

“ENVY”

Envy is my first tangible memory as a human being. I carried that deadly sin with me into adulthood.

I was 4 ½ years old, in kindergarten. Three or four of us were sitting on the floor and we were asked to place blocks of wood, with holes in their centers, on a string. It was a contest to see who would finish first. I did not win, and I was envious of the girl who had more dexterity than the rest of us to complete the task first.

How sad! My first real memories of me, Michael, were those of envy spurred on by competition. Thomas Aquinas said of it, “Envy according to the aspect of its object is contrary to charity, whence the soul derives its spiritual life...Charity rejoices in our neighbor’s good, while envy grieves over it.” (Summa Theologica)

I have often reflected upon Thomas’ take on envy and finally in my late adult life, I feel confident in voicing a bit of different twist on his definition.

My kindergarten envy did not grieve over my classmate’s good fortune in finishing first. The deadly sin of envy made me feel inadequate and incompetent. And I took those feelings of inadequacy and incompetence with me through the schools – grade, high, college, and seminary. Most times in the background, other times significantly in the forefront, the envy was always there, ready for a fight.

Only after very special moments of grace in my faith journey, in which God broke into my existence, over and over again through the encouraging words of fellow human beings, did I come to be aware of my gifts and talents. They led me out of my envy, in which I was grieving over myself. I was led to charity, in which I recognized the many gifts God had given me; and how I could use them to be of assistance to others.

Grieving, not so much over my neighbor’s good, but rather, grieving more over my inadequacies blinded me to my own good. Thanks to God’s interventions over the years, I am now charitable to myself and the world is a better place because of it.

—*Rev. Michael Ratajczak*