



The teaching of Jesus in this week's Gospel is, as usual, both thought provoking and challenging. He challenges us to ponder the sin of envy. We have all heard the parable: a landowner hires laborers to work for the day in his vineyard. He hires his workers at five different times: the first group is hired at dawn, the second at 9am, the third at noon, the fourth at 3pm and the last at 5pm. Each of the five groups, without knowing what the others were being paid, initially agreed that their wage was fair. The interesting twist happens at the end of the day—all five groups are paid the same wage even though some worked many more hours than the others. When this came to light, those hired first complained: "This is not fair! We worked more hours and deserve more!" The landowner responds: "My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I wish to give this last one the same as you? Or am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am

generous? Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last." At first sight, it seems there is a legitimate gripe being expressed by those hired early in the day, yet Jesus seems to be saying they are guilty of envy.

So, what is envy? What is Jesus teaching us here? The Catechism of the Catholic Church defines envy as follows:

Envy is a capital sin. It refers to the sadness at the sight of another's goods and the immoderate desire to acquire them for oneself, even unjustly. . . . St. Augustine saw envy as "*the* diabolical sin." "From envy are born hatred, detraction, calumny, joy caused by the misfortune of a neighbor, and displeasure caused by his prosperity." (CCC #2539)

Notice in the parable, the first workers initially agreed their wage was fair; it was only after seeing their fellow laborers receive a better deal that they became incensed. The point is, we must learn to be thankful for the "fair wage" we have been given even when others are given more. For example, we must learn to be happy for the good health of others even when we are sick; we must be happy for the prosperity of others even when we ourselves are struggling; we must be grateful for the talents and gifts of others, even though we may be lacking the same. The fact is, in every area of life, whether it be intelligence, physical appearance, athletic ability, wealth, popularity, personality, etc., there will always be others who have been given a "better deal" than ourselves. In heaven, where there is no envy, we will rejoice in the gifts of others as if they were our own — we will truly love our neighbor as ourselves — but, here on earth we must fight against the temptation to envy when others receive a "better deal."

How can we overcome this diabolical sin, this form of sadness, called envy? Let me list two simple ways: 1) Exercise good will toward all; 2) Be thankful to God for the "fair wage" you have been given without comparing yourself to others. The Catechism says, "Envy represents a form of sadness and therefore a refusal of charity; the baptized person should struggle against it by exercising good will." Thus, we must choose to celebrate the blessings of others even when they exceed our own and we must always remain thankful for what we have been given by the providence of God. I remember a man once saying to me, "As long as I have life, I will be thankful to God!" Ultimately, envy is a sin against God and neighbor and the remedy is love of God and neighbor. Why is this so hard for us at times? Isaiah, in the First Reading for today's Mass reminds us with these words: "My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways my ways, says the Lord. As high as the heavens are above the earth, so high are my ways above your ways and my thoughts above your thoughts" (Is 55:6-9).

May the good Lord deliver us from envy by raising our thoughts and our ways to be more like His!

Your Servant in Christ,
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