationship, in their parish, or if you've truly worked through something in the past or it's clinging to you and bringing you down.

And, don't forget - sometimes those closest to you will see these things in you. Sometimes we don't want to see or admit when something is off kilter with our souls, but a spouse or friend or coworker might come to us and say "why are you so angry?" or alert us if we're changing for the worse.

So recognizing some signals of when anger is unhealthy in our lives, what then do we do to make sure the right kind of anger - seeing an injustice or something wrong - is dealt with properly? Remember, not acting isn't an option. Elijah in the first reading takes a break and wants to remain under the broom tree because literally the army is after him for taking a stand

against the false god Baal and slaying the prophets as he acted on a righteous anger. But he still has to get to work. And so do we!

Here, a couple of things to keep in mind.

One is thinking a situation through. Sometimes a situation allows us to do that; how am I going to formulate an argument. Do I need to bring this up or just let it go? Our Lord is a big help in this. Spending time in prayer or before the Blessed Sacrament and just meditating or listening to our God for counsel can be a big help. So too can talking to someone for sound advice. How many times do people, when they don't think, mess something up by clicking "send" on their computer or failing to take a deep breath before saying something foolish.

Second, get involved, and act! Are we a complainer, or a doer? I get passionate on things. I am deeply concerned for the unborn. I'm deeply concerned in current situations in our world there's a line being crossed between health safety and violating the civil rights of people to worship, to speak and make their own health decisions. I'm concerned about the welfare of the family, especially kids, in a world becoming less faithful and

embracing relativism, where people choose to define what is true and do what Adam and Eve did - take what rightfully belongs to God and apply it to themselves. So what do I do about it? I pray. I've gone to Planned Parenthood to be a witness. I've written elected officials on issues important to me. I vote. There is only so much I can do, but I have to keep on doing it. This is where patience matters so much. You may be fed up with things going on in the world, be it the politics of our world or your workplace or school. You might not change it overnight. But you can be a voice at that school board meeting or in your community, and you can challenge people. But this requires action. It means talking to people directly too through when something is wrong or we believe they are in moral error.

Third, when there is anger in our souls, deal with it in a healthy way. Not by burying it, because it will come out in one of the unhealthy ways above. But by acknowledging it. Maybe you were hurt years ago - talk to someone about it. But more often than not, in daily life there's things that come up that just can snowball; a family member not pulling their weight; a coworker taking advantage of us; a neighbor causing problems, etc. Remember avoidance and denial are enabling - the enabler just will get worse and

worse. Think of what happens if a child never hears the word “no.” The problems just get worse and worse. But for us, when there’s the problems that are buried before they blow up, work on conflict. Fans of “Seinfeld” might remember the holiday “Festivus” when Frank Costanza, George’s father, made up a day for family members to sit around the pole of the fake Christmas tree to air grievances of the past year. Not a bad idea at all, it just needs to be done more often. Fr. Charles Irvin, a priest from Michigan who founded Faith Magazine and who died at 88 years old earlier this year, suggests there are techniques for conflict resolution. One simple home remedy is to schedule a “Family Council” every couple of weeks or once a month. Everyone sits in a circle; each person is given fifteen minutes in which they can say anything they want to – share any thought or any feeling. No one else can challenge their statements either verbally or using body language. Everyone gets fifteen minutes of unchallengeable statements. He says If you try it you’ll be amazed at what peace and serenity in your family can result. I’d tend to agree.

Addressing things is really important because when we don’t address stuff, bad things happen. In families, Fr. Charlie points out, we are surrounded by people who are quite skilled in helping us to ventilate our hurts,

resentments and in deal with anger. Why is it that we turn to such people only after our spiritual house is on fire, raging, and about to be totally consumed? He remembers getting a telephone call on Christmas Eve from a man who was shrieking in grief, telling him that his wife was leaving him, in fact was walking out the door while he was on the phone with him. The matter, it turns out, had been building up for eleven years, he had done absolutely nothing about it, and called him to “do something about it” on Christmas Eve. He reminded him that I was a Catholic priest, the Church was against divorce, and Fr. Charlie was supposed to do something just as his wife was walking out the door with the children. Well, no, he couldn’t come in and fix it, and the man had let the problem go. So the bottom line, address anger and problems before they become greater and greater.

Lastly, forgiveness. Can you forgive yourself knowing you are human, and maybe get angry at loved ones? Can you for strive to try to work through things? To be sure, sometimes you have to cut ties with a person. There are evil people out there who hurt us and abuse us. But more often, our problems with people just need to be worked through by talking and forgiving. As Saint Paul says in that letter, “be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.”

Maybe we won't see eye to eye politically with a person, but we can see them as created by God. Maybe a person took advantage of us, and we need to talk about it and try to move past it. Or maybe a person's anger at us we find is because they themselves have low self-esteem or were hurt by someone in the past. Striving to forgive, and striving to swallow our pride and ask for forgiveness, can do so much.

I saw a magazine cover recently that asked the question "Is American Angrier than Ever?" and it's hard not to think that way. There's a lot to be angry about. As I said, I battle anger. But the answer to anger isn't to let it fester. I deal with it through prayer. I deal with it through taking time to just be with my dog and get into nature for photography. I deal with it through talking to friends for counsel. I deal with it by reminding myself every time I hold the Lord in my hands at this altar that my Lord died not just for me but for the angry mob who killed him on Good Friday. I deal with it by trying to let go of things that need to let go of, and knowing that I have to be a man of fortitude who is willing to talk about challenging things with people, and that some relationships had to come to an end too. I get angry at myself for messing things up at times. Anger is there for a reason. God in His wisdom gives us an emotion to alert us to the fact that sometimes something isn't

right. All too often that leads to fury, shouting and reviling and becomes an endless cycle. Jesus shows us the better way. So as we come forward momentarily to eat the Bread of Life, that Spiritual Food for our journey, let our eyes be opened to how much Jesus loves us all. And also to the reality that to love means to will the good of the other - which we do through addressing what is wrong and striving to set it right, both in our souls and in the souls of one another. May anger spur us to action, not bitterness and hate.