

Homily – 25 Year A

Those of us who were taught the basics of our faith from the so-called ‘penny catechism’ will remember the enumeration of the **seven deadly** sins.

The **deadly** sins are those that are to be regarded as particularly destructive. If we commit them they will ruin our character. They will always bring us personal unhappiness.

The **seven deadly sins** are at the root of all bad behaviour and human misery. They include pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, and sloth. The Gospel today draws our attention to the last in the list: **envy**.

Advertisers, who look for chinks in human defences so as to sell products, make much use of our susceptibility to all the seven temptations, including our propensity to be envious.

Envy especially besets people who live in a materialist society where the possession of things is considered to be a measure of social status or personal success.

The sad thing is that many people do not enjoy what they have because they are always regretting what they do not yet have.

It is not just adults who are unhappy.

Children become distressed because they do not have the latest device, or designer-label clothing or footwear.

In their persistent cries to be given what their peers possess they can make their parents’ lives a misery.

Advertisers, of course, are very successful in exploiting children’s ‘pester power’.

The new Vatican Catechism warns us of the dangers of our succumbing to envy.

Envy, it says, will give rise to hatred, and to detraction, and calumny.

We will find ourselves speaking ill of those who are successful.

We will be glad to see a neighbour’s misfortune.

We will be unhappy at their prosperity. (#2539)

In today’s Gospel story the workers who had been hired earlier in the day had agreed to their wage at the outset.

At that time they were grateful for their employment and its promise of fair remuneration.

Now that gratitude is poisoned and their hearts are soured.

The power of envy to cause disturbance within us is revealed by that parable.

Is there any one of us who does not identify with their complaint?

So we are **all** susceptible, more than we may have realised, to this temptation.

Our Lord’s teaching gets deep within us and discloses our selfish attitude.

The Gospel also gives us the **remedy** for our sickness.

Our negativity will be transformed if we recognise the generosity of God.

If, instead of bemoaning another's good fortune, we ponder on what God has given us, then our spirits will lift.

Is there not much to be thankful for, beginning with the gift of life itself?

Have we enjoyed good health, ability of mind, sensitivity of heart?

Have we been blessed with supportive relationships – parents, partners, friends?

Have we benefited from the good example, the good teaching, or the good will of others?

Have we been afforded opportunities to improve our circumstances or to engage our gifts and talents and skills.

In times of sickness, distress, infirmity, have we received sympathy and support?

And if we look at those aspects of ourselves which we consider to be attractive,

if we look at our achievements,

then surely we can also see how much we have been given

- by God's grace,
- and by the kindness of others.

This is especially the case with regard to any spiritual progress we may have made.

Our virtues are surely the result of God's Holy Spirit at work within us,

and they are due in no small measure to the encouragement of our mentors and good companions.

Today the Gospel invites us, challenges us, to **emulate the generosity of God**.

Jesus calls us to be generous in spirit and in practice - to all,

Not just to those whom we think have deserved our love.

As He says on another occasion:

If you love only those who love you, what makes you any different?

Do not even the pagans do as much?

Be ye perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect

Who makes his sun to shine and his rain to fall on good and bad alike.

In his well-known hymn St Paul reminds us of the qualities of true love:

Love is always patient and kind; it is never jealous;

True love is never boastful or conceited.

It is never rude or selfish; it does not take offence.

True love is not resentful.

When envy besets us may God give us

The grace of gratitude for what we have ourselves received,

and the grace to be glad at another's welfare.