

FROM THE PASTOR'S



Twelfth Sunday in Ordinary Time, June 22, 2008 A

ORIGINAL SIN

In today's second reading, we hear these words from Paul:

Through one man sin entered the world, and the sin, death, and thus death came to all people. . Romans 5:12

This is the verse of scripture on which Catholic belief or doctrine concerning original sin is based. This is chapter seven from *Father McBride's College Catechism*. We sold 200 copies of the book in our parish a few years ago.

"Sin is not simply a weakness we can overcome, but rather a condition from which we have to be saved."

Robert Barron

Enjoy the Whole Garden, Except. . .

God created Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden. God told them to enjoy the goods of creation, including the beauty and company of each other. They were to cultivate the garden and use their gifts of mind, will, and imagination to make the world flourish around them.

They could eat the fruit of all the trees, including presumably the Tree of Life. But they should not eat of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. God set a limit to their earthly achievements. God gave them a drive to a goal that surpassed their natural powers to see and understand. To reach that end they would need revelation.

They could grasp a lot. But they needed obedience and prayerful submission so they could be led forward by God and given the gift of a vision they could not attain on their own.

The forbidden Tree was a symbol of human limits and mastery. We have an infinite hunger that cannot be satisfied by finite means. Trust alone in the Mystery of God makes possible the next step.

The serpent persuaded Eve that human aggressiveness can acquire whatever it wants by its own power. He painted God as a jealous rival. He introduced fear into paradise. She should fear that God will crush us with laws. The serpent intimated to her that God is afraid that we would threaten him and his control of us.

Eve surrendered to the serpent's temptation. Fear replaced the innocence that was based on love of and trust in God. She convinced Adam to do the same.

The man and woman immediately hid their genitals, a sign of what was most personal and intimate between them. For the first time they wore the armor of defensiveness.

Next, they heard God's voice seeking them out, and they hid in the bushes. They had declared independence from God. They wanted to live where God could not find them and interfere with them.

Of course, God easily found them.

"Where are you?"

"I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid," says Adam.

There we have the story of Original Sin. Afraid. Naked. Hidden. Fear has replaced trust. A cover-up of the self is needed to defend the ego from God. Hiding is running from God so we can be independent of him.

The blame game began. The serpent blamed God. Eve blamed the serpent. Adam blamed Eve. Personal responsibility was abdicated.

Adam and Eve lost the garden. Childbirth would be painful. Farming the garden of a fallen world would be difficult. Suffering and death would be part of life.

In this dark moment God promised a new creation, a redemption that would be greater than the first creation. To the serpent God said, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He will strike at your head while you strike at his heel." (Gen 3:15)

In chapter six we looked at man and woman as images of God. The story of Adam, Eve and the serpent explains how the originating evil came about and affects us to this day. This is the topic that now lies before us.

What Are We to Think About Original Sin?

Some say . . .

We should forget about original sin. When God made us he said, "That's good!" we are born good. Anyone who looks at the fresh innocence of a baby can tell that. We are not conceived or born in sin. We are original blessings, not shadowed by sin. Baptism is not needed to take away any sin for our birth is an event of goodness. We are intrinsically good. Of course we are not perfect, but that is due to a psychological weakness that can be corrected by therapy. Or it could

be traced to a flaw in our development that can be healed by patient education and recourse to positive thinking.

Others conclude that if one is pressed to describe original sin, it should be attributed to a sinful situation. Inadequate social structures, violent homes and neighborhoods, ignorance of leaders, and similar social problems are the real original sin. It is a social problem, not a personal moral flaw. It is the bad vibrations of a society gone awry rather than any assumed internal moral weakness due to inherited original sin. We arrive good. We learn how to be bad from the sinful environment around us.

The Catechism teaches. . . . “By one man’s disobedience many (that is all) were made sinners. . . Then as one man’s trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man’s (Christ’s) act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men.” (Rom 5:12;19)

What was the original state of Adam and Eve?

They lived in a state of original holiness and justice. Their spiritual powers controlled their bodies and passions. The union of man and woman was marked by harmony and love. They related to creation peacefully and fruitfully. They related to God with love, trust, and obedience.

What was lost through their disobedience?

They were deprived of original holiness and justice. The flesh now warred against the spirit. Husband and wife began to experience tensions, lust, and the quest for domination. Nature became a hostile environment that needed to be tamed. Their attitudes to God were colored by fear, the cover-up of self and a “hiding” from God to gain independence from the Lord. Suffering and death entered history.

How did Adam’s sin become the sin of his descendants?

All humanity is contained in Adam as one man. Because of the unity of the human race very one is touched by Adam’s sin, just as each person is affected by Christ’s justice. The Council of Trent teaches that original sin is transmitted by propagation, not by imitation. *But the transmission of original sin is a mystery we cannot fully understand.* Following St. Paul, the Church’s faith has always believed that Adam’s sin is transmitted to us when we are conceived.

