

Sunday 1st March 2020
The First Sunday of Lent
Purple



Collect

Almighty God, whose Son Jesus Christ fasted forty days in the wilderness, and was tempted as we are, yet without sin: give us grace to discipline ourselves in obedience to your Spirit; and, as you know our weakness, so may we know your power to save; through Jesus Christ your Son our Lord, who is alive and reigns with you, in the unity of the Holy Spirit, one God, now and for ever. **Amen**

Genesis 2:15-17, 3:1-7 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Garden of Eden

2¹⁵ The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶ And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷ but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat^[a] of it you shall surely die.”

The Fall

3¹ Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the LORD God had made.

He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You^[b] shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” ² And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³ but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴ But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵ For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶ So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise,^[c] she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷ Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

Footnotes: a. or *when you eat*. b. in Hebrew *you* is plural in verses 1-5. c. or *to give insight*.

COMMENT: “In Adam’s sin, we sinnèd all” read an old New England catechism taught to children as their first reading lesson. That is the thrust of this brief excerpt from the story of the Garden of Eden, albeit greatly elaborated by the gospel lesson below. Some may prefer the literalist view which regards it as something other than a myth, but there is little strength to such a position. The geography of the story appears to have been drawn from an ancient Near Eastern tradition of an idyllic garden from which rivers flowed. Some have placed it in the Tigris-Euphrates River valley in Mesopotamia (meaning the land between two rivers) which is now modern Iraq. In Genesis 2-3, however, this garden is no simple paradise, but a

place created by God in which humans live, eat and work. It thus functions as a symbol of the unbroken relationships between God and humanity, and between humanity and nature. The story told in 2:4-3:15 describes how these relationships were broken by the deliberate disobedience of the humans to whom God had given exclusive but limited oversight of the garden. In Ezekiel the expulsion from Eden after the Fall serves a metaphor of judgment against nations (Ezekiel 28:11-19; 31:8-9,16,18); and in Joel 2:3 as a metaphor for the coming “day of the Lord”. Adam and Eve, with the temptations to which they succumbed implies that the degradation of humanity came about as result of deliberate choice freely made by both of them. For this they bore the inevitable consequences of being driven from Eden and thereafter to find suffering the human condition. The redactor of the story provides the picture of the serpent as being the craftiest and best informed of creatures (3:1, 4-5) appears as friendly to Eve, but also as the LORD’s antagonist opposing the divine purpose with disastrous results for all concerned (verses 14-19). This had implications for later eschatological references to serpents (e.g. Isaiah 11:8; 65:25) as well as in the exegesis of the story by apocryphal and New Testament authors. The Genesis story of the fall reminds us that the choice between good and evil, right and wrong, creativity and destruction is always ours to make. Ours too is the responsibility for making that choice and being accountable for the consequences. During Lent we have the opportunity acknowledge our failures, turn back to God, receive forgiveness and begin anew to walk in God’s way.

Matthew 4:1-11 English Standard Version (ESV)

The Temptation of Jesus

4¹ Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. ² And after fasting forty days and forty nights, he was hungry. ³ And the tempter came and said to him, “If you are the Son of God, command these stones to become loaves of bread”. ⁴ But he answered, “It is written, ‘Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.’” ⁵ Then the devil took him to the holy city and set him on the pinnacle of the temple ⁶ and 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 ‘On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.’” ⁷ Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” ⁸ Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. ⁹ And he said to him, “All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me.” ¹⁰ Then Jesus said to him, “Be gone, Satan! For it is written, ‘You shall worship the Lord your God and him only shall you serve.’” ¹¹ Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him.

