

25 Sunday in Ordinary Time – Homily

Isaiah 55:6-9; Psalm 145; Philippians 1:20-24, 27; Matthew 20:1-16

Over the past couple of weeks, we've been learning from Jesus what it means to belong to the Kingdom of Heaven. Following Jesus means a willingness to seek reconciliation with those who have hurt us. Last week we looked at Peter's question, "How many times must I forgive." Jesus said, "70 times 7", meaning there is no end of forgiveness. As disciples of Jesus, we are called to be people who forgive and forgive and forgive. This week, we get another lesson in Kingdom living through a parable. Only this time, Jesus isn't teaching us how to resolve problems we have with others. This week, Jesus teaches us about a problem every one of us must face at some point, **a problem we have with ourselves – envy.**

Are you envious because I am generous? Are you envious?

If we are honest with ourselves, most of us, maybe all of us would answer YES! We are envious. Sometimes we find the blessings others receive hard to swallow, especially when we have worked harder, been more faithful, and given up more of our lives. (*There is even a COVID envy as some are able to keep their jobs, work from home and seem to have been affected very little compared to others.*)

One definition of Envy is: A feeling of discontent or resentful longing aroused by someone else's possessions, qualities, or luck.

In my studies this week I came across an article titled, "The age of envy: how to be happy when everyone else's life looks perfect."

Here is an excerpt from that article:

"We live in the age of envy. Career envy, kitchen envy, children envy, food envy, upper arm envy, holiday envy. You name it, there's an envy for it. Human beings have always felt what Aristotle defined in the fourth century BC as pain at the sight of another's good fortune, stirred by "those who have what we ought to have" – though it would be another thousand years before it would make it on to Pope Gregory's list of the seven deadly sins.

But with the advent of social media, says Ethan Kross, professor of psychology at the University of Michigan who studies the impact of Facebook on our wellbeing, "envy is being taken to an extreme". We are constantly bombarded by "Photoshopped lives", he says, "and that exerts a toll on us the likes of which we have never experienced in the history of our species. And it is not particularly pleasant."

Clinical psychologist Rachel Andrew says she is seeing more and more envy in her consulting room, from people who "can't achieve the lifestyle they want but which they see others have". Our use of platforms including Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and Snapchat, she says, amplifies this deeply disturbing psychological discord. "I think what social media has done is make everyone accessible for comparison," she explains. "In the past, people might have just envied their neighbors, but now we can compare ourselves with everyone across the world." Windy Dryden, one of the UK's leading practitioners of cognitive behavioral therapy, calls this "comparisonitis".

Comparisonitis is a pandemic of its own. I do not know a single person who is not affected by it. Life is not fair, especially when we compare. Most of the time when we reflect on the unfairness of life it is because we are comparing ourselves with others.

We often learn at an early age that life is not fair. Whether within our families, school setting or group of friends something happens that doesn't seem right, especially when we compare with the good things others get.

I learned this at a young age. I grew with an older sister and two brothers very close in age, one 13 1/2 months older and my twin brother two minutes older. My two brothers excelled in academics and sports and thus always had lots of friends. I was introverted, really struggled academically and if I did make a sports team, I would usually sit on the bench while my brothers were the stars. Thus, comparing myself to them was a constant battle.

When I was 12 years old I had a friend who was getting into magic. I thought, this is what I will do to separate myself from my brothers. I will start learning to do magic and it would be something that my brothers weren't doing. I thought it was clear to my family. However For our 12th birthday my twin brother got a magic set and I got a game board, the Ungame.

I was devastated. It was so unfair. My brother had so much, intellect, amazing athletic ability, lots of friends and the one thing I wanted, he got. I was envious.

While I have come a long way with my brothers and my comparisonitis, even as an adult there are still twinges of envy. This week my two brothers are playing in the Washington State Senior Armature Golf Tournament. I am very happy for them and hope one of them wins, but I am also a little envious. I am envious of how well they both play golf and wish I could play that well. But even more, I am envious of the time they get to spend together. I want time with them.

I admit, I have comparisonitis.

We see comparisonitis in the workers who were chosen early in the morning. At first, they are in agreement with the landowner for a day's wage. We imagine all was well until those who worked for an hour get paid a full days wage. On seeing what the others were paid, who only worked an hour, they suddenly (in comparison) feel that they should get more and they grumble and complain when they don't.

Had they just been paid first, they would have gone home content. But, in the Kingdom of heaven we have to face ourselves. And when the last go first and the first go last, it shakes everything up. And we are confronted with our brokenness, our envy.

