



A theological and pastoral guide to awakening from spiritual lethargy in the age of social networks

Introduction: Envy without wanting to... but constantly

We live in a world where everyone's life is an open showcase. Instagram, TikTok, Facebook, LinkedIn... Social media has turned intimacy into a spectacle and the ordinary into a constant source of comparison. In this context arises one of the silent epidemics of our time: the *doomscrolling* of other people's lives.

This English term —“doomscrolling”— describes the compulsive act of scrolling through negative news or content. However, here we will apply it to a more subtle and corrosive form: the passive and constant contemplation of other people's (curated and edited) lives on social media. An endless stroll through the shop windows of what *seems to be* happiness, success, and fulfillment. And while we look, we compare. And while we compare, we feel. And what we feel is often a hollow sadness, disguised as admiration, but soaked in **melancholic envy**.

I. The theological root of the problem: What is envy and why is it a sin?

Envy is not merely “wanting what someone else has.” From a Christian perspective, envy is something much deeper and more damaging: it is a sadness caused by another's good.

Saint Thomas Aquinas defines envy as “*tristitia de bono proximi*” (Summa Theologica, II-II, q.36), that is, sadness at the good of one's neighbor. This sadness arises when someone else's good is perceived as a threat to our own worth, identity, or happiness.

Spiritually speaking, envy is a practical denial of Providence. It is telling God: “*You didn't give me what I deserve.*” It is a sin against charity because it prevents us from truly loving our neighbor. And it is a sin against humility because it makes us believe we deserve what we do not have.

The tenth commandment —“*You shall not covet your neighbor's goods*” (Exodus 20:17)— warns us against this interior disorder that, though often invisible, can gravely deform our hearts.



II. The modern shape of envy: melancholic envy through digital consumption

In the past, envy was more sporadic: we envied the neighbor, the cousin with a better job, the friend who got married. Today, however, envy has become globalized and digitized. We can spend hours looking at influencers' perfect bodies, acquaintances' vacation photos, former classmates' professional achievements, other parents' happy families, other Catholic groups' apostolic successes...

This *passive consumption* of others' lives is presented as entertainment, but in reality, it is a form of toxic escapism. Because **we don't live, we merely observe**, like someone watching trains go by from the platform without boarding any. What begins as curiosity ends as a mental habit that wounds self-esteem, poisons spirituality, and numbs the desire for God.

This constant state of comparison and mild sadness, even if it doesn't lead to action, **paralyzes the soul**. We no longer actively desire the good of others —nor even our own— but remain stuck in a viscous sadness we can't quite identify... yet know hurts.

III. Social media as a mirage: what you see is not what it is

Digital life is an optical illusion carefully constructed. Most of what is posted on social media is edited, filtered, and selectively chosen. It's not outright lies, but a curated presentation of the best: achievements, happy moments, the most flattering images.

This phenomenon can make us believe others are constantly experiencing fulfillment, while we alone are trapped in routine, discouragement, or failure. But the truth is, **what we see is not real**. Or at least, not *the whole* reality.

Saint Paul warns us:

“Do not conform to this world, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind” (Romans 12:2).



This verse is key. It's not just about avoiding sin but protecting the mind from being *shaped* by the values of this world: superficiality, comparison, vanity. And few things shape the mind today more than social media.

IV. Spiritual effects of 'doomscrolling' on the life of faith

The constant exposure to curated lives of others causes very specific pastoral and spiritual effects:

1. Spiritual apathy

When we constantly compare ourselves, we always feel "less." This extinguishes the desire to improve. We no longer strive to grow but resign ourselves to a sense of inferiority. This even affects spiritual life: we stop believing we can be holy, useful, or fruitful.

2. Inner judgments disguised as spirituality

Many times, envy masquerades as "constructive criticism" or pious judgment: "*Sure, that family looks happy, but they probably don't pray like we do.*" Instead of rejoicing in others' good, we try to minimize it. It's a defense mechanism to avoid facing our sadness.

3. Disconnection from the present

Digital envy disconnects us from the now. We live watching others' lives while ours slips away. This disorder prevents us from fully living our own vocation, mission, and family life.

4. Subtle accusations against God

Internally, we start to ask: *Why didn't God give that to me? What did I do wrong? Why them and not me?* This silent complaint can turn into resentment toward God, even if we don't say it out loud.

V. The path to healing: how to free yourself from melancholic envy

The good news is that, like all sin or interior disorder, envy can be overcome. Not overnight, but through patient inner work assisted by grace.



1. Recognize and name it

The first step is an act of sincerity. Admit that we're being poisoned by what we see. Name the emotion: "What I feel is not healthy admiration, it's sadness over someone else's good."

2. Fast from passive consumption

Set specific times during the day *without social media*. Not as punishment, but as spiritual hygiene. Return to simplicity: silence, spiritual reading, contemplation of the everyday. Digital asceticism is now an essential part of Christian life.

3. Be grateful for your own life

Gratitude is the antidote to envy. Consciously give thanks, even for the smallest things, and reconcile your heart with your own story. Keeping a "gratitude journal" helps reveal how blessed we are, even in things we take for granted.

4. Ask for the grace of charity

Envy is not overcome by willpower alone but with grace. Ask the Lord: "*Give me a pure heart that can sincerely rejoice in the good of my brothers and sisters.*" Charity is not just avoiding harm, but genuinely delighting in others' good.

5. Go to confession

If feelings of envy have been persistent and have led to judgments, gossip, or inner paralysis, it's good to bring them to the Sacrament of Reconciliation. Christ not only forgives but heals and strengthens.

VI. A pastoral call: live as witnesses, not spectators

Our vocation is not to watch life from the sidelines but to **be protagonists of the Kingdom**. God hasn't called us to consume others' lives but to live our own in fullness.

Each person has a unique story, an unrepeatable mission. As Saint Paul says:

“*For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good*”



works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Ephesians 2:10).

You weren't given someone else's life because you are called to something different. You are not a copy. You are not a beta version. You are a divine design, loved from all eternity.

Conclusion: Stop watching, start living

The *doomscrolling* of other people's lives is a modern form of emotional and spiritual slavery. But Christ didn't come so we'd be frustrated spectators —He came to make us **free children**. Not to compare ourselves, but to give ourselves. Not to consume beauty, but to create it.

Put the phone down. Look at your children. Open a book. Pray a mystery. Embrace your spouse. Return to the Sacrament. Take a walk without a camera. Live your story. Because that story —not the influencer's— is the one that can save your soul.

Final prayer to free the heart from envy

Lord Jesus, You who see the depths of the heart, free me from the comparison that paralyzes, from the judgment that poisons, from the sadness that distances me from You. Give me a grateful, pure, and strong heart. May I look upon my brothers and sisters with joy and live my vocation with passion. Amen.