

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

In today's message we're going to talk about a sin we call "envy." In the Catholic church, "envy" is one of the seven deadly sins. And after the message today, you're going to see that this sin does indeed deserve special attention. For the sin of envy almost never occurs in isolation... at least not for very long. That's why the title of today's message is: "Envy Evolves." Envy changes. Envy progresses. Envy is that first domino that, when knocked down, starts a chain of other dominos falling.

So what is envy? None other than Aristotle came up with a definition over 2300 years ago that is accurate and simple. He describe envy "as the pain caused by the good fortune of others." Envy is the pain caused by the good fortune of others. Have you ever experienced pain when someone else had good fortune? I know you have. But let's save that discussion. First let's take a close look at the Old Testament lesson we heard earlier, because we have a perfect example of the sin of envy. From this lesson, we'll better see what envy is. What causes it. What happens when it's not stopped. And then what can be done about envy. Let's look at the story:

First, the background:

Joseph was the great-grandson of Abraham. So just to remember the family tree: Abraham had a son named Isaac. Isaac had a son named Jacob. And Jacob was Joseph's father. Jacob had a total of 12 sons. But, it's really not quite that simple. Let me give you a quick run down of the sons of Jacob:

- Leah had 4 sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah.
- Rachel was unable to conceive, so she gave her maidservant Bilhah to Jacob, who had two sons: Dan, Naphtali
- Leah got jealous and gave her servant Zilpah to Jacob: Gad, Asher
- But then Leah had two more sons: Issachar; Zebulun
- Finally, Rachel did get pregnant: Joseph.
- And, not mentioned until later is a one more son of Rachel: Benjamin.

So these were the 12 sons of Jacob. And you thought your family was dysfunctional! You can guess already that there might be problems in this family. And there are. Now the story:

2 Joseph, a young man of seventeen, was tending the flocks with his brothers, the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah, his father's wives, and he brought their father a bad report about them.

From what we know about him in Scriptures, Joseph appears to be a man of exceptional ability and natural gifts. He also is clearly a man of high morality. So when Joseph sees that four of his half brothers (the ones born to the maid servants) weren't towing the line as shepherds, he feels compelled to report it to his father.

Strike 1: The stage is set already. You have to imagine these four sons weren't too happy about this. I'm sure they got an earful from Papa Jacob when they got home. The seeds of discord are planted.

3 Now Israel loved Joseph more than any of his other sons, because he had been born to him in his old age; and he made a richly ornamented robe for him. 4 When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than any of them, they hated him and could not speak a kind word to him.

Strike 2 against Joseph: Dad showed special treatment to Joseph. We must find fault with Jacob here that he favors one son over all the rest. Jacob was not a perfect man. Where he should have shown love equally to all his sons, he doesn't. He fails. So the brothers hate Joseph for this. Note the building of the animosity. A "snow ball" is rolling down a hill building size and speed.

5 Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more.

6 He said to them, "Listen to this dream I had:

7 We were binding sheaves of grain out in the field when suddenly my sheaf rose and stood upright, while your sheaves gathered around mine and bowed down to it."

8 His brothers said to him, "Do you intend to reign over us? Will you actually rule us?"

And they hated him all the more because of his dream and what he had said.

Strike 3: Joseph had a dream and he shares it. The dream indicates that he will have a position of leadership and authority, and all his brothers would submit to his authority. This was God communicating to Joseph to help prepare him for what he would do later in life. Now the question is why he felt compelled to share it with his brothers. Were his intentions pure? Was he just ignorant about how they would take it? Was there pride involved? I don't know that we can say for sure.

What we can say for sure is how the brothers reacted. They were filled with envy. They were filled with hatred for their brother because of the dream.

9 Then he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. "Listen," he said, "I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me."

10 When he told his father as well as his brothers, his father rebuked him and said, "What is this dream you had? Will your mother and I and your brothers actually come and bow down to the ground before you?"

11 His brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the matter in mind.

God gave the dreams to let Joseph know that he would be in a position of important leadership. This would give him courage in the difficult times that would come.

Joseph has another dream. Once again, the dream clearly indicates the leadership position he will have and the authority he will have over his family. This time his dream reveals that even his mother and father will bow before him.

Now we have the benefit of hindsight. We see the whole picture, and how Joseph eventually ends up in Egypt as the second most powerful man after the Pharaoh himself. With Joseph in that important position he was able to provide for his family when they came to Egypt for help during a severe famine. God knew where all of this was leading. And we living after the fact know where all of this was leading. But no one had any clue about these things when Joseph had these dreams.

