

Easter (Year B) – April 1, 2018

ACTS 10:34A, 37-43; PS 118:1-2, 16-17, 22-23; COL 3:1-4; JN 20:1-9

People who want nothing to do with God quite often reject the parts of the Bible they find inconvenient. They will, for example, dismiss stories like the **Genesis** account of **Adam and Eve** as “**fairy tales**”. Their objections often sound like this:

“It’s ridiculous to believe in a God who cares if Adam and Eve ate fruit, as if eating fruit deserves such a harsh punishment. A loving God doesn’t care what we eat.”

This **point-of-view** completely misses the *point*. The problem wasn’t *what* Adam and Eve ate. The problem was *that they ate*...what God told them *not* to. It wasn’t their **diet** that cost them their relationship with God. It was their **disobedience!**

Skeptics typically focus on **rather minor peripheral details like these** in order to convince *themselves* that **self-reliant thinkers—like themselves—**don’t need **childish Bible stories** to make sense of life. But *that’s* typically not **the real issue** for such folks. The **real** issue is their **aversion to obedience—**having to submit to someone else’s **authority**. So, they hide behind **mockery** to avoid the real issue.

Another common criticism of the **Adam and Eve** story is that a “**talking snake**” convinced Eve to eat the forbidden fruit. After all, the only place we see “**talking animals**” is in *cartoons* or **animated movies**, right? And **who** are **cartoons** for? **Children!** Therefore, those who believe such goofy stories must be rather **childish and immature**...or so the modern skeptics like to think.

But let’s stop for a moment and ask ourselves: Is it **really** that far-fetched to believe that **Satan** uses **non-human** instruments to **distract, manipulate, and lie** to people?

Perhaps modern skeptics *could* be convinced that the Devil regularly uses **non-human instruments...if** the instrument were something **a little more familiar...a little closer to home...a little more common** in the average person’s life...**than a snake!**

There’s an excellent book that came out last year, entitled, “***iGen: Why Today’s Super-Connected Kids Are Growing Up Less Rebellious, More Tolerant, Less Happy—and Completely Unprepared for Adulthood***”. In this **eye-opening**

book, the author reveals the disturbing effects of **smartphones**, in general, and **social media**, in particular, on the youngest generation.

One specific quote from that book *just might* make a skeptic a *little less inclined* to dismiss the **serpent** in the Adam and Eve story. But before even considering the **quote**, let's first recall *how* the Devil **deceived** our first parents—Adam and Eve—to better understand why **Easter** is not only the most **important feast** in the **Liturgical Year**, but also why the **Resurrection** is the most **significant event** in all of *history*.

For now, let's *suspend our disbelief in* “**talking snakes**” just long enough to consider the specific **details** of the *encounter* between the **Devil** and our **first parents**.

Recall that God gave Adam virtually unlimited run of the **Garden of Eden**. He could **go where** he wanted and **eat what** he wanted...**with one exception**. He was not to **eat** of the fruit of the **Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil**.

Since God had not yet created Eve when he gave Adam his “**garden orientation**”, it's safe to assume that Adam later explained it all to Eve. Perhaps something was **lost in translation**. Perhaps hearing the warning from **Adam** just didn't carry the **same weight** for **Eve** as it would have had **God** given her the instruction *directly*. Perhaps that's why the **Devil** approached *Eve* instead of **Adam**. Whatever the case, here's what happened:

...the serpent...said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. (Gen 3:1-6)

The Devil says **four very specific things** to Eve. And, as we would suspect from the **Father of Lies**, what he said to her was an **admixture of truth and falsehood** designed to *confuse* and to *cause doubt*. And, as we know, he **succeeded!**

Let's look at each of the **four things the Devil said**:

- 1) You will not die. (**Lie**)
- 2) Your eyes will be opened (**True...sort of**)
- 3) *You will be like God* (This was the **hook**—we’ll come back to it)
- 4) You will know good and evil. (**Partially true**, with a deliberate **distortion**)

[**After returning to point 3**]: They were *already* like God.

...God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness...So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them.” (Gen 1:26-27)

Through **deception** and **distraction**, the Devil confused Adam and Eve about their true *identity* and convinced them to *mistrust* their **Father**. He persuaded them that they had to *steal from God secretly