

Commentary on the Gospel for Sun, Mar 5th 2017

In our First Reading for this liturgy, we hear of one garden, two newly-minted beings and two trees surrounded by various varieties of flora and fauna. Ah yes, I forgot about the serpent. How did it slither in without my notice?

All good stories and plays have an inciting incident in order to accelerate the action. What would you say is the real beginning of the energy or excitement of this story? It could be the announcement that everything was good and available, everything that is, except touching or eating of one of the trees. Maybe, but for the sake of my imagination, let us say that it is Mrs. Adam's desire for wisdom. God has forbidden them to eat of "the tree of the knowledge of good and evil". Eve is tempted by the serpent to eat of the forbidden tree. Why would she want to have that kind of knowledge? She and her mate wanted the "quick and easy". God did not say exactly what would result from eating of the other tree, the "tree of Life". Perhaps eating of that tree would invite a taste for more life, but that would take a life of time and tasting. Eating of the "knowledge tree" would result in self-fascination and a "leaf-covering" shame of negativity. Eating from this tree faced them both with the struggle about what is good and what is bad about them.

The "tree of Life" would have resulted in their seeing what God had said about all of creation, including them, that all was good and that they were "very good". Alas, they wanted a sound-bite; a something which would solve incompleteness. What they received was their life-long struggle to learn from the "tree of life" the wisdom that comes from the long-and-hard climb up the branches of life.

In the reading from Paul to the Romans, it is comforting to hear about how disobedience, literally "not-listening", is contrasted to the "listening" of the "New Adam, Jesus". One sin of one man is contrasted with the one life of receiving himself and living that life to its end on the "Tree of the Cross."

The Gospel for today is the account of Jesus' beginning his living his identity. In the verses immediately before what we hear, we read of Jesus being announced as the "beloved" of the Father in Whom God is well pleased. Jesus heard what the Father had said, and was sent to live that identity.

So the rising action of His story takes place quite quickly. The devil has Him where he wants Him. Jesus is hungry, vulnerable unsupported by anything except his name.

In three straight little stories, the Tempter is back at it. "Forget yourself, your name, what you heard and listen to what others would say of you. You changed stones into bread. You went flying off the ledge and landed safely. You now have all the kingdoms, handed to you by the real creator of what life can be." Jesus seems to laugh at the Devil's silly invitations to forget or deny His Self and His relationship with His Father and His Father's Kingdom.

The Tempter is the fashioner of the "quick-and easy" style of life. The Tempter is still working on humanity to convince us that knowledge is wisdom and it can be obtained googily or by drinking this or doing that. Jesus lived the life now traveled by those de-fig-leafed by God's love. Lent is the time for letting our names and identities be listened to again. We are walking life's road toward our being

immersed again in the waters of Easter. We are encouraged and graced to continue climbing the “Tree of Life” and rejoicing in the wisdom-fruit it offers to the patient climbers.

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