But again, their reaction is clear. They are jealous of Joseph. They're envious of Joseph. They hate him. The rest of Joseph's story is absolutely fascinating. It covers 11 chapters: Genesis 37 – 47... try to read them this week, and see how God is working in the big picture to accomplish his will. But what we want to remember right now is the result of these envious thoughts that the brothers harbored against Joseph. Because they were envious of his abilities and his favored position with his father, and of his dreams that indicated he would be a great leader... because of that envy dwelling and growing in their hearts, bad things happened. You see the **envy evolved**. The envy did not remain envy. It evolved into hatred. The hatred evolved into anger. And the anger evolved into aggression. They attacked Joseph, at first intent on killing

him, and then deciding to sell him into slavery. Then they covered up their sin by faking Joseph's death and lying to their father that Joseph was mauled by wild beast. The envy in their heart evolved and snowballed into countless more sins. Joseph's life (in the near term) was destroyed. Jacob's life, thinking his son was dead, was destroyed. The brothers' lives, burdened by the guilt of their actions, was destroyed. All of this because of envy.

Countless men and women have fallen prey to brief periods of intense envy followed by anger which then evolved into aggression. This pattern is seen again and again.

In fact, first appears in the Bible already in Cain, a son of Adam and Eve. When his brother Abel's offering was acceptable to God and his own offering was not, Cain was envious. That envy evolved into hatred, which evolved into anger, which evolved into aggression. Cain took a large stone and committed the first murder in all of history: he killed his brother Abel.

Don't underestimate the seriousness of the sin of envy. In fact, envy is included in the 10 commandments. The 9-10th Commandments say, **“You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his manservant or maidservant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor.”** The only reason to covet or desire anything that your neighbor has is if you envy what they have!

Friends, I want you to think and look hard at your own heart and life. Where is the envy in your life? Is there anyone in your life that you envy? Think of people you know at work. Think of people you know in your neighborhood. Think of people you see on TV. Think of relatives. Think of friends. Do you envy anything that they have that you do not? Does their good fortune cause you even a little bit of pain? As you look at other, are you every envious, thinking the person has a better spouse. Better job. Better car. Better friends. More respect. More good fortune. More connections. More money. Greater influence. Greater opportunities. Greater popularity. And here's the strange thing: You can even be envious of someone who is more humble than you are. You can envy someone who knows the Bible better than you, or has a stronger faith than you. You can envy someone who is friendlier and nicer than you are. And this is sin too! Where is the envy in your life? Find it! It's there somewhere.

Understand: you are in a precarious situation. It's dangerous. Because envy evolves. It grows and it changes into other things that eat away at your happiness, and gradually destroy your relationship with God. Envy can evolve into all sorts of things: discontentment, depression, hatred, anger, aggression, gossip, jealousy, stealing, adultery, and more. Envy evolves! Envy damages lives. Envy is a sin that separates you from God and angers him.

When you root out the envy in your life... when you admit the sin is there... when you identify who you are envious of... what should you do? How can you get rid of the guilt of this sin? How can you be free from the envy and all the sins it evolves into?

- 1) Don't justify the envy in your life. “Well he is a jerk and doesn't deserve what he has! He's been proud and arrogant, so my envy is justifiable!” No, it isn't. There is no such thing as justifiable envy.
- 2) So understand the weight and severity of this sin. It truly is a deadly sin. Understand the horrible *earthly* consequences of harboring this sin. It destroys friendships, relationships, and the lives of people. But even worse, understand the eternal consequences of harboring envy in your heart. Ultimately, envy is saying to God that he hasn't given you enough: power, position, influence, possessions, talent, friends,

- etc. Whatever you envy, is also anger at God for what you perceive he's not done for you.
- 3) Confess this sin to God. Lay it out on the table for him. Don't excuse it. Don't hide it.
 - 4) Now here God's promises. Christ lived without ever envying another. He died for this sin of envy in your place. He rose again to assure us that our envy is completely forgiven forever.
 - 5) In the peace and joy of forgiveness, live a changed life. Know that your loving and perfect God has given you exactly what you need in this season of your life. He's given you exactly the skills and abilities you need. He's given you the spouse he wants you to have. He's given you the friends you need. You have the exact right amount of money, status and fame. It's all good, because it came from God in just the right measure.

And those with more than you? Rejoice for them and with them. Be happy for what God has given them. Envy grieves over another person's good. But with Jesus living in our hearts, we are able to genuinely rejoice over our neighbor's good.

Turn to Jesus who cleanses our hearts of envy. Be free, at peace and filled with joy! Amen.