

## Begone, Satan! Welcome, New Adam!

### First Sunday of Lent – March 1, 2020

Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7; Rom 5:12-19; Mt 4:1-11

*“Begone, Satan! ... You must worship the Lord your God, and serve God alone” (Mt)*

Note: At the start of Lent, Holy Mother the Church cautions us about the perennial struggle between good and evil. As archetypes, Adam and Eve stand for every man and woman, you and I, who often fall prey to pride and abuse our freedom leading to the ‘Fall’. But Jesus reverses history and calls us to live in true freedom, striving for life in abundance. Let us welcome Him into our lives.

### Three Signposts from Scripture:

1. God has created the best of all possible worlds, of which the first chapter of Genesis tells us: “God saw that it was good”. Moreover, with the creation of wo/man in God’s image and likeness, everything was “very good” (Gen 1:31). Today’s first reading, beginning with the second narrative of the creation of wo/man (Gen ch.2)—known as the Yahwist creation account—depicts God as a kind of potter moulding the first human being “from the ground”. God places ‘Adam’—from the Hebrew, *Adamah*, meaning, ground or earth—in the Garden of Eden to till it and live in right relationship with the earth and with God. Then the reading continues into chapter 3, which describes the so-called ‘Fall’ or the first sin of humankind: hubris or pride. One must be mindful of the mythical, symbolic and poetic nature of the language used. Eden symbolizes serenity, peace and happiness; Garden adorned with various trees signifies beauty, plenitude and prosperity; with the trees of life, and knowledge of good-and-evil symbolizing the possibility of eternal life, as well as knowledge of what’s to be done or avoided. Serpent symbolizes evil. The serpent’s “You will be like God!” (3:5) words work wonders. Adam and Eve at Eden, and you and I, today, get trapped by this root-temptation: namely, trying to ‘*be* god’. You and I create idols by making the small ‘i’ into the Big ‘I’. When we make demigods of ourselves, we sever our ties with God, with others, and with the cosmos, at large. Fortunately, all is not lost since the *felix culpa*—‘happy fault’ and ‘necessary sin of Adam’—wins for us a Saviour: Jesus!
2. Jesus saves us from our sins and sinfulness not from ‘above’, so to say, but from ‘below’. By virtue of the incarnation of God’s Son, Jesus, God stands in solidarity with sinful humankind and saves it. This is clearly attested in the Letter to the Hebrews: “We have not a high priest [Jesus] who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect *has been tempted as we are*, yet without sin” (4:15). The temptations that Jesus faces are not accidental or peripheral but rather integral to his mission, since the opening line in today’s gospel passage reads: “Jesus was *led by the Spirit* into the wilderness to be tempted.” The temptations, therefore, seem integral and indispensable to Jesus’ Spirit-driven Messianic mission. Moreover, in keeping with his portrayal of Jesus as the ‘new Moses’ leading and redeeming the ‘new Israel’, evangelist Matthew depicts Jesus’ temptations as very similar to those experienced by Moses and God’s chosen people: Israel. But, by sharp contrast, though Israel stumbled in times of temptation despite Moses’ leadership, Jesus triumphs and shows us the way to overcome temptations. Notice the similarities between Israel’s temptations and Jesus’ with Matthew juxtaposing wilderness with desert, mountain with Mount Sinai, 40 days with 40 years, and bread with manna.

3. If Jesus commanded the stones to turn into bread, he would be using his messianic power neither for his mission nor for others but for filling his own belly and inflating his own ego. The tempter craftily says, “If you are God’s son .....” Jesus rebuts him with a line from Deuteronomy (8:3): “One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.” Jesus keeps God, Abba’s word, at the centre of his life. Second, by following the devil’s suggestion to throw himself from the pinnacle of Jerusalem’s Temple, Jesus would be succumbing to shortcut sensationalism. Jesus chooses the painful pathway of the Cross. Third, by bowing down and worshipping the tempter, Jesus would be seeking power and glory for himself. He rather chooses to worship, love and serve God alone (see Deut 6:13). Thus, Jesus defeats the evil one and becomes an example of single-minded love and devotion to God. Paul will describe Jesus as the ‘new Adam’ who rewrites history.

### **The Temptation → Sin → Salvation Theme in the Second Reading**

While Matthew sees Jesus as the ‘new Moses’, Paul paints him as the ‘new Adam’ in today’s second reading to the Romans (see also 1 Cor 15:22; 45-49). Graphically the movement of the first reading is as follows: Adam → temptation → sin → death. Conversely, by overcoming temptations and sin, we see: Jesus → temptation → rejection of sin → New Life. This new life is not just a promise of future happiness but the outpouring of the “free gift of righteousness” and “abundance of grace” (v.17). God calls us to say “no” to Satan and “yes” to the New Adam, Christ.

**The Plea of the Psalmist for Forgiveness** (51) with the response: “Have mercy on us, O Lord, for we have sinned,” is a poignant psalm of David, guilty of adultery and murder, begging for a “pure heart” and “steadfast spirit”. This could be my prayer; for, “my offences, truly I know them.”

### **The Triple Effect of Sin**

*Sin Poisons the ‘Self’* – The ‘original sin’ of our First Parents has apparently lost ‘originality’ since we, their progeny, repeatedly reenact their ‘fall’. The ‘swollen head’ (hubris and egoism) and the ‘protruding belly’ (greed and selfishness), are sins that destroy our truest ‘self’, our very identity of being sons and daughters of God. Fasting can help us in this regard.

*Sin Severs our Ties with Others and with Mother Earth* – The beautiful relationship between man and woman is destroyed with Adam and Eve playing the ‘blame game’, each not willing to own up his/her own guilt. Furthermore, the saddest fallout of the ‘fall’ is that sin vitiates not only human beings but also the earth: “Cursed is the ground because of you!” (Gen 3:17). That’s why in ‘*Laudato Si*’ and ‘*Querida Amazonia*’ Pope Francis invites us to an ‘ecological conversion’ and ‘integral ecology’. Almsgiving can restore right relationships.

*Sin Makes us God-less* – We drive ourselves out of God’s Garden like prodigal sons and daughters who waste our lives in godlessness, love-lessness and lifelessness. Lent calls us to deepening our prayer life and relationship with God.

**A Limerick:** “In Genesis, Adam’s the winner; and Eve is denounced as the sinner; for the fruit she brings; that’s how men see things; He blames *her* when she brings dinner.” Let’s not play the blame-game but accept our own sinfulness and shortcomings.

**Prayer:** “O God, give us that promised abundance of grace that we may resolutely say, ‘begone, Satan! and ‘welcome, Lord Jesus!’ in resisting evil and accepting You into our lives.”

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