

1st Sunday of Lent – (Year B) – February 18, 2018

GN 9:8-15; PS 25:4-5, 6-7, 8-9; 1 PT 3:18-22; MK 1:12-15

Human beings were not created to die.

Think about that!

God created us, from the *beginning*, for **eternal life**.

If we go back to **Chapter 2 of Genesis**, we can see this. After God created Adam but before he created Eve, he placed Adam in the **Garden of Eden** and told him:

“You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die.” (Gen 2:16-17)

We know how the story played out after **Satan**—appearing in the form of a **snake**—convinced Eve first, and then Adam, to disobey God. But let’s take a **closer** look at **God’s warning** in order to gain a **better understanding of Lent**.

Recall that God said, *“...in the day that you eat of it you shall die.”* But Adam and Eve *didn’t die the day they ate the fruit*. As a matter of fact, they lived for quite a long time afterwards.

So, was God **wrong** about them dying by telling them *“...in the day that you eat of it you shall die”*? Since God cannot **lie** and since God cannot be **wrong**, how do we make sense of the fact that Adam and Eve didn’t die **on the spot**...that very day?

Well, it’s because Adam and Eve *did* die...**immediately**...*spiritually*. Their **relationship with God** was **completely severed** from that moment on.

Spiritual death **still** happens today...it’s called **mortal sin**. We can be **dead** in (mortal) sin and still **physically alive**. Many people, in fact, are **just that**...the **“walking dead”** among us. **We** may even be one of them, depending on whether or not we are living in *persistent grave sin* with no sincere intention to change.

The human race doesn’t take sin that seriously these days—we know this because we’ve grown accustomed to *calling evil “good” and good “evil”* (cf. Isa 5:20). But **God** takes sin seriously. *Very* seriously. If you want to know *how seriously God takes sin*, just look at a **Crucifix** and recall the **horrific suffering of God’s perfect Son**—

Jesus. The **agony of Jesus**—not to mention the agony of God the Father in watching his Son be slaughtered for our sins—**proves** that God does not take sin lightly.

Now, before we move to our **Readings** for today, let's pay attention to how Satan **approached** Eve, in order to corrupt her and her husband. **Satan cannot create. He can only corrupt.** Which means, he can only take the **good things of God** and make them into **instruments for evil**. That's what he did in the Garden of Eden. He took possession of a **snake**—a *serpent*—and approached Eve in a **physical form** so she could **see** him and **hear** what he had to say.

Ever since then, the **serpent** has become a **symbol of evil** because of what the Devil did with it. *But from the beginning it was not so.* Here's what **Genesis** tells us about God's creation and **all** creatures, **including serpents**:

...God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (Gen 1:24-25)

So, keep in mind that **the Devil takes God's good things and corrupts them.**

In our **1st Reading** today, we enter the **Genesis** story nine generations after **Adam** with Adam's **great, great, great, great, great, great, great** grandson, **Noah**. The **epidemic of sin**, unleashed by Adam and Eve had, **by this time**, spread and multiplied so broadly, that God said "Enough!" **Genesis** describes the state of things in **Noah's time** this way:

The Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the Lord was sorry that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him to his heart. So the Lord said, "I will blot out man whom I have created from the face of the ground, man and beast and creeping things and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found favor in the eyes of the Lord...Noah was a righteous man, blameless in his generation... (Gen 6:5-8, 9)

This was the state of things before the **Great Flood** that God unleashed to purge the earth of evil. In the **1st Reading** for today, we join Noah and his family *after the flood*, when God makes a **covenant** with Noah. We read:

God said to Noah and to his sons with him...I will establish my covenant with you, that never again shall all creatures be destroyed by the waters of a flood; there shall not be another flood to devastate the earth. God said: This is the sign of the covenant that I am making between me and you and every living creature with you for all ages to come: I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth. (Gen 9:8, 11-13)

Just as with **creation**—which God deemed good—so too with this **sign of the covenant established by God**. *The sign itself is good*. But the Devil will even corrupt God's **signs** in order to sow even more confusion.

God intended the rainbow to be a symbol of his promise to withhold his wrath.

Today, the *rainbow* has been **hijacked by Satan** to confuse and corrupt humanity's understanding of **male** and **female**, not to mention humanity's understanding of **marriage** and **family**—all of which God established from the beginning. *This is no mere coincidence*. This is part of the Devil's plan to destroy humanity because he knows if he can destroy **God's image—male and female**—and the **natural relationship** between male and female, and thus, the **family**, he wins a great victory.

So, *not matter what God does, Satan will always try to corrupt it*. But **God will always have the last word**. God can take things that have been corrupted and make them into something even **better** than they were before the corruption. And this is why we can say, now, that **God has already won the war with Satan**.

