

1st Sunday of Lent

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7

This material was passed down through oral tradition until the time of Moses who was the one chosen to write it down. This story is part of the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible.¹⁵ Today it is commonly thought that Moses did not write every part of these books, but who the other authors might have been is unknown. At the time of Jesus, it was accepted that Moses was the author.¹⁶ In this reading we confront the age-old question, why would God place a tree in the garden and then forbid Adam to eat from it? God, of course, wanted Adam to obey him, but he also gave him the freedom to choose.¹⁷ The story of the Fall is vital to our understanding of the coming of Christ and the redemption he won for us by so doing. In short, if there had been no Fall, we would have had no need of a Redeemer.⁷

7The Lord God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, The human person, created in the image of God, is a being at once physical and spiritual. The biblical account expresses the reality in symbolic language when it affirms that “the Lord God formed man of dust from the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life”.³ (CCC 362) Man has a special kind of life that distinguishes him from all earthly beings, a life that comes from God.⁵ **and so man became a living being.** God is portrayed as a potter and this image shows that man is in God’s hands just like clay in a potter’s hands.²

8Then the Lord God planted a garden The garden is a symbol of divine blessings.⁵ **in Eden, in the east and placed there the man whom he had formed.**

9Out of the ground the Lord God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life This was a common ancient symbol for immortality.⁵ **in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.** Good and evil are opposites that suggest knowledge of everything.¹

3:1Now the serpent The Hebrew word “nahash” which is translated here as “serpent” has a wide range of meaning from snake to evil dragons like Leviathan and the legendary sea monsters. It usually refers to something that bites, often with venom. The serpent is definitely a life-threatening thing that represents mortal danger physically as well as spiritually for the ancient serpent is identified as Satan in the book of Revelation.⁴ **was the most cunning of all the animals that the Lord God had made.** Behind the disobedient choice of our first parents lurks a seductive voice, opposed to God, which makes them fall into death out of envy. Scripture and the Church’s Tradition see in this being a fallen angel called “Satan” or the “devil.” The Church teaches that Satan was at first a good angel, made by God. The devil and the other demons were indeed created naturally good by God, but they became evil by their own doing.³ (CCC 391) **The serpent asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?”** The serpent’s question is a distortion of the divine command. The woman corrects the serpent’s distortion, but she adds her own “...neither shall you touch it.” Sin begins with some distortion of the truth.⁵

2The woman answered the serpent: “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; **3**it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.’” Physical death entered the world as a consequence of sin.³ (CCC 1008) This also refers to the death of the soul.⁴

4But the serpent said to the woman: “**You certainly will not die!** The devil is a liar and the father of lies.³ (CCC 392) Satan refers to a physical death rather than a spiritual one.¹⁶ Adam and Eve lost

something greater than natural life when they sinned: they lost supernatural life, original holiness, and original justice.¹⁸ Recall Jesus' words in Mt. 10:28: "And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell."

⁵No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." You will have knowledge of both good and evil. Up until this point only good has been experienced.¹⁶

⁶The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. It is the *discernment* of the Holy Spirit that unmask the lie of temptation whose object appears to be good, a "delight to the eyes" and desirable, when in reality its fruit is death.³ (CCC 2847) So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.³ (CCC 397)

⁷Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves. This begins the description of the effects of the original sin.² Adam and Eve become afraid of God.³ (CCC 399) The harmony in which they had found themselves is now destroyed. The union of man and woman becomes subject to tensions, their relations henceforth marked by lust and domination.³ (CCC 400) This reading prepares the way for the story of Jesus' temptation in the gospel. The first man and woman succumbed; Jesus resists the tempter.¹

Romans 5:12-19

This reading gives us Paul's view of how Christ, the second Adam, conquered the sin introduced into the world by the first Adam.⁶ After the experience on the road to Damascus, Paul saw all the Old Testament as prefiguring Christ and Christ fulfilling all the Old Testament.⁷

Brothers and sisters:

¹²Through one man sin entered the world, Sin entered the world through Adam.⁶ and through sin, death, This refers to spiritual death (separation from God) as well as physical death.⁶ and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned— Fallen human nature is deprived of the economy of grace which it formerly enjoyed. It is wounded in its natural powers and subjected to the dominion of death, which is transmitted to all men. It is in this sense that every man is born in sin. We hold, therefore, in accordance with the Council of Trent, that original sin is transmitted along with human nature, not by imitation but by propagation, and is therefore, incurred by each person individually.¹⁰ The fact that everyone dies is the proof that everyone is affected by original sin.⁹

¹³for up to the time of the law, This refers to the Law given to Moses. sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. From Adam to Moses, the source of "death" was Adam's sin; men did, of course, commit evil deeds in that period, but they were not charged with them. Between Adam and Moses, evil deeds were not set down to men's account as something contributing to their death.¹³ (They could not be accused of breaking a law that did not exist.¹¹) Adam incurred death as a consequence of original sin when he broke an explicit specific command of God. Later, under the Mosaic Law, there were also certain precepts, which involved the death penalty if broken. In the period from Adam to Moses there was no law which stated: If you sin, you shall die.⁹

¹⁴But death reigned from Adam to Moses, People in that period were all subject to death, even those who committed no “actual sin.”⁹ even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, Adam had received a precept (“Do not eat of the fruit of the tree of good and evil lest you die.”) but those who lived in the first period without the Law did not do evil as he had, for they violated no precepts except the natural law written on every person’s heart. The fact that they died proves that death is due not to personal sins but to original sin. Death is a consequence of original sin because that sin brought with it the loss of the original gift of immortality.⁹ who is the type of the one who was to come. The “one who was to come” refers to Jesus, the Messiah.⁹

