

11:00 A.M. Mass: I'm very jealous of this young lady as a first time lector. The reason being is that I could never have done that at her age. Very well done. Jealousy and envy are the theme of today's readings. More specifically, in the gospel.

The Gospel reading is about a kind of jealousy among the apostles as to who is really the greatest among them, who is closest to Christ.

Sometimes we use envy and jealousy to mean the same thing. At other times people separate them into two separate attitudes.

Envy is about wanting what someone else has such as money, property, a car, a job or friendships. We not only wish we had what they possess but even wish they would lose it and, at its worst, we take steps to make that occur.

+A minister's six-year-old girl had been so naughty during the week that her mother decided to give her the worst kind of punishment: she couldn't go to the Sunday school picnic.

When the day came, her mother felt she had been too harsh and changed her mind. When she told the little girl she could go to the picnic, the child's reaction was one of gloom and unhappiness.

"What's the matter? I thought you'd be glad to go to the picnic," her mother said. "It's too late!" the little girl said. "I've already prayed for rain." If she can't have it, no one should!

Envy has to do with what belongs to someone else. Envy has been called the vice of counting someone else's blessings rather than our own.

Jealousy is about what we have and our worry that a rival will take it from us. Jealousy always needs a rival. We can be jealous about a relationship, about our prerogatives, about our position at work and are afraid that someone will somehow take it away from us.

We become jealous, then, of a person we see as a threat to us. That's why jealousy is the cause of so many "crimes of passion". A jealous person is one who is insecure. The more jealous they are, the lower their esteem.

Somebody once remarked that unlike the other capital sins such as gluttony, lust or pride that give some momentary pleasure, envy and jealousy are always sheer torment.

The envious or jealous person dies not once but every time someone succeeds or receives applause. For such a person, another's successes is a diminishing of ourselves. Envy or jealousy can make us so sick that we can't even think straight or even see straight.

We become unable to see any good in the people we envy or about whom we are jealous. Envy blinds us to the good things in our life as we focus on what someone else has.

+Craig Brian Larson, in his book *Pastoral Grit*, describes an example of this: One summer holiday, when he was around nine years old, another family visited their home. As his father barbecued burgers in the backyard that afternoon, the father of the other family began to wrestle with his sons in the grass.

He wrote, "As I watched the other family I felt left out. My father doesn't wrestle with me like that, I thought. And in a rush of deep sadness I childishly concluded that those boys had a better father than I did. I went sulking to my room, and then later tearfully told my mother and father how I felt.

The truth was, my father and I did many great things together. He took me to White Sox, Bears, and Bulls games. We played baseball together, and he attended many of my Little League games. He never spoke a critical word to me, but rather affirmed me often. He provided a comfortable suburban life for our family of eight.

Nevertheless, at that moment of narrow comparison, I overlooked all his virtues and the good things he did for me and focused on the one thing I wanted at the time."

Comparisons are deceptively skewed, and in this case, tragically so. Perhaps a year or so after the holiday they shared with this family, the father he had so admired committed suicide. Seeing his blessing, he writes: "My father and I continue to be the greatest of friends to this day."

Apart from what they do to our personal life, envy and jealousy can have terribly damaging spiritual side effects.

First, they can destroy our spiritual life by corrupting our prayer. The words of the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us as we forgive" begin to carry an internal asterisk to exclude certain people whom we envy or of whom we are jealous. That "asterisk" empties our prayer of truth.

A second effect of envy or jealousy is that they seldom remain completely in our mind. They almost inevitably lead to action in how we treat others, speak about them, in steps we take. It might be entertaining to see your boy/girl friend jealous but if it continues in the relationship, it can become very abusive and controlling.

Jesus sees that the disciples are jealous or envious of their closeness to Him and are becoming divided among themselves.

An antidote to envy that loves to count other people's blessings, is to engage in the prayer of thanksgiving in our life, to recognize the blessings God has given us. They are

there but we often fail to recognize them. Covetousness is simply craving more of what you have enough of already. What you have now is all you need to be happy.

Another antidote is to strengthen our relationships one another and to Christ. The more secure we feel in Christ, the less worries we will have with those around us. If we know of his love, that will be all we need.

As long as runners keep their eye on the goal, they will do well. They begin to fail when they start noticing and becoming preoccupied with the other runners.

When we begin to examine the blessings in our life and to focus on our following of Christ in everything, then we discover a peace that comes as when the storm subsides. It is the peace of Christ. If we focus on Christ, everything always falls into place.