

## **The Twenty-Sixth Sunday in Ordinary Time September 26, 2021**

In the spring of 2005, I was home for my niece's grade school graduation mass, just as I had been present for my other nieces and nephew's graduation masses. Little did I know that it would be the last mass in my home parish, we knew it was going to be closed that summer, but so abrupt and without warning. Many of us were jealous because another church in town was staying open even though it was poorly maintained and had little income. It's a feeling I still experience whenever I drive past either site.

Some of you have probably experienced the closing of your school, either at your parish or in your town or both. I've experienced both. My home parish had a K—8 school and was one of three feeder schools to Columbus High School in Waterloo. After the mass I mentioned earlier, we went home and when we came back the next day to help teachers clean the rooms, we found the doors were chained and locked. No one could get in. We got permission a couple of days later and went in for the last time and helped the teachers and staff get their things. It was hard to see the parish and school close that my sisters and I had attended, our mother had attended, and my grandparents had attended.

A lot of relationships in high school rise and fall on whether someone is jealous of the one whom you are dating, hanging around with, or just being friends with. If you're not from a certain town, participate in a certain sport, or are a member of a certain club or organization, then you get bullied and teased, you get pranks pulled on you (funny to them, painful to you) and every one laughs because they are afraid of being the next victim.

The feelings of jealousy can be some of the most painful emotions we can ever experience. It can destroy relationships and leave us feeling lonely, bitter, and spiteful.

In today's gospel, Jesus has strong words for His disciples who are experiencing jealousy. He scolds them for trying to stop a man from casting out demons in His name. The disciples were trying to control the powers Jesus had given them. They were unwilling to share their authority with others, even if it meant freeing someone from the grip of the devil. In essence, they were envious of the others who were able to perform wonders in Jesus' name. They felt that they had exclusive rights to Jesus and his power.

Envy is one of the seven deadly sins and an offence against the tenth commandment. When we are envious, we begrudge others for the talents, friendships and material possessions that they have. Envy is such an offense against God because it can lead to our wishing or even committing harm against others.

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When jealousy does find a place in our hearts, it destroys relationships and communities. It is at the root of many crimes such as robbery, fraud and even murder. When we are jealous, we tell God that all the blessings that he has given us are just not good enough.

The good news is that there is a way out for us who might find ourselves struggling with envy against our family, friends or our neighbors. As with any sin, it begins by turning to Jesus and asking for forgiveness. In prayer, we can confess to God that we are envious because we do not always appreciate the many ways he has blessed us. We can ask him to give us a real and lasting gratitude for the good things we already enjoy. And we can ask him to give us true humility so that we do not always have to be the center of attention and do not always have to impress everyone all the time.

If our jealousy has led us to seriously harm others by spreading rumors about them or stealing from them, we should go to the Sacrament of Reconciliation as soon as possible. And, whenever possible, we should try to make things right by restoring whatever we may have damaged or stolen. Another good way to overcome envy and learning humility is to ask forgiveness from the people we have harmed and confess to them that we were acting out of jealousy. Chances are they already know that, but it will go a long way toward healing the relationship.

The essence of the Christian life is to follow the example of love which Christ set for us. It means loving others as we love ourselves and putting the interests of others before our own. It is the exact opposite of how we act when we are jealous. And so, another important cure for envy is to pray for the well-being of the people we are jealous of. We should even ask God to bless them with the talents, friendships and material possessions we would like for ourselves. When we do that sincerely by the power that God gives us, we begin to feel the grip of envy loosen on our hearts and in our lives.

All of us have been given countless blessings by God. These gifts are meant to be shared with others to the glory of God. If we have an attitude of gratitude and generosity about our own gifts we will be less likely to feel envious of others' possessions and talents.

St. James reminds us in today's second reading that our riches and treasures are only temporary but that our life with God is eternal. Setting our sights on the higher gifts - faith, hope, and love - will ensure that we will use our gifts for the good of others.