

The Envy of the Devil Thirty-second Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, November 10, 2015
8:15 AM **Wis 2:23—3:9;** Lk 17:7-10 St. Leo the Great, pope (Christ came to restore communion with God, by showing us what it really means to be human.)

“God formed man to be imperishable; the image of his own nature he made him.”

We are now reading from the Book of Wisdom, and the Book of Wisdom is one of those books I mentioned before that belongs in the Catholic canon of Scripture because it belonged to the Jewish diaspora. Where it actually was authored we don't know, but it's not Palestinian in origin.

Now one thing when we read this ancient literature we have to keep in mind **the viewpoint that ancient people had of reality was very different from ours.** They did not have the benefit of our science, our knowledge of rocks and earth formation and galaxies and the whole universe. They simply did not know any of it. They saw what we can see with the naked eye, but they knew nothing more. **So therefore divine inspiration always implies it works with people as they are, within the context of their own understanding and inspires meaning within their context.**

So the meaning here: what is it? First of all, the idea is that **humanity is really created for something more than simply life on earth. That's inspired meaning.** It's not obvious. We cannot study life on earth and simply say, oh, obviously there's something more here. No, not obviously at all. In fact, many people don't believe it. Many people think that life on earth simply arose as it were by chance and continues by chance and then ends—no meaning, no purpose, nothing. Wisdom says, no, there's purpose here. But the purpose has been warped. **The purpose of God has been warped. Why? According to this, “the envy of the devil.”** That's a very interesting concept: the envy of the devil, the devil being of course a creature of God: intelligent, wise, resourceful, powerful, but apparently also prideful, and here envious, and not willing to serve.

But this idea of envy, what is envy? **Envy is sadness because of the blessings of someone else.** Some people call this jealousy. That's not the proper word. It's envy; envy is sadness—jealousy is possessiveness—envy is sadness because of the good fortune of someone else. And this is saying that **this great spirit of intelligence**, this great lofty spirit, with a great mind, nonetheless, **was envious of human beings.** If you think about it, it does make sense because **human beings have what angels do not have. We have experience. We enjoy life.**

They actually aren't alive; they exist, but they don't live. They don't have ups and downs. They may have various graces which we cannot even know about, but **they don't have what we have: life in the body, life on this earth, a capacity to interrelate with one another in the way we do. They can't love and be loved by equals because no angel is equal to another one; each is its own species. They can love and serve God—that's it.**

But God has made us to share life with God and given us life on earth, which is really more than God gave the angels. So I can understand envy, sadness that they got the short end of the stick, more intelligent than we, yes, but not more. And it is, after all, humanity that God has incarnated himself into, not an angelic nature. **God did not take upon himself an angelic nature, but the human nature,** in a way that the human life is in a way the axis of creation, where this seems to be the focal point of God's work. Even **God's work in the whole of creation works through humanity because humanity has, whether you like it or not, dominion over everything else.** If indeed there is such a thing as global warming and that has to be remedied, it's only through humanity that this will happen because humanity for better or for worse has dominion over the earth. So whatever happens to the earth will happen through humanity. **It is humanity that is the coworker with God.** There's reason why angels could be envious. **You can only be jealous of what you have; envious of what you don't, and they don't have this.** And that's the idea in this book.

So the devil enticed humanity away from God's purposes, encouraged a self-centeredness, a self-will, a self-love that dominated everything else, **which threw everything off kilter. In this off kilter world communion with God is impossible.** That's why **Christ came to restore communion with God, by showing us what it really means to be human.** Without Christ we really don't know what it means to be human. And **if we don't know what it means to be human, then we can't be in communion with God because it is humanity that is the image and likeness of God.** But when we are off kilter we are not fully human in the first place, and so not fully in communion with God. And that's what it means "by the envy of the devil, death entered the world," death meaning not that organisms stop breathing, but separation from God. **Separation from God is death.** Christ came to bring life.