We have seen this over and over again since the beginning. **Satan's attempts to destroy backfire on him continually because of God's love for us**. Now, in the case of **water**, God's ingenious plan was too subtle for even the Devil to corrupt!

Satan had successfully corrupted almost the entire human race—except Noah and seven members of his family. So, God decided to wash away the evil with a massive flood of water, which simultaneously saved the righteous eight. Water, which God created good, became an instrument of destruction, at least from the standpoint of those whose sin had taken them past the point of no return. We read in **Genesis**:

The LORD wiped out every being on earth: human beings and animals, the crawling things and the birds of the air; all were wiped out from the earth. Only Noah and those with him in the ark were left. (Gen 7:23)

This might seem cruel on God’s part, but it’s **simply a matter of his perfect justice**. If a human being obstinately refuses to turn away from sin, that person will be separated from God for eternity after they die. That’s what we call **Hell**. At the moment of our death, God looks at the way we lived and **Jesus**, the **Just Judge** he has appointed, will simply send us where we **proved**, by the use of our free will on earth, where we want to spend eternity — with **God** or with **Satan**.

Returning now to the **flood**: After the water had accomplished its devastating destruction of all the evil bodily creatures, God promised never to use water to wipe away **all sinners** again, but rather, to use water to wipe away **all sin**, beginning with Original Sin.

He does this, of course, through the *Sacrament of Baptism*, which **St. Peter** sums up this way in the **2nd Reading**:

...a few persons, eight in all, were saved through water. This prefigured baptism, which saves you now. [Baptism] is not a removal of dirt from the body but an appeal to God for a clear conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ... (1 Pet 3:20-21)

The waters of Baptism still cause a flood. But this time, it is *God’s love flooding the heart and soul* with his healing, sanctifying grace which **kills not the sinner**, but the *sin*.

In the **Gospel** passage for today — one of the shortest Gospel readings of the entire liturgical year — Jesus preaches the following message:

“This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel.” (Mk 1:15)

We can sum up “**the gospel**” in this general sense, in **four steps**:

- God’s love
- Bad news
- Good news
- Invitation

God created everything as an act of love. God is perfect and complete and needs nothing — including human beings — you and me. So, then, why did he create us? Because, as **St. John** writes in his **1st New Testament Letter**:

God is love. (1 Jn 4:8, 16)

Love is not something God does. **Love is God's nature.** He can't help it. So genuine love desires a **beloved**—someone to **receive** the love. So, God created us for nothing less than to receive his love—fully. But he wants **our love** to be real, so for it to be real we have to be free to love him, which means we also have to be free **not** to love him.

The “**bad news**” is that we don't love God fully and some don't love God at all.

The “**good news**” is that God went to **extreme lengths**, sacrificing his **perfect Son** in order to **purchase our souls** with his **Son's Precious Blood**.

The “**invitation**” is to accept this. **Some do. Some don't.** Which is why, when the priest **consecrates** the wine into the **Precious Blood of Jesus**, he says these words of Jesus:

This is the chalice of my Blood. The Blood of the New and Eternal Covenant, which will be poured out for you (that is, you apostles at the last supper) **and for many** (he pours it out for everyone, but far too many don't care, so it benefits many, but not all).

What's the bottom line, then?

God gave humans eternal life from the beginning. We lost it through sin. But **God restored the possibility of eternal life** by sending his Son from whom the waters of Baptism poured out of his pierced side as he hung on the Cross. We are not exempt from the penalty imposed on Adam and Eve for their disobedience. All of us will die physically.

But in order for us to attain eternal life, we must do what Jesus preached in his first public words. **Repent and believe in the Gospel.** We must **believe** the “**good news**” but not stop there! We must also **repent**, which means to turn away from our sin, and turn back to God. And so, God, in his unending love, gives us the **Season of Lent** in which we identify where sin has most corrupted us and we deliberately set out to eradicate those things which lead to the corruption through our Lenten penances and practices.

As **St. Irenaeus** said:

“Friendship with God brings the gift of immortality to those who accept it.”

Breviary II, p. 77

They key words for us are “**those who accept it**”.

Some **will** accept God’s gift of salvation and spend eternity with him.

Some **won’t** accept God’s gift—preferring to *stay stubbornly stuck in grave sin*—and spend eternity separated from all love.

Lent is the time when we get serious about deciding where we want to spend eternity.

Human beings—especially today—have *watered down the gospel message* to mean nothing more than “**I have to be a good person**”. But we don’t get into heaven by being “**good**”—at least not by our easy definition of good in which **everyone**, except maybe *Hitler*, qualifies.

We get into heaven by being *holy*.

So, the question for us on this first Sunday of Lent is:

Am I holy?

If you are **congratulations**, Saint (so and so).

However, if you’re like me, and still have a **very long way to go to attain holiness**, then **congratulations!**

You—and I—have this tremendous opportunity called **Lent** to *do* something about it!