

We are now in the season of Lent; today is Lent's first Sunday. Lent is a time for introspection, a time for seeking to know ourselves as God knows us. Lent brings a theme of repentance. The reality of humankind is that all fall short of God's expectations, and to fall short is to live in sin.

God calls us to holiness and holiness is possible when we dwell with the Holy Spirit, through the grace and mercy of Jesus Christ. Christ is our Redeemer. By his sacrifice we find merit in God's eyes. We are reckoned righteous by God. There is a thing, here, that we call atonement - atonement with a small "a," when we consider ourselves and acknowledge our sinfulness; atonement with a capital "A," when we consider that Jesus took our sin and lifted it on the Cross. In Christ's victory of life over death, our sin is buried with death so that we can dwell in the righteousness of God.

This thought brings us to Lent, because the season is about recollection and repentance. It is a season designed to help us gain insight and keep our lives in perspective. Lent is about getting in touch with the reality of ourselves, so that we, properly, can acknowledge our failures before God. Penitential self-awareness allows us to seek the strength and guidance of the Holy Spirit in amending our lives, so that we might then live them in a manner that reflects the glory of God manifest in Jesus Christ.

Seldom do we find a set of readings that better present the essence of the Christian understanding of sin and redemption. Paul tells us, in his letter to the Romans, that as one man's sin, meaning Adam's sin, led to universal condemnation, so one man's act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all. Our Lord gave himself for our salvation. What a difference one death makes, when the death is that of the Son of God

In the Old Testament reading, we heard the ancient story of humanity's fall. Adam is a generic Hebrew word meaning "humanity." The creation story tells us that Adam sought to discern as God discerns. In seeking that capability, Adam attempted to make himself like God. When we substitute ourselves for Adam, as we must in order to understand, we find that it is our nature to think that we, alone, can decide what is best - for ourselves and for our world. Each and every time that we do this, we risk thwarting God's will. Reduced to essential meaning, sin is nothing more than telling God that we know more and better than he does, and that we neither want nor need his help.

The implication of the Genesis story is that original sin derives from Adam's fall. It suggests a universal human attribute that is contrary to good. Traditionally, we have called that original sin "pride." But here pride takes a hard fall. Sometimes pride is a good thing, because sometimes pride prompts us to take life's higher road and stand firm in the face of temptation. If, however, pride means selfishness, then pride may well be "original sin," because pride then prompts us not to take the high road, but to put

ourselves first, before God and before neighbor. Narcissism is the reason that we yield to temptation.

God is aware that temptation is ever lurking. That is the point of the Gospel reading, which was St. Matthew's account of our Lord's temptation. Even Jesus was subject to temptation, but he did not yield. Jesus chose righteousness over sin. God is aware that although we can choose the good, even the saints, from time to time, chose evil. So, God sent his Son into this world to save sinners.

The season of Lent is a time for introspection. It is a time to contemplate God's love and ask how we are responding to that love. Only then can we do what Lent calls us to do - make straight, within ourselves, a pathway for the Son of God. *Amen.*

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