

LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



A Column by Fr. Tom

Life in Christ - Part 2: Envy - It's Not Easy Being Green

We give thanks to Kermit the Frog for the title of this week's column. One of the old clichés about today's topic is "She was green with envy." It's certainly not easy being that kind of green. It's not easy being envious, and yet it is an emotion that a lot of us have struggled with from time to time. Let's take a look at not just the emotion of envy, but the Capital Sin of Envy.

Last week, we discussed how pride is an often confusing sin, but we might also consider that envy is a confusing sin too. However, envy is not confusing in the same way that pride is. As we discussed last week, there is good pride and sinful pride. There is no such thing as good envy. Where the confusion develops for envy is that it is often confused for jealousy, or rather vice versa. One might say, "I feel jealous that she has a brand new Porsche, and I drive a 1985 Honda." While jealousy is sometimes used as a synonym for envy, its original definition suggests a different emotion. In the interest of space, perhaps it might be best to explain the difference between the two emotions thus, "Jealousy is fear of losing something you have, and envy is coveting what someone else has." In using the word "coveting" in the last sentence, one might recall that the word "covet" is used rather prominently in the 10 Commandments, specifically in the Ninth and Tenth Commandments.

Now, we can begin to see where the Capital Sin of Envy engenders other sins. In the *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (CCC), we read: "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. When it wishes grave

harm to a neighbor it is a mortal sin." [CCC, 2539] The Catechism then goes on to quote Pope St. Gregory the Great regarding how the Capital Sin of Envy can lead to other sins. "From envy are born hatred, detraction, calumny, joy caused by the misfortune of a neighbor, and displeasure caused by his prosperity." [*Moralia in Job* 31,45]

While the above sins are born of Envy, Envy itself is born of Pride. The Catechism states, "Envy represents a form of sadness and therefore a refusal of charity; the baptized person should struggle against it by exercising good will. Envy often comes from Pride; the baptized person should train himself to live in humility." [CCC, 2540] We may remember from last week's column that Pride is elevating oneself above another. It is seeing oneself as greater than another. Pride teaches us that we are more deserving of good things. Envy springs from this feeling. It is for this reason that the Catechism teaches us that charity, good will and humility combat the sin of Envy. In Paul's First Letter to the Corinthians, Paul teaches us, "If [one part of the body] suffers, all the parts suffer with it; if one part is honored, all the parts share its joy."

[1 Cor 12:26] We are called to practice both humility and charity in order to combat the sins that are brought on by the Capital Sin of Envy. We are called to rejoice for the gifts and blessings that God has bestowed on us, but also for the gifts and blessings that He has bestowed on our brothers and sisters.

Next week, we will look at Wrath, another of the Capital Sins, which could spring from Envy gone horribly wrong.

