

A small boy opened the big family bible. He was fascinated as he fingered through the old pages. Suddenly something fell out of the Bible. He picked up the object and looked at it. What he saw was an old leaf that had been pressed in between the pages. "Mama, look what I found," the boy called out. "What have you got there, dear?" With astonishment in the small boy's voice, he answered "I think it's Adam's underwear!" (from an email) I'm going to focus on our first reading today from Genesis, a passage one wag said was an argument over who would wear the PLANTS in the family." Another summed up the whole story of Adam and Eve this way: After Adam and Eve were expelled from Eden, their son Cain, while out walking with his father, noticed the beautiful Garden and asked, "Why don't WE live there?" To which Adam replied, 'Son, we USED to live there, but your mother ATE us out of house and home!' (PREACHING WELL, POB 3102, Margate NJ, p. 3) OK, enough silliness. Let's get on with the three point torture.

First, in the Book of Genesis, it is explained that sin came into the world as a result of lack of faith in God's word and providence. Eve fell for devious propaganda. The serpent said she could be like a god, cunningly causing her to forget that she had already been created in the divine image. The serpent had succeeded in launching the first false advertising campaign in history. We have been the victims of false advertising ever since. (adapted from CELEBRATION, 10 June 2018, p. 2)

We are also told in Genesis that, before their sin, "the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed." Nakedness is a symbol of innocence. Before the sin, the man and the woman could be in each other's presence "naked and without shame." They could appear before each other "unclothed," without masks, without defense mechanisms, without the need for psychological games, without pretenses. They could appear before each other in all their vulnerability, because, before they sinned, they trusted themselves and consequently trusted the other. Hence there was no need to hide things, to be protective. By sinning, they lost more than their innocence. They lost their trust in themselves and, consequently, their trust in each other. They could no longer be comfortable when they were fully vulnerable to each other, and now found it necessary to protect themselves, to hide nakedness and vulnerability, to put clothes on. Sin drove both of them behind respective shelters and effectively put a rift into their former free, trusting, 'naked' relationship. They now began to live in loneliness, partially hidden from each other. (adapted from THE RESTLESS HEART: FINDING OUR SPIRITUAL HOME, Ronald Rolheiser, p. 77-78)

Second, this act of disobedience brings about suffering. Adam fell into separateness and self-loathing. Henri Nouwen believed that original sin could only be described as "humanity's endless capacity for self-rejection." Adam thought he had left the garden, and he had, but the garden fortunately never left him. In the very first conversation God had with humanity, Yahweh questions Adam about his self-doubt and self-loathing that came from his feeling cut off. "Who told you that you were naked?" he asks Adam, almost as if to say, "I sure didn't!" Immediately, Yahweh, in a most nurturing and protective image, 'made clothes and put them on him,' (Gen 3:21) although earlier in the text we are told that after they ate the fruit, Adam & Eve themselves made loincloths out of fig leaves.

God is always covering our nakedness and silencing our shame. It's a big part of the work of a priest in the confessional – to convince people not to shame themselves, for God never does. God always wants to invite us forward, into freedom, into love and lightness; God never wants to beat us down or beat us up. A good confessor is a doctor of healing, not a judge handing down punishments. God's work is always to help us. Only the original manufacturer can declare what the product – we humans – should be. Nobody else. Our identity is written in our genes and enjoyed by God precisely in its specificity. This is the basis for all sin. We

stray from our true nature, which is made in the image and likeness of God. (adapted from Richard Rohr, ADAM'S RETURN, p. 159)

Third, the problem was that Adam and Eve no longer knew who or where they were. They had moved out of the gracious responsibility of tending the earth and honoring its produce to the terrible irresponsibility of seeking to become like God. Doubt, fear, selfishness, and disdain for the order of things created by God are now the bushes in which they hide. They no longer look at Creation and themselves with respect and honor, but rather with misplaced desire to HAVE rather than to CARE. God comes seeking them, even after their sin, but shame and fear have dissipated their longing for God. They no longer want to be found. We easily see in this story how timeless the stories of the Bible truly are. We are living them out in our day-to-day lives.

So what's the solution? It's to get back to the right order. And for this we have to go back to the very beginning. The ancient rabbinic interpreters appreciated Adam as the prototypical priest and the Garden of Eden as the primordial temple. In fact, the same Hebrew term is used to designate Adams' cultivation of the soil and, much later the priest's activity within the Jerusalem Temple. Adam, we are told, walked in easy fellowship with God in the cool of the evening and spoke to him as to a friend. This ordering of Adam to God meant that our first parent was effortlessly caught up in adoration. The term 'adoration' comes from the Latin 'adoratio,' which in turn is derived from 'ad ora' (to the mouth). To adore, therefore, is to be mouth to mouth with God, properly aligned to the divine source, breathing in God's life. When we are in the stance of adoration, the whole of our life – mind, will, emotions, imagination, sexuality – becomes ordered and harmonized, much as the elements of a rose window arrange themselves harmoniously around a central point. The beautiful garden in which the first priest lived is symbolic of the personal, and indeed, cosmic order that follows from adoration. This is why, by the biblical telling, orthodoxy, literally 'right praise,' is consistently defended as the key to flourishing and why idolatry, incorrect worship, is always characterized as the prime source of mischief and disharmony. The worship of false gods – putting something other than God at the center of our life – leads to the disintegration of our personhood and our society. Another way to say this is that we become what we worship. When God is our ultimate concern, we become conformed to Him; we become His sons and daughters. When we worship money, we become money mad; when we worship power, we become power brokers; when we worship popularity, we become shallow.

When we are baptized, as the oil of chrism is smeared onto us, the rite says: "As Christ was anointed priest, prophet and king, so may you LIVE as a member of His Body, sharing everlasting life." The priestly duty of all of us is to order our lives – so that creation, our world, our society, our families and communities, might return to right order, the order that God intended, the order that leads us – and the world – to salvation. The problem in our world is that it is DIS-ordered; we are worshiping the wrong things – money, fame, good looks, power, status. But once we know whom to worship, we know what to do. We are back to our proper stance – mouth-to-mouth with God – in adoratio. The Jerusalem Temple was constructed so as to be evocative of the Garden of Eden and to get this stance correct. It is a priestly stance. The Jerusalem temple was covered inside and out with symbols of the cosmos – planets, stars, plants, animals, and so forth – because, as we have seen, the ultimate purpose of our priestly lives is to order the universe itself, to return it to its originally designed state. Even the curtain that shielded the holy of holies was woven of fabrics dyed in four colors – purple for the sea, blue for the sky, green for the earth, and red for fire – for it represented the totality of the material realm that God had made. Our job is literally to "Eden-ize" our lives, so that the whole of culture and the whole of nature might once again be put right. What a wonderful task God has given to us, 'stewards of creation' as our Fourth Eucharistic prayer puts it. May we be good stewards of God's good creation, in our proper stance toward ourselves, the world, and God. THIS is the way that leads to eternal life. (all of this last point adapted from Robert Barron, CATHOLICISM, p. 20-22) Let the church say 'amen.'

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