COMMENT: Lent recalls the forty days Jesus spent in the wilderness in preparation for his ministry. At the same time, we must recall that Matthew echoes the Old Testament passages in which both Moses and Elijah are said to have spent similar periods of fasting in the wilderness (Exodus 32:28; 1 Kings 19:8). As for them, so for Jesus; the sojourn in the wilderness involved a deep spiritual experience. Our word ‘devil’ translates the Greek ‘diabolos’ which originally meant ‘accuser’ or ‘slandered’. In the Septuagint (LXX), it was used to translate the Hebrew word ‘satan’, meaning ‘adversary’. By 200 BC the name ‘Satan’

had become the embodiment of evil, with the Greek equivalent being used in the New Testament. Matthew, who casts Jesus as the new Moses, is probably here contrasting Jesus with Adam as did Paul some twenty years earlier; Romans 5:12-20, 1 Corinthians 15:20-22, 44-49, and the writer to the Hebrews fifteen years earlier [4:15] noting that Jesus “in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin”. Adam succumbed to temptation, Jesus held firm. However the experience of his being tempted may be interpreted, Jesus had to make some very meaningful choices. How was he to carry out his mission? The three temptations were options he had to consider and reject because they were not God’s will for him. Had he chosen any of them, he would not be our Saviour and Lord. This issue takes us to the heart of the Lord’s Prayer – “lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil”. Sometimes we can be called to make ‘life choices’ in circumstances where there is a moral choice – will we choose the right path?

Psalm 32 *Beati quorum* Grail Psalter

℟ Happy the man to whom the Lord imputes no guilt.

¹ Happy the man whose offence is forgiven,
whose sin is remitted.

² O happy the man to whom the Lord
imputes no guilt,
in whose spirit is no guile. ℟

³ I kept it secret and my frame was wasted.
I groaned all day long,
4 for night and day your hand was heavy upon me.
Indeed my strength was dried up
as by the summer’s heat. ℟

⁵ But now I have acknowledged my sins;
my guilt I did not hide.
I said: “I will confess
my offense to the Lord. “
And you, Lord, have forgiven
the guilt of my sin. ℟

⁶ So let every good man pray to you
in the time of need.
The floods of water may reach high
but him they shall not reach.

⁷ You are my hiding place, O Lord;
you save me from distress.
(You surround me with cries of deliverance.) ℟

⁸ I will instruct you and teach you
the way you should go;
I will give you counsel
with my eye upon you. ℟

⁹ Be not like horse and mule, unintelligent,
needing bridle and bit
else they will not approach you.

¹⁰ Many sorrows has the wicked
but he who trusts in the Lord,
loving mercy surrounds him. ✠

¹¹ Rejoice, rejoice in the Lord,
exult, you just!
O come, ring out your joy,
all you upright of heart.

✠ **Happy the man to whom the Lord imputes no guilt**

**Glory be to the Father and to the Son
and to the Holy Spirit,
As it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be,
world without end. Amen.**

COMMENT: This is a witness to the assurance of God’s forgiveness for the penitent soul. It acknowledges both the universal sinfulness of humanity and the prevenient mercy or grace of God (a grace that precedes even our willingness to repent or confess). **NOTE:** The term “prevenient grace” refers to a universal grace, which precedes and enables the first stirrings of a good will or inclination toward God – he leads us to himself – we need to follow that lead. The doctrine of prevenient grace can lead on to Calvinism (from John Calvin [1509-1564]) – which states that we are dead in sin and cannot save ourselves, and only those whom God chooses come to faith through that grace. However it can be equally argued that “whosoever will may come” (Arminianism from Jacobus Arminius [1560–1609]) as in Acts 2:21; “And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved”. Other texts carry a similar call; Joel 2:32, and Revelation 22:17.

Short Preface

And now we give you thanks because you give us the spirit of discipline, that we may triumph over evil and grow in grace, as we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed.

Post Communion

Lord God, you have renewed us with the living bread from heaven; by it you nourish our faith, increase our hope, and strengthen our love: teach us always to hunger for him who is the true and living bread, and enable us to live by every word that proceeds from out of your mouth; through Jesus Christ our Lord. **Amen**

Blessing

Christ give you grace to grow in holiness, to deny yourselves, take up your cross, and follow him; and the blessing of God almighty, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, be among you, and remain with you always. **Amen.**