

FROM THE PASTOR'S



25th Sunday in Ordinary Time, September 24, 2006 B

INNER CRAVINGS THAT GET US IN TROUBLE. THE CATHOLIC CHURCH AND GAMBLING. A NEW ADULT CATECHISM FOR AMERICAN CATHOLICS.

Today, we listened to the fourth of five excerpts from St. James's Epistle. A part of this fourth excerpt deals with "inner craving" that can get us in trouble and make life difficult for us.

Jealously

James says "where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice."

Jealously is an insidious feeling that can wreak havoc on our relationships and steal our joy. I know that jealously has destroyed many marriages and seriously hurt many more. I am sure that those of you who are married would agree that it is most difficult to deal with a jealous spouse.

Unfortunately, I do not have a lot of wisdom to offer on this particular feeling. I have, over the years, read articles and books on most feelings: sadness, joy, fear/anxiety, shame etc. But, I don't remember ever coming across a good article on jealously. What causes it and what can help to free us of it. If you have read a good article on this topic, I would appreciate it if you would share it. But I can say a couple of things about jealously:

- Feelings are neither right nor wrong. They just exist. It is never a sin to feel hate, jealously, shame or envy etc. Feelings only take on a moral dimension when they move us to engage in immoral behavior. Therefore, it is not wrong to *feel* jealous. But it is wrong if our feelings of jealously lead us to engage in destructive behavior that damages another or damages relationships.
- I believe that it is generally accepted that the *root cause* of jealously is *low self-esteem* and *insecurity*. It would seem that if we were truly in touch with our own goodness and giftedness, we would not need to be jealous of another or of his/her qualities. In fact, true self-esteem would

allow us to *celebrate* and not be jealous of the successes of another.

True and False Ambition

James also mentions false ambition in his reading today. There is nothing wrong with being ambitious as long as it is kept in check and not allowed to become a god in our lives. All of us should be ambitious to be the best person we can be. God would love that. We should want to develop our gifts and talents and succeed in our area of work. But, ambition is not good when it becomes a god in our lives, when it hurts our relationships with our family and causes us to neglect other responsibilities.

In today's Gospel, we have an example of *false* ambition. Some of Jesus' inner circle are arguing about who is going to be most important in his new kingdom. Jesus goes on to say that the really important people in his kingdom will be those with a *servant's heart*. True leadership is not about *lording* it over others, but rather about seeking to *serve* others. The ambition that moves us to make ourselves the center of attention and to promote our self-interests is false ambition at least in the eyes of Jesus. *Gospel ambition* moves us to make Jesus first in our lives and moves us to devote ourselves to furthering the interests of our communities. In his book *The Purpose Driven Life*, Rick Warren says the following about true servants of the Lord.

- *True servants make themselves available to serve.*
- *True servants do the best with what they have.* They don't keep bemoaning how they are not as talented as others. Neither do they keep saying: "one of these days I will do such and such." Rather, the one with a servant's heart pitches in and uses the imperfect gifts he has to serve his community.
- *True servants are faithful to their ministry.* They finish their tasks, fulfill their responsibilities, keep their promises, and complete their commitments. They don't leave a job half undone, and they don't quit when they get discouraged. They are trustworthy and dependable.

- *True servants maintain a low profile.* True servants of the Lord do not promote or call attention to themselves. Instead of acting to impress and dressing for success, they “*put on the apron of humility, to serve one another.*” If recognized for their service, they humbly accept it but don’t allow notoriety to distract them from their work. Self-promotion and servanthood don’t mix. Real servants don’t serve for the approval or applause of others. They live for an audience of One. As Paul said, “*If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ.*”

- *True servants think of ministry as an opportunity, not an obligation.* They enjoy helping people, meeting needs and doing ministry. They “*serve the LORD with gladness.*” Why do they serve with gladness? Because they love the Lord, they’re grateful for his grace, they know serving is the highest form of life, and they know God has promised a reward.

I am glad to say that we at Ascension have *many humble servants* of the Lord. Week after week, they go about their service not seeking attention. They are simply glad to have the *opportunity* to serve God and to be of help to their parish family. We are indeed blessed to have so many true servants of the Lord.

The Catholic Church and Gambling

Recently, Bishop Thomas Tobin (not relation) of the diocese of Providence, Rhode Island, wrote the following piece on gambling.

