

25th SUNDAY OF ORDINARY TIME – B (September 20,2009)
Fr. Jerry Kopacek

First, I want to address briefly an issue you may have read about in last week's Witness (or elsewhere); the article was entitled "Inservices on Mass Changes". What kind of changes are we talking about? Let me assure you right from the start: the basic structure of the Mass is not changing one bit. Rather, this involves a question of translations. Here is what it is about: in 2002, the Vatican released a new edition (in Latin) of the Roman Missal or sacramentary. This is the book containing all the prayers used in the celebration of the Mass. It is the big red book the altar server brings when the priest says 'let us pray'; it is also the book the priest uses at the altar. An English translation of this new sacramentary is nearing final approval by the U.S. bishops and the Vatican. This new translation is being done according to new guidelines to assure that what we pray in English is a more accurate and more faithful translation of the original Latin version.

That is where the changes that we will notice come into play. Let me give a couple of brief examples: 1) we are all familiar with "The Lord be with you—and also with you". The priest's line in Latin is "Dominus vobiscum" which indeed means "the Lord be with you." But the people's response in Latin is "et cum spiritu tuo" which means "and with your spirit." And so that will in fact be your response: "the Lord be with you—and with your spirit." A second example: we begin our Profession of Faith with: "We believe in one God, the Father the almighty..." In the original Latin, however, it begins "Credo" which is first-person singular and not plural: "I believe." And so that is how we will begin: "I believe in God..."

Now, there is no reason to panic! First of all, these changes will not be going into effect for some time—not today, not next month. At this point, it looks like the earliest we would possibly begin using these new translations is Advent 2010—over a year from now (and it might be later than that). Meanwhile, the Office of Worship in Dubuque will be providing all kinds of resources to us for learning these changes. In fact, there will be an in-service at Blessed Sacrament here in Waterloo on November 16 to provide more background on this—anyone may attend, and I plan to go (watch the bulletin in coming weeks for further information). We are **not** going back to Latin; it is simply that our prayers in English at Mass will reflect a more faithful and accurate translation of the official text of the Missal. I mention this at this time because of the Witness article last week and in case you were wondering what this is all about—I assure you that you will be hearing a lot more about this over the next several months.

We continue our survey of the letter of St. James; today, however, the other two readings reinforce a significant part of James' lesson. He speaks of the sin of envy and jealousy, and the destruction that follows in their wake: "when Jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice * * * You kill and envy but you cannot obtain..." that disorder is powerfully illustrated in the first reading from the Old Testament book of Wisdom where the wicked hate the just one precisely because he is just—and so they want to run him down since his justice is 'obnoxious' to them. And, as the gospel makes clear, Jesus is that ultimate 'just one'. Jesus knew he would be handed over to others who would have him killed—precisely out of their envy of him.

Envy has long been considered one of the seven deadly or capital sins—those sins that lead to other sins and vices (anger, lust, and gluttony are other examples of those seven). Envy is that sadness or resentment that is experienced in seeing the good fortune of someone else. Your neighbor has a more expensive home, and so you resent that and let it color your attitude toward that neighbor. One of your classmates is more popular, is more a part of the 'in crowd' than you are, and so you start spreading rumors or gossip about that person. Someone else's state of health, physical appearance, marriage or family life seems better than yours, and so you complain or rage against God because it seems so unfair.

Envy, therefore, is an attitude—one that is connected with the last of the Ten Commandments: “You shall not covet your neighbor’s goods.” The Catechism warns us that if envy leads us to wish grave or serious harm on someone else, then that envy rises to the level of mortal sin. We are obviously talking about something that can be pretty serious.

Does this mean that every time we wish for something else, that we are therefore guilty of the sin of envy? Not necessarily. You see someone who has achieved a goal you yourself are striving for. You wish you could do the same, and that wish and the example of that other person inspire you to work harder and renew your own efforts. You read about the saints and their special closeness to God—their example inspires you to a renewed prayer life and the pursuit of holiness and generosity. These are obviously good things; they are not the bitterness and resentment that characterize envy.

Many spiritual writers have noted a fascinating thing about envy: as Peter Kreeft says, it is the only one of the seven deadly sins “that gives the sinner no pleasure at all, not even fake and temporary satisfaction.” Think about it: indulging in food and drink to the point of gluttony may feel and taste good at first, but can surely lead to misery later. Giving in to lust may lead to momentary physical pleasure, but can surely lead to broken marriages, families and other relationships. But what does envy accomplish? Absolutely nothing--nothing that is good or even pleasurable, not even for a moment. It leads to bitterness, resentment, holding grudges—who on earth would really want to live in that frame of mind? When you really stop to think about it, envy doesn’t make any sense at all, does it? As St. John Vianney said in one of his sermons: “Other vices...at least...can be apparently explained; but where will you find an excuse of envy?” Where indeed?

It seems to be part of human nature to see the good things in other people’s lives and think “gee, I wish I could be there.” By itself, that’s not the problem; but if left unchecked, that attitude can easily grow into that green-eyed monster we call envy. The good news is: envy does not have to control us. We may feel tempted, but God’s grace and the love of Christ can help us resist that tendency to resent and become bitter at the good fortune of others. Continue to nurture the practice and the prayer of gratitude—the more we call to mind and thank God for all that we already have and all we already are, the less we are going to worry about what others have that we don’t. The grateful person doesn’t have time and doesn’t want to waste the energy of being angry at the supposed ‘unfairness’ of life; that person will instead want to be the good and generous steward of what God has already given him. What’s more, the grateful person, far from being a slave of envy, will even be able to be glad for the good fortune of others. A minister once said: “Envy is my hurt and today I have been seeking grace to rejoice exceedingly over the usefulness of others, even where it casts me into the shade...Lord, give more and more to those whom I have despised.” Now, that prayer is true wisdom and God’s grace in action. That same grace will enable us to pray in just the same way—if we want to do so.