

- The story of man's creation in our first reading from Genesis reminds us how the Creator formed Man as a special creation—superior to all other earthly creatures.
- But with that great privilege comes great responsibility—and having given Man this unequalled gift, God expects in return obedience and reverence...and love.
- But Man...because of pride, refused obedience—with disastrous results that would have been everlasting had not the mercy of God intervened.
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- People often ask how to read the first chapters of Genesis with all its wonderful stories.
- Now the books of the Bible are written in different styles and genres—poetry, history, prophecy, etc.
- The first 11 chapters of Genesis—the creation stories, Noah, the tower of Babel, and the like—were not written to be a simple forensic, mechanistic detailing of exactly HOW God created... but rather that it was indeed He—the one God—who did create all that there is.
- The Genesis accounts give reasons why He created...how Man achieved his unique position...moving towards the account of the establishment of His Chosen people—the Israelites...who foreshadow the complete and eternal story of salvation—not of a certain race or nation, but of all men and women who follow Jesus to become God's true and eternal people.
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- Now if you read the early fathers of the Church, even they knew this—not utilizing a strict literal reading of Genesis, but rather extracting divine truths from a deeper, analogical meaning.
- Only in 1800s—largely because of the vast number of varied interpretations of the Bible and of Jesus...did many retreat into what they saw as a safe zone—the absolute literal translation of books in the Bible...even though many were never written as or meant to be used as simply a recitation of historical facts.

- Granted, early Genesis is much more historical than simply a parable or legend, but neither is it simply a history text.
- But...there is no need to tie ourselves up in knots about where the literal ends and analogy begins.
- God's basic essential truths ARE contained in early Genesis—primarily the existence of the One and only God who is source of all power, knowledge, justice and mercy...who created not only all that we see, but also all that we cannot see—and created Man in His image as a special being—both spiritual and material.
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- This is important to realize because well-established science conflicts starkly with a rigidly literal reading of Genesis...and that causes confusion, ridicule, and disbelief of the faith.
- But a proper reading of Genesis conflicts with science and reason none at all. In fact, as Blessed John Paul II reminded us in his encyclical Faith and Reason, true faith and true science cannot conflict, because they both have God as their origin.
- Science we determine from our God-given reason. Faith we discern from God-given revelation.
- In fact, one can be surprised at how science and faith coincide. For instance, the Big Bang theory aligns very much with the account of God creating—all was void, and God said: "*Let there be light*"...and all creation follows.
- Now as for Man himself—he, like all of God's creation, was created Good.
- Eden is a description of the man's bliss before sin...before his rebellion against his Creator.
- The Tree of the knowledge of good and evil is a symbol for man's choice of conduct in relation to God.
- And that's easy enough for us to realize. Reverence for God brings good; refusal to obey and to revere God brings consequences...just as it is with children and parents.

- Parents: Remember how your very young children were...perfect in your eyes, as Man was in God's.
- And yet...with the remnants of Original Sin, in pride and selfishness they begin to disobey, to rebel, to lie.
- Remember your pain and disappointment when they moved out of their newborn innocence into rebellion against you.
- So...is it so difficult for us to put ourselves in God's place...our all-loving God who remembers the sweet innocence of Mankind's youth, and yet now has rebellious children?

- The serpent in the garden is Satan—a spiritual, intellectual, and very real creature who has chosen to be an enemy of God.
- Satan's hatred of God comes from His loss of angelic bliss resulting His refusal to serve...and his jealousy and hatred of Man stems from the favor God gives to Man.
- Satan strikes at Man to strike at God, and yet he hates us furiously because we are, in a way, given his place before God among the angels...while he is condemned to live eternally away from the love and joy of Heaven.
- I still remember a line in a movie that I saw when I was young, where Satan was asked where Hell was...and Satan replied:
“When you've known the perfect joy of Heaven, anywhere else IS Hell.”

- What was Satan's bait to lead Man astray? Pride...telling Man:
“You need not obey, reverence or be subject to God; you can be His equal!”
- He even tries to set Man against God, as he tells Eve: *“God knows well that the moment you eat of [the forbidden fruit] your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods”*.
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- Isn't that part of our self-justification of sin...believing that we are “missing out” on something? Isn't that what we hear...that the

Church just doesn't want us to have "fun".