Do we commit original sin? No. We inherit it. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice.

Is our human nature totally corrupted or just wounded? Our human nature is wounded, not fully corrupted. St. Thomas Aquinas speaks of five wounds of original sin:

1. Ignorance. We have difficulty in knowing the truth.
2. Malice. We are inclined to act from uncharitable motives.
3. Weakness in Will. We find it hard to choose the good.
4. Disorder in Passions. We let emotions control behavior.
5. Suffering and Death. We face pain and the finality of death.

Is original sin a stain on our souls?

The image of stain has a long history in religious language. Since the soul is spiritual it cannot have a physical mark. The use of the term “stain” was meant as an image of the deprivation of original holiness and justice due to the disobedience of Adam and Eve.

What is another way to imagine original sin’s impact on us?

Another possibility is to envision the effect of original sin as a source of evil energy within us. We endure an originating evil that pulls us away from God. Baptism takes away original sin, but not the damage. The wounds mentioned above remain as powers, movements, surges that incline us to evil thoughts words and deeds.

Why did not God prevent Adam and Eve from sinning?

God would not take away the freedom that assures our humanity. Thomas Aquinas wrote, “There is nothing to prevent human nature’s being raised up to something greater even after sin. . . Thus St. Paul says, ‘Where sin increased, grace abounded all the more (Rom 5:20).’ and the Exultet sings, ‘O happy fault,. . . Which gained for us so great a Redeemer!’”

1. What was the substance of the first sin?

“Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God’s command. This is what man’s first sin consisted of. (Cf. Gen 3:1-11; Rom 5:19) All subsequent sin would be disobedience toward God and lack of trust in his goodness.” (CCC 397) CCC = Catechism of the Catholic Church.

2. What did the Church adopt from Augustine on original sin?

“The Church’s teaching on the transmission of original sin was articulated more precisely in the fifth century, especially under the impulse of Augustine’s reflections against Pelagianism. . . Pelagius held that man could, by the natural power of free will and without the necessary help of God’s grace, lead a morally good life; he thus reduced the influence of Adam’s fault to bad example. . . We therefore hold with the Council of Trent that original sin is transmitted with human nature ’by

propagation, not by imitation...’ (Paul VI CPG,16).” (CCC 406, 419)

3. What are we to say about Mary and original sin?

“Many Fathers and Doctors of the Church have seen the woman announced in the *Protoevangelium* as Mary, the mother of Christ, the ‘new Eve.’ Mary benefited first of all and uniquely from Christ’s victory over sin: she was preserved from all stain of original sin and by a special grace of God committed no sin of any kind during her whole earthly life. (CCC 411)

St. Paul wrote of inner conflicts he experienced, doing what he should not do, not doing what he should. How would you relate our chapters on Image of God and Original Sin to Paul’s inner warfare? What is the value of seeing Image of God and Original Sin as sources of good and bad energy fields driving your inner life and seeking domination of your inner self? What would you do to overcome the effects of the wounds of original sin on your life?

Prayer

Lord Jesus, my Redeemer, thank you for your incarnation, life, teachings, passion, death, and resurrection. By your paschal mystery, you have made possible our liberation from original and actual sin. We thus can know from our experience that where sin abounds, grace does more abound. Your love is stronger than any sin or evil. Whether inherited or actual. We therefore realize that reflection on original sin must include your saving work for you are the center and Lord of history. Through you must be seen the whole picture of the drama of salvation. Praise be to you, Lord Jesus Christ now and forever Amen!

Glossary

Original Holiness and Justice—Revelation teaches us that before sin occurred, man and woman lived in a state of original holiness and justice. There was no suffering or death and they lived in harmony with themselves, creation, and God.

Original Sin—By their disobedience, Adam and Eve were deprived of original holiness and justice. We inherit from them this deprivation, which is called original sin.

Effects of Original Sin—Because of original sin, human nature is weakened. We are affected by ignorance, suffering, and death and the inclination to sin which is called concupiscence.

Devils—Satan (the devil) and other demons are fallen angels who defied God. They tempt us to revolt against God.

Protoevangelium, “First Gospel” - God did not abandon us after the Fall, but announced that a Messiah would come, that there would be a battle between the serpent and the woman’s descendant who would achieve the final victory over evil. (Cf Gen 3:9, 15) (CCC 410)

“Adam was but human-this explains it all. He did not want the apple for the apple’s sake, he wanted it only because it was forbidden.”

Mark Twain

Fr. Charles arrives this coming Tuesday from Malta.

Fr. Eamon leaves for Spokane, Washington. He will be giving a retreat over the weekend and will stay on there for a week. Father will be back July 8th.

Have a blessed week,

Fr. Eamon