

FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT [A]

Genesis 2:7-9, 3:1-7; Psalm 51; Romans 5:12-19; Matthew 4:1-11

Today – the First Sunday of Lent - the Church gives us readings that bring us right back to the spiritual basics.

Where is humanity first placed by God? God places the first human beings in The Garden, in the perfectly delightful setting of His creation. From the beginning God deeply desires proximity and intimacy with us – there are no barriers, there are not obstacles, there are no secrets. In the beginning God seems to it that there is no distance between God and us, there is nothing keeping us from walking easily delightful with God.

The Garden is the place of absolute delight for the human senses.

In stark contrast, recall the stories about the pagan myths. Greek gods, Roman gods and all other pagan cultures depicted gods as rivals – as rivals to each other and humans were seen as rivals to God. Recall the epic stories of human figures seeking to steal something of the gods to bring it back to earth with the hopes of their own becoming a god.

Friends, there is nothing of this in the Bible.

The One True God wants what is best for us. Using the image of Genesis, God wants us to live in The Garden as perfectly at ease with Him.

In the Garden, tower two trees. Imagine the majestic one in the center – the Tree of Life; imagine it just teeming with life and all for our ease, delight and joy!

The other is the tree of the knowledge of good and bad. God's only prohibition is that humanity not eat of the fruit of this tree.

Why? Well, God alone is the objective standard of what is good. Only God can establish this criterion – we cannot. We do not determine goodness and badness – God does. We participate in the good when we follow God's promptings and teachings; we participate in the bad when we disobey God's ways.

To eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad is to seek to take that which belongs to God and only to God.

God does not prohibit us because God is difficult or temperamental or moody. Think of it rather as "spiritual physics" - we do not have the capacity or power to establish ourselves as the gauge of good and evil.

Notice how the serpent seeks to seduce humanity: "you certainly will not die." How interesting that the serpent does not say "there is no God" or "the Garden is

all make believe.” No – the devil firmly believes in God. [An aside: this is seen also in Matthew’s Gospel for today].

What the devil effectively tries to do is to tempt us into seeing *God as our rival*. The devil seeks to get us to believe that God is holding back from us, that God is scared of us, that God puts us down, keeps us at bay and wants us less than fully alive.

This is the very point of view held by pagan myths!

The devil seeks to puff Adam and Eve up with the suggestion that they can become no less than gods themselves.

The temptation for us to become God is the source of our greatest suffering.

How does this happen? Well, I assert that my freedom comes first! I declare that my freedom trumps all the freedoms of others! I determine what is good for me and rationalize my taking what I want.

And in that instant, The Garden becomes a desert. Just like that, the divine life is cut-off, God’s life is cut-off and not because God leaves us but because we want to live apart from God.

In contrast to The Garden for which we have been created to live, when we sever our proper relationship with God as His children, we choose the desert, a place of barrenness and lifelessness.

When we make our own freedom, we act as though you are God.

Said differently, **the original language of love [The Garden] devolves into the language of conflict and rivalry [the desert].**

And accusations are hurled upon one another: “She made me do it! He made me do it.”

Friends, prior to their disobeying God Adam and Eve are unselfconsciously naked – they are perfectly at ease with God and each other – no drama, no treachery, no deception, no cunning. Only after having tried to become like God do they suddenly have to cover up and protect.

We are all spiritual descendents to Adam and Eve. That is why we are so afraid to show ourselves to others. That is why there is such resistance to be transparent and honest with each other and God.

When we try to be God, we hide behind 21st fig leaves like titles, decrees, positions, salaries, homes, bank accounts, sarcastic comments, broodings and resentments.

This Lent, let's get back to the basics. This Lent let's work our way back to where we belong – in The Garden. The great adventure of human life is to live in the Garden where we alone find and experience the true freedom through easy living with God.