

THE QUESTION OF THE WEEK

“God did not make death, nor does He rejoice in the destruction of the living. By the envy of the devil death entered the world and those who belong to his company experience it.”

Book of Wisdom 1: 13; 2:24

Each November as all the leaves have fallen from their trees and nature seems to die a slow death we celebrate the Feast of All Souls and we turn our thoughts to issues of personal mortality. The dying around us puts us in a frame of mind to consider such ultimate realities. But right after the summer solstice when there is the most daylight of the whole year and the days seem longer and even more relaxed, to think about death now? What are you thinking? We should be focusing on vacation and relaxation

Yes. We should. And I recommend it to you. I assure you I am going to give myself over to the task of rest and relaxation and thoughts of summer vacation. But the first reading today caught my eye. “God did not make death.” Striking thought isn’t it? Well, if God didn’t make death, who did? The end of that passage provides the answer. “By the envy of the devil...” Envy is a great destroyer. It sucks the life out of any relationship, any bond, any situation, any family, any institution. And envy is commonplace but hidden often enough. It is very real. Very deadly. Deadening. But often goes unrecognized, unnamed.

Envy tears at the good. It destroys any possibility of relationship by hating the person—not what the person does—that the person even lives. It is very personal and very destructive. If you want to see an instance of envy in action read the passion account at the end of any of the four gospels. You will see the envy of the devil, in human form, tearing at Jesus—figuratively and literally. Falsely accusing. Calling the good he did as coming from the evil one. Scourging him. Crowning him with thorns. Mocking him. Spitting on him. Beating him. Forcing him to drag his own instrument of execution and then nailing him to it. That’s how envy works. That’s what envy does.

How does Jesus handle it? He endures it. He remains steadfast and true despite what is happening to him. He offers the forgiveness of the Father even to those who are destroying him. And then what? Well, he dies. All his blood is poured out. And then what? They bury him hastily in another man’s grave. Is that the end of the story? Well, actually, no. On the third day he rises from the grave. Alive. New. With wounds intact but healed. Full of life. Never to die again. The envy of the devil and death itself has been defeated. Do you realize that? Do you believe that? That is the question of the week.