The owner graciously replies, "My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Am I not free to do with what is mine? Take what is yours and go. **Are you envious because I am generous?"**

What can stop the spread of envy. What can deliver us from ourselves? What is the antidote to envy, to comparisonitis?

The obvious answer is **Stop comparing!** There will always be someone who has more, looks better, has more friends, drives a newer car, has a bigger house, is a better golfer, gets something you want and/or has it more together, at least in appearance.

I understand to advocate "Stop Comparing" is easier said than done. So, what can help us stop comparing....

I, Trust the Character of God. Trust the purposes of God. Trust the promises of God. Trust God is for you. God doesn't compare.

In the midst of the gospel lesson which on a human level appears to be unfair, (We can identify with those who worked all day). The Scriptures invite us to reflect on the character of God. The Kingdom of Heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. The parable is about the generosity and character of the landowner. And, in this parable the landowner clearly represents God.

Trust the character of God. Notice. Those who started work later in the day worked NOT by a contract, but on the word of the landowner. They worked trusting the character of the owner who said, "I will pay you what is just."

Trust God's character of forgiveness, kindness, nearness, generosity, Trust God' unconditional love.

Our scripture lessons invite us to reflect on the character of God:

In our O.T. text from Isaiah we are told God is "Generous in forgiving". God's thoughts and ways are not our thoughts and ways. In fact, as high as the heavens are from the earth so far are God's ways above our ways. We are called to trust the ways of God.

Trust God's Forgiveness. Trust God's Ways. Trust the Cross.

Our Psalm says, "God is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and great in kindness... just in all this ways... holy in all his works and near to those who call on him. TRUST God! Trust God is near!

Moreover, in the parable the landowner keeps going out to the city to get more workers for his vineyard. At noon, three O'clock and again at 5pm, just an hour before closing the landowner is searching for people to work in his vineyard. God never stops searching for us to work in His Kingdom. God has a place for us. God has a place for you.

Trust the character of God. Trust God is seeking you out and has great plans and purposes for you. God's love compels God to seek us out.

God seeks and desires people and makes possible their work in His vineyard. God seeks and seeks and seeks.

Trust God CARES! God will make sure everyone who accepts his invitation to work in his vineyard will have enough, far more than we could every want or imagine.

Trust God's generous character.

II, Rejoice: Truly in your heart, rejoice. We are called to compare less and rejoice more.

Paul tells us in the book of Romans that we are to, “Rejoice with those who rejoice, and weep with those who weep” (Romans 12:15).

We do a much better job weeping or mourning with those who mourn. It is much harder for us to rejoice with those who rejoice.

We see this in our Gospel. The workers who have been toiling all day grumble at the good fortune of the workers who received the same wage. Instead of rejoicing, their bitterness and grumbling reveals their envy. Imagine what a different scenario this could have been if those who worked all day would have celebrated the good fortune of those who worked only an hour or two. What if they would have celebrated the privilege of witnessing such a great act of generosity?

I heard this week that “Envy is the thief of compassion”. I believe Envy is also the thief of Celebration. It is the thief of enjoyment and rejoicing.

I am trying this with my brothers this week. Whenever I think of them, I am trying, from my heart, to rejoice and be happy for them. It is already making a difference in my spirit.

Combating comparisonitis isn't just rejoicing with others, but also celebrating and being grateful for what we have. I think this is what the landowner is getting at when he says to the first workers, “take what is yours and go.” Stop comparing and instead, rejoice that you have what you have.

It has been said that: “envy is resenting God's goodness to others, and ignoring His goodness to you.” Rejoicing for others and living in gratitude helps overcome comparisonitis.

Paul says in Philippians 4:4, “Rejoiceⁱⁿ in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice.ⁱⁿ Let your gentleness be known to everyone. The Lord is near. Do not worry about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.” There is a relationship between rejoicing and peace.

We are called to be people of Love. In I Corinthians 13 Paul writes, “⁴Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth.” **Love rejoices!** – We are called to compare less and rejoice more!

III, Keep your eyes on Jesus. Live your life all in for Jesus. Paul expresses this beautifully in our epistle. Paul writes, “For me to live is Christ and to die is gain.” There is no comparisonitis in Paul. He is simply living for Jesus with his whole being. He trusts the character of God and knows that for him death will be gain. He will live his life trusting God and rejoicing with others.

May we rejoice that we are loved and have a place in the Kingdom of Heaven. May we live trusting in the character of God and live all in for Jesus because he is all in for you and me!

I will pray for you and ask that you pray for me.

God bless you in the name of the Father, and the Son and the Holy Spirit. – Deacon Steve