The Catholic Church does not hold that all gambling is immoral. There is no scriptural, traditional or magisterial basis for such a teaching. The Catechism of the Catholic Church explains:

“Games of chance (card games, etc.) or wagers are not in themselves contrary to justice. They become morally unacceptable when they deprive someone of what is necessary to provide for his needs and those of others. The passion for gambling risks becoming enslavement” (No. 2413).

In other words, while gambling itself is morally neutral, the circumstances surrounding it can render it immoral. These circumstances include: using excessive amounts of money, addiction to gambling, gambling that is unfair to the participants, gambling that leads to crime and corruption, gambling that causes collateral damage to individuals, families or communities.

Gambling is a very sensitive topic for Catholics. We realize that there are moral concerns about gambling, but still we play bingo, sell raffle tickets, have parish festivals with games of chance and organize trips to Atlantic City and Las Vegas. Are sins being committed every time these activities take place? I don’t think so.

Gambling can have useful purposes. Gambling provides funds for nonprofit agencies such as churches, schools and fire departments. It can be relaxing and fun for a group of friends. It can entice people out of their homes and form local communities. Many of our senior citizens find their primary social support around bingo tables.

It strikes me that as Catholics our approach to gambling is very similar to our approach to alcohol. While drinking alcohol is not evil in itself, the morality is found in the circumstances of its use or abuse.

We should be very reluctant then to level a universal condemnation of gambling. There is no theology to support such a stance, and we can easily be accused of being hypocritical on the issue.

The fact that the culture of gambling is ensnaring many of our young people, including college and high school students, is a growing and serious problem.

Without a doubt, large-scale, corporate, professional gambling—such as that found in casinos—is in a league of its own. It’s essentially different than the gambling already mentioned, and it presents serious concerns. This form of gambling is far more dangerous to individuals, families and communities. More money is involved. It’s more addictive. Its primary motive is profit, not charity.

United States Catholic Catechism for Adults

This past July our US bishops published a new Catechism with the above title adapted to the unique situation and culture that we live out our Catholic faith in. The Catechism follows the same format as the Universal Catechism—i.e. “the Four Pillars”: the *Creed, Sacraments, Morality and Prayer*. This book is a much more attractive and *easier* read than the Universal Catechism. In my humble opinion the writers of this new Catechism have done a superb job. While doctrinally faithful to the Universal Catechism, this new Catechism has much more of a *spiritual* slant to it (See point six below).

THE BREAKDOWN OF EACH CHAPTER

1. Stories & Lessons of Faith: Each chapter begins

with biographical sketches of American Saints and other outstanding Catholics who represent the variety of racial and ethnic witnesses to the Catholic Way of Life. These stories give glimpses of how Catholics participated in the unfolding of American culture from colonial days to the present. For example, the Preface to the Catechism has a beautiful biographical sketch of our first US Bishop, John Carroll.

2. Teaching: It's Foundation and Application: Each introductory story is followed by a presentation of a particular teaching on aspects of the Creed, the Sacraments, the Commandments and Prayer.

3. Sidebars: The doctrinal section in each chapter is followed by a sidebar composed of three questions with answers taken from the universal Catechism of the Catholic Church.

4. Relationship of Catholic Teaching to American Culture: This section seeks to relate each teaching to our diverse US society.

5. Questions for Discussion: In this section you will find questions for personal reflection or group discussion, which should help us to internalize the teaching addressed in a particular chapter.

6. Meditation & Prayer: The authors of this catechism state that the book *"is meant to draw the reader into a prayerful attitude before God. Each chapter concludes with a meditation drawn from a saint or spiritual writer. A catechism needs to be more than a summary of teachings. God has called all of us to prayer and holiness". Prayer is the gate that leads us to a deeper understanding of the Word of God and to the hidden treasures of doctrinal teaching.*" (Introduction)

Brothers and Sisters, I am VERY excited about this wonderful new addition to the catechetical life of the church. It is a book that will be referenced for many years to come. I am hoping that all of you will consider purchasing a copy. The parish has been able to buy a 100 copies of this \$25 book for \$15. But we will sell it for **\$10** a 60% discount. Copies will be available outside church next weekend.

Have a blessed week,

