

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

First Sunday of Lent

First reading:

(Genesis 2.7-9, 16-18, 25; 3.1-7)

The Garden of Eden

In Lent, the readings are especially carefully chosen. The first readings work through the history of salvation, starting with the story of un-salvation, which makes it all necessary: the Fall of Adam and Eve.

Presented in the form of a historical story, this is not really history of what happened long ago to the first man (Adam means generically 'man') and woman. Rather, it is an analysis of what happens to us every day, an image of how sin happens: we are subtly tempted to go against what we know are the divine commandments for life. Look at the way the serpent flatters Eve to make her pleased with herself and so fall all the easier! We fall, come to our senses and find ourselves naked and defenceless. Even so, God does not desert the creatures he loves. He comes to their aid, to help them over the worst: he himself sews garments for them to ease their shame, and finally - a few verses later - promises that evil will not eventually prevail.

Other cultures have other stories of how evil comes into being, but only the Hebraeo-Christian story ends with the assurance that evil will be conquered, that the seed of the woman will crush the head of the serpent.

Question:

Does the story ring true? Fit it to your own experience!

Second reading:

(Romans 5.12-19)

The Second Adam

Paul's letter to the Romans sets out in glowing confidence and clarity the process by which evil was overcome.

Just as the representative of all humanity, Adam, turned away from God, and by his disobedience set humanity on a course leading to disaster, so Christ, by his supreme act of loving obedience, turned back the course of human destiny. Only Christ, who was not only the supreme Man, but more than man, could so reverse the course of history and bring to God the homage of the human race that would wipe away and extirpate the rebellion from God wrought by human disobedience.

We know full well that we were born into a world in which evil begets evil, fraud begets fraud, violence begets violence, jealousy begets jealousy. Salvation consists in the conscious act of putting our faith in Christ, in the reversal he achieved. This is normally - but not always -

expressed in baptism, by which we enter into Christ and clothe ourselves in his redemption. So the one man, Adam, prefigures the one Man, Christ. Only the direction is reversed. Adam is paradigm of rebellion from God; Christ the paradigm of loving obedience to God.

Question:

Can those who have never heard of Christ enter into his salvation??

Commentary on Sunday Scripture – Year A

Gospel:

(Matthew 4.1-11)

The Testing of Jesus

By putting this scene of the testing of Jesus at the beginning of Lent, the Church shows that it sees Lent as a period of testing.

Matthew sees this moment as the testing of God's Son, just as the People of God Israel - God's son, whom he brought out of Egypt into the desert - was tested for 40 years. We may also see it as the time when Jesus reflected on the mode of his mission. His mission was to bring the Kingship of God to a new realization: how should he do this?

The Tempter suggests false ways, which Jesus rejects, one after another, each time with a word from scripture, the Word of God. He rejects the idea of the Messiah merely producing the luxury of the plenteous messianic banquet (stones into food). He rejects the idea of a startling personal miracle that none could gainsay (the leap from the Temple). He rejects the suggestion of entering into league with the Tempter's own values of pride and dominion (rule over the world).

At the same time Jesus shows himself to be the Second Moses, the founder of a new People of God: like Moses, he spends 40 days and 40 nights fasting; like Moses he is taken up onto a high mountain, from where he can see not merely all the territory of the Holy Land, but all the kingdoms of the earth.

Question:

What is the chief fault that tempts the Church away from the way of Christ today?
