

# INSTITUTE OF CHRIST THE KING SOVEREIGN PRIEST

Saint Francis de Sales Oratory, Saint Louis, MO

Sexagesima Sunday, February 27<sup>th</sup>, 2011

Seven Deadly Sins Sermon Series – Envy

Canon Michael Wiener

*“But that on the good ground are they who in a good and very good heart, hearing the word, keeping it, and bring forth fruit in patience.”*

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What purpose is there in preaching to you about the seven deadly sins? What use has it to speak to you about grave sins and sins in general?

He, who preaches, says St. Thomas, must speak

- first of all to enlighten the intellect of his listeners;
- must move secondly the affections, so that a man willingly listens to the word of God, not indeed with a view to his own favor, but in order to draw them to listen to God's word;
- and thirdly, he who preaches must speak in order that men may love that which is signified by the word, and desire to fulfill it.

"Unless the Holy Ghost fills the hearts of the hearers, in vain does the voice of the teacher resound in the ears of the body", says St. Gregory.

Our object of discourse is a positive one - the contemplation of sin as a privation of goodness and as the absence of God's grace is meant to direct our eyes towards the gifts of God and His eternal love which alone can preserve us from being captured by our weaknesses, our inclinations and sins. We want to encourage you by these sermons about the seven capital and deadly sins, we don't want to depress you.

Capital sins are like “leaders of an army”, as St. Gregory puts it. They are the principle of other sins, they generate, so to say, other sins and bad habits. Capital sins are like cancer.

We see this in the case of the sin of sloth which we heard about last Sunday and the sin of envy, the subject of today's sermon, and the sin of wrath or hatred which will be covered on the Sunday of Quinquagesima:

- Sloth is sadness in the presence of one's own spiritual gifts, sorrow over spiritual joy, we can say. Sloth is ungrateful sorrow in view of our own goods.
- Envy is also sadness or sorrow, but sadness about the goods of and goodness in others. It is “grief over a man's good, in so far as his good surpasses ours”. Sloth and envy are both types of sadness or grief, but envy is a developed form of it in so far as it turns against the fruits of God's love in others.

- Hatred, finally, is sadness over the blessedness of our neighbor as such, without any comparison, without any other reason than pure denial and malignity. Hatred as capital sin committed by a living person is the last stop on the way to hell, where there is hatred without reason - and without end.

**Envy is grief over a man's good, in so far as his good surpasses ours.**

The sinful character of envy comes more clearly to light when we compare it - for example - to zeal: Whereas the envious man “begrudges” the goods of another and sees them as a threat to his own status, his glory or reputation, the zealous man does not grieve over the goods others possess, but desires to acquire them himself. “The zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up.”

The *envious* man considers the goods - spiritual or material - of others as his own evil. The *zealous* man preserves the goodness of things in others – but wishes to enjoy the same goodness proper to these goods. And he is virtuous in doing so if it is a moral good he wishes to acquire. The envious man destroys goodness in others in seeing it as an evil for himself which makes him smaller, less honored, less pious, less intelligent, less esteemed and - less lovable.

We see here why envy belongs to the deadly sins: Its essential character is directed against the love of God, God Himself, Who is the source of all goodness – in us and in all men. And if envy is sorrow for the increase of God's grace in our neighbor, “it is accounted a sin against the Holy Ghost, because thereby a man envies, as it were, the Holy Ghost Himself, Who is glorified in His works.”

Envy weeps at those who rejoice and rejoices at those who weep. Weeping over our neighbor's good - which is envy, gives rise to joy in his evil.

Of course: Also envy is committed as a grave and mortal sin only if both - our knowledge and our will - fully embrace this sadness over our neighbor's goods. St. Thomas says: “Nevertheless, in every kind of mortal sin we find certain imperfect movements in the sensuality, which are venial sins: ... so in [regard to]... envy we find sometimes even in perfect men certain first movements, which are venial sins.”

What is the remedy against this sin? What can be done if we are tempted by envy? What shall we do if envy is able to resound in us?

St. Francis de Sales says, “The loving heart of the Redeemer measures and organizes all events in the world. He does all this for the benefit of souls who want to respond wholeheartedly to his divine love. It is there, my dear, that our faults are thorns in our souls. But once removed through voluntary self-accusations, they are subsequently transformed into roses and perfumes. They enter our heart through our malice, but they are thrown out by the Holy Spirit.”

St. Francis de Sales' advice guides us to acts of humility, opposed to envy as an effect of pride: "In confession," he says, "you will practice the virtues of humility, obedience, simplicity, and charity. You will exercise more virtues in this single act of confession than in any other act whatsoever."

Another remedy is obviously to act charitably toward our fellow man, to do him well and to look out deliberately for all those things which God gave him and which make him lovable. A charitable look on our neighbor with all what is good and lovable in him as well as his weaknesses and his need for forgiveness will expel envy more easily.

Envy is a denial of God's gifts in others: God sowed His seeds so that it can take root in all. His grace is sufficient for all of us, His power is made perfect also in our infirmity. We are parts of the same Body of Christ and to envy gifts of any kind in others is to deny God supreme goodness and wisdom. Learning to appreciate God's goodness in us and in others preserves us against envy.

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