

I think most all of us at various points have looked at other people and wondered isn't life easier on the other side of the fence. Sometimes I'll daydream about winning the lottery. Or I'll look longingly on things that I'd buy if money weren't an object.

There's nothing wrong with a little daydream. But sometimes we can forget just how blessed we are.

Such was the case for Deann Weber, who's a photographer and writer from New Jersey when she found her mind wandering at 3 a.m.

She was sitting on the couch watching TV. An infomercial for a wondrous product blared through the quiet night, promising it would change her life.

"If only it were that easy," she thought. Sleep had eluded her once more. She stared blankly at the TV as her mind wandered, making a mental list of how she wished things would change.

She got up and shuffled her way to the kitchen for another cookie. Her worries seemed to subside as the sweetness of the chocolate chips filled

her senses. "Chocolate really does make everything better, even if only for a few minutes," she thought to herself. Her late night dates with the TV and cookies had become a habit, a way of comforting herself.

She admitted to herself that she had fallen victim to the Green Eyed Monster. Having a pity party in the wee hours of the night had become a regular routine. With her husband and children asleep, the house was quiet. It was just her and the TV and the chocolate chip cookies to help ease her envy.

At the time, she writes that it seemed that everyone she knew was moving on and she was just an observer. Her friends? They had new cars, vacations, designer clothes and new homes. Yet her world was standing still. They continued to live a simple lifestyle. She was convinced her life was becoming boring and that she needed a change.

The next day was Sunday and they decided as a family to stay home and de-clutter some of the closets. She tried hard not to think of her friend who was on a weekend ski trip.

The kids were to put their outgrown toys and clothes in large plastic bins. Her husband would clean out the hallway closet that had become a catchall for everything. She would work on their bedroom closet. Once their bins were full, they would go through them and decide what to donate, keep or throw out.

She was in the midst of full-force cleaning when a fleck of blue caught her eyes. There, on a shelf, squeezed between old purses and shoes, was her teenage diary. She had written it in a spiral notebook over a three-year period. Looking at the worn cover decorated with her hand-drawn doodles, she couldn't help but smile. Inside she saw her teenage handwriting. All of the letter "i's" were dotted with cute hearts and her exclamation marks were tripled to show her excitement. It was obvious she was a happy teenager. She decided to take a small break from de-cluttering to read some of her diary entries.

Sitting in her kitchen with a steaming cup of tea, she grabbed a chocolate chip cookie and started to read. After reading several pages, she began to realize that, although she had many obstacles as a teen, she had a positive attitude and expressed her gratitude often about her family, friends and the

teachers who helped guide her. She had a zest for life even when it was difficult.

She was ready to get back to cleaning when she flipped the pages of the diary one more time. Call it fate she says, but one sentence jumped right out at her. “I promise myself to not be jealous of my friends anymore and not care if they have better things than I do. I want to be happy!” Her younger self had just opened her eyes.

Growing up, she lived in a housing project in Brooklyn. They managed with bare necessities, and yet, as young as she was, she had come to terms with it and learned to accept and be grateful for what she had. Now, as an adult, how could she have been so blinded by material possessions, she wondered. She realized she had more than enough. After all, they were cleaning their overstuffed closets to donate to others.

That night at 3 a.m., when she normally would have had her pity party, she instead took out a notebook. With a pen in one hand and a chocolate chip cookie in the other, she started to write. “Dear diary, it’s been a while since I wrote my thoughts. I am grateful for...” and so it began. As her gratitude

list got longer, her spirits lifted. She dotted her “i’s” with hearts and her exclamation marks were tripled.

She kept that diary going in the years that followed. Her late night pity parties are now replaced with a good night’s sleep. The Green-Eyed Monster took a little time to leave she says. If she does return every now and then, she reminds herself of all the things for which she is grateful. She focuses on what she has, and not on what she does not have. She is grateful for her family, friends, health, pets and home. She is also grateful to her teenage self, the girl who taught her older, but not wider self, to count her blessings.

Like her, all of us I think it’s safe to say want to be happy. But sometimes it can be easy to get sidetracked as to what happiness is.

Often we are surrounded, a bit like Deann, others who seem to have all they could want. And unfortunately sometimes being human, we can go from just admiring someone to envying them, which Aquinas defined as an irrational anger at the success of others.

James the author of our second reading was very much aware of the problems this could cause in the community. He writes “where jealousy and selfish ambition exist, there is disorder and every foul practice.” He then writes of the slippery slope envy and jealousy can be, leading to wars and conflicts. We see as much in the first reading;”let us beset the just one, because he is obnoxious to us; he sets himself against our doings, reproaches us for transgressions of the law...let us condemn him to a shameful death.” As Christians we read that and know the reference is to Jesus, who was killed in part due to envy and jealousy of others.

Jesus predicts what will happen in the Gospel, but even in this Gospel, we see His apostles are caught up in a little envy of their own. They seem to ignore the suffering and death part, but argue who will be greatest in the Kingdom of Heaven. They seem to realize how foolish they’ve been as no one wants to admit what they were talking about. Jesus then teaches them a lesson in humility, something He’ll re-emphasize when we come to the Last Supper and He washes the feet of the 12.

Though the apostles come off in a bit of a negative light here, let’s not forget these men grow in their faith - most become martyrs for it. Deann

also learned from her bit of envy. But if it's not addressed, the thing of it is it can lead to even worse things.

It tends to be something we kind of gloss over as it's not a sin that is always easily recognizable. Some things we know right away were wrong. Others are much more subtle like envy.

So what is a Christian to do to deal with this properly? A couple of things can help.

As a starting point, we ask ourselves am I envious. Some questions to ask include identifying feelings of envy for others possessions, looks or life.

Related to this can be pride; sometimes when we are envious, we over compensate by being egotistical, or always having to have the last word or talk over others, not taking their advice. Even spouses and parents can be susceptible to this too, as power can be quite the drug - remember we are told that even Pilate knew that it was out of envy that Jesus was handed over (Matthew 27:18). We also might find ourselves being overly critical of someone we are envious of too, or perhaps just irritated by them when they aren't doing anything at all to warrant that feeling.

Closely related to envy too is ambition, which we also want to identify.

There's nothing wrong with wanting a successful career or life, but when we become overly ambitious, we can do anything to get ahead, including stepping over people, or not thinking of others needs or that we are part of a team. The ambitious person can also forget they are connected to Christ, and are meant to glorify God rather than themselves.

Recognizing these things, we can then take the steps for spiritual growth.

For one, we check our ego and are willing to be led, by God and also other people. The overly ambitious person or envious person can get tunnel vision on having it their way or the highway. But when Jesus holds a child in their midst, a child is someone who in His time had no social status at all; then as today the child is led by parents until they mature. Are we willing to be led by God and check our ego? Are we willing to say "this person maybe can do things better than I can do?" and let go of our power be at work or on a committee or in our parish? Are we willing to listen to the advice of others, even if it's hard to admit this person is better than we are at

something knowing that maybe God puts them there to help us find our gifts too?

Second, like Deann, we can count our blessings - and talents. Don't spend so much time focusing on others and what they have while forgetting the many things we do have. There is so much to be grateful for, and it's easy to lose sight of that. Find joy in the present moment, much like a child does as well. Rather than get focused on the past or preoccupied with the future and trying to get further ahead, stop and smell the roses. Stop looking at what you can't do or what others can, and realize God has given you unique talents too that you can do, so use them.

Third, we ask ourselves are we doing it for God's glory or our own?

Sometimes we do things so others will compliment us, or so our status will build and people will know who it is that gave the donation to the church, or put on the best dinner party, or how accomplished we are.

Lastly, we remember that though not all may recognize our talents, when we have the attitude of not being resentful or seeking recognition, we can make a profound difference in this world.

Saint John of Kanty was a Polish saint who took on this attitude. By all accounts, he did all that he needed to do to move ahead in life. But he's actually a great example of someone who worked hard to move ahead but was always blocked by others because of jealousy and envy.

Born in Kety, a small town in Poland on June 24, 1390, he came from a religious family and family life was important to him.

At age 23 he went to Krakow to pursue his studies to become a Catholic priest. He was accepted into a prestigious school. He graduated, and was ordained.

His trials would begin when he took a position at the school in 1429. The next 13 years St. John continued his studies and did some writing and was very generous to the poor.

Sadly, he had to deal with the jealousy of others. Because of his growing popularity, rivals began challenging him, making false accusations against him. He was forced out and sent to the town of Olkusz in Bohemia in 1431.

It was intended to be an insult, but the people quickly came to realize that he was a good man.

At 41 years of age, he became assistant pastor at a smaller country parish. Some would be dismayed at not “moving up” in Church circles, but not Saint John. The people were initially hostile towards him because he was seen as someone who was disgraced and sent to them so his reputation preceded his arrival. What soon began to change people's attitude was the giving of his heart to the things that helped people in their lives. St. John showed great patience in humility that took time.

After 8 long years St. John was exonerated and transferred back to Kracow. Through his persistence, he won over his rivals who ultimately begged him to stay. For the rest of his life he taught scripture at the University.

His life would be marked by humility too. Once John was sitting down to dinner when he saw a beggar walk by outside. He jumped up immediately, ran out, and gave the beggar the food in his bowl. He asked no questions,

made no demands. He just saw someone in need and helped with what he had.

He became loved by the people as he was wined and dined with nobility. He took the message of Christ to all who he met. Once, he was turned away at the door by a servant who thought John's cassock was too frayed. Again, his humility shone through. John didn't argue but went home, changed into a new cassock, and returned. During the meal, a servant spilled a dish on John's new clothes. "No matter, My clothes deserve some dinner, too. If it hadn't been for them I wouldn't be here at all."

He finally did get some honor. After he died. To show honor, the University would take his doctoral gown to be used by graduates receiving advanced degrees at the University of Krakow.

Through his attitude, he changed hearts and minds. Through his selflessness he helped people. What a tragedy some people get so hung up on ego and recognition and brooding; but Saint John opted to live for others and in the process did so much good. Let's never forget God sees the good things we do.

As I try to grow in holiness in my own life, I know full well envy can sometimes crop up too with me. I'm extremely competitive, and whether it's preaching or my photography hobby, I can compare myself to others. Or I can think about others who maybe have more than I do. What I remind myself though is what Deann did when she read her old diary. I want to be happy. Sure, an award is nice, I wouldn't mind winning a lottery prize, and it's nice to get a compliment. But I know if I spend my life comparing myself to others, or thinking about what I don't have, I'll miss out on so much. For happiness is found in coming to know God, and doing this for His glory, and to be a person of hope who leaves this world a little bit better place than when we came into it, not leaving behind a statue or hall named after us. So let us trust in God. Let us trust in others who are there to help us. And as we come to this altar, let's make sure we remind ourselves that this God came to serve us and calls us to do the same for one another, using our gifts for the greater glory of His name.