- The result of disobedience...then and now: Eyes opened...the realization of being horribly deceived...and consequences.
- Like us, Adam and Eve had a choice...and they chose disobedience...leading to the loss of blessing...loss of much of grace...and the resulting disorders of mind and body—man now knowing the good, but lured toward evil.
- Satan is revealed to Man as the liar...the deceiver. As Jesus says, he is the father of lies...and lying is his nature.
- God is truth, and Satan tempts us away from truth—away from God—because he abhors the truth.
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- To Satan, we are incidental...inconsequential. What happens to us is but collateral damage.
- But we are his vehicle for trying to strike at God in his hatred.
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- But God, in His great love sent us one to save us from ourselves and from Satan's hatred—Jesus.
- As John tells us: *"In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins."* (1John 4:9-10)
- This love is the whole meaning of the cross. This love is the whole meaning of the incarnation, crucifixion death and resurrection of Jesus.
- God had no need of man. God simply out of sheer Goodness created man. He creates Man not out of need, but simply in order to share His goodness and love.
- So in this Lenten season, remember: "I am created by God out of pure love...not to be simply one in faceless billions, but rather He

purposely and intentionally created ME...to love me, to cherish me, to hold me to his heart.”

- One day God said: *“From all eternity I have planned for and longed to create my dear child (names of some in congregation) ... and today I finally create this dearly beloved of my heart...to cherish him/her for all eternity.”*
- So let us strive to love God in return...providing Him a parent’s joy in His child’s turning from rebellion, and seeking the Good by obedience and reverence.
- For *“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him.”*

Reading 1

[Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7](#)

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being.

Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made.

The serpent asked the woman, “Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?”

The woman answered the serpent:

“We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, ‘You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.’”

But the serpent said to the woman:

“You certainly will not die!

No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil.”

The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom.

So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it.

Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

Responsorial Psalm

[Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17](#)

R. (cf. 3a) Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Have mercy on me, O God, in your goodness;
in the greatness of your compassion wipe out my offense.
Thoroughly wash me from my guilt
and of my sin cleanse me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

For I acknowledge my offense,
and my sin is before me always:
“Against you only have I sinned,
and done what is evil in your sight.”

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

A clean heart create for me, O God,
and a steadfast spirit renew within me.
Cast me not out from your presence,
and your Holy Spirit take not from me.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Give me back the joy of your salvation,
and a willing spirit sustain in me.
O Lord, open my lips,
and my mouth shall proclaim your praise.

R. Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.

Reading II

[Rom 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19](#)

Brothers and sisters:

Through one man sin entered the world,
and through sin, death,
and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned—
for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world,
though sin is not accounted when there is no law.
But death reigned from Adam to Moses,
even over those who did not sin
after the pattern of the trespass of Adam,
who is the type of the one who was to come.

But the gift is not like the transgression.

For if by the transgression of the one, the many died,
how much more did the grace of God
and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ
overflow for the many.

And the gift is not like the result of the one who sinned.

For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation;
but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal.

For if, by the transgression of the one,

death came to reign through that one,
how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace
and of the gift of justification
come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ.
In conclusion, just as through one transgression
condemnation came upon all,
so, through one righteous act,
acquittal and life came to all.
For just as through the disobedience of the one man
the many were made sinners,
so, through the obedience of the one,
the many will be made righteous.

or

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Gospel

[Mt 4:1-11](#)

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert
to be tempted by the devil.
He fasted for forty days and forty nights,
and afterwards he was hungry.
The tempter approached and said to him,
“If you are the Son of God,
command that these stones become loaves of bread.”
He said in reply,

“It is written:

*One does not live on bread alone,
but on every word that comes forth
from the mouth of God.”*

Then the devil took him to the holy city,
and made him stand on the parapet of the temple,
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 with their hands they will support you,
lest you dash your foot against a stone.”*

Jesus answered him,

“Again it is written,

You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test.”

Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain,
and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence,
and he said to him, “All these I shall give to you,
if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.”

At this, Jesus said to him,

“Get away, Satan!

It is written:

*The Lord, your God, shall you worship
and him alone shall you serve.”*

Then the devil left him and, behold,
angels came and ministered to him.