¹⁵But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many. Forgiveness of sin (new life) enters the world with the arrival of Jesus Christ.⁶ Although the people of God in the Old Testament tried to understand the human condition in the light of the history of the fall, they could not grasp this story’s ultimate meaning which is revealed only in the light of the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ. We must know Christ as the source of grace in order to know Adam as the source of sin.³ (CCC 388) Just as all who descend from Adam inherit death, though they do not eat from the tree themselves, so all who are joined to Christ inherit righteousness, though they do nothing to produce it themselves.⁸

¹⁶And the gift is not like the result of the one who sinned. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal. This contrasts the verdict of condemnation for one sin (Original Sin) —which fell on all men—with the verdict of acquittal for men condemned not only through Adam’s transgression, but also through their own offenses (This refers to the Justification which comes through Jesus Christ).⁵

¹⁷For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. The grace of Christ more than compensates for the damage done by Adam’s rebellion.⁸

¹⁸In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all. Man was ruined by Adam and rescued by Christ.¹¹

¹⁹For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous. Christ, by his obedience and submission to the Father’s will, counters the disobedience and rebellion of Adam, restoring to us – superabundantly- the happiness and eternal life which we lost through the sin of our first parents.⁹

Matthew 4:1-11

The great kings of Israel were known for protecting God’s people from the oppression of their pagan neighbors. The first battle of the Messiah-King was to confront the devil. As Israel’s royal representative, Jesus experienced the same kind of trials Israel did during the Exodus. What happened to Israel in the time of Moses happened to Jesus in the first century.¹² Israel failed but Jesus passed the test!

¹At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil.

²He fasted for forty days and forty nights, Going into the desert for forty days reminds us of how Jesus symbolically relived the story of Israel’s forty years in the wilderness during the Exodus.¹² It also brings to mind the 40 day fast undertaken by Moses. (Ex. 24:18) and afterwards he was hungry.

³The tempter This is Satan, that is, “Adversary”, “Enemy”, the fallen angel of darkness, who places obstacles on our path to God.¹³ approached and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread.”

⁴He said in reply, “It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God.” The first of Israel’s trials during the Exodus involved hunger and they accused Moses of taking them out into the wilderness to kill the whole assembly with starvation (Ex.16:3). Unlike Israel, Jesus does not waver from trusting the Father.¹²

⁵Then the devil took him Throughout these temptation episodes, the Accuser can move the Son of God physically but not spiritually.¹³ to the holy city, Jerusalem, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple

⁶and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone.” Note that Satan knows and can quote scripture! This is from Ps. 90:11.

⁷Jesus answered him, “Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.” The second trial of Israel was when they put God to the test at Massah when they doubted God and accused Moses of a plot to take them out into the desert where they were to die of thirst. Jesus refused to test God on this or any other issue and quoted Deuteronomy 6:16 where the whole verse says: “You shall not put the Lord your God to the test, as you tested him at Massah.”¹²

⁸Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, This mountain does not exist in nature but we are reminded of Moses who went up on Mt. Pisgah and looked at the Holy Land which he would not be able to enter.¹⁴ and he said to him,

⁹“All these I shall give to you, Of course, these don’t belong to Satan in the first place as Ps. 24 says: “The Lord’s are the earth and its fullness.” if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.”

¹⁰At this, Jesus said to him, “Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve.” The last temptation of Israel involved worshipping a false god in the golden calf episode at Mount Sinai. In this third temptation, Jesus overcomes Israel’s sin of idolatry. Most of Jesus’ subsequent actions—whether His healings, His forgiving people’s sins, or His exorcisms—can be seen as repercussions of His initial triumph over the devil in the desert.¹²

¹¹Then the devil left him and behold, angels came and ministered to him. The heavenly court of faithful angels “wait on” the Son of God. The grammar indicates repeated and insistent action, showing the eagerness of the angels; they waited on Jesus hand and foot as the King of heaven alone deserves.¹³

Some of the material for this commentary was taken from: (1) “Workbook for lectors and gospel readers: 1999” by Lawrence E. Mick, (2) “The Navarre Bible: Pentateuch,” (3) “Catechism of the Catholic Church”, (4) “Lord, Have Mercy,” by Scott Hahn, (5) “The Jerome Biblical Commentary,” (6) “Workbook For Lectors And Gospel Readers: 2002,” by Aelred R. Rosser, (7) Commentary Notes of Sean Innerst and Tim Gray, (8) “Ignatius Catholic Study Bible: The Letter of Saint Paul to the Romans,” (9) “The Navarre Bible: Romans And Galatians,” (10) “Creed of the People of God” by Pope Paul VI, (11) “The Letter To The Romans” by William Barclay, (12) “Mystery Of The Kingdom On The Gospel of Matthew” by Edward P. Sri, (13) “Fire Of Mercy, Heart Of The Wood: Meditations on the gospel according to Saint Matthew” by Erasmo Leiva-Merikakis, (14) “The Gospel of Matthew” by Daniel J. Harrington, S.J., (15) “You Can Understand The Bible” by Peter Kreeft, (16) The St. Paul Center For Biblical Theology Online founded by Dr. Scott Hahn, (17) “The Bread Of Life Catholic Bible Study” by Deacon Ken e³ Marie Finn, and (18) “Understanding The Scriptures” by Scott Hahn. Ph.D.

In loving memory of Peg Schneller, who compiled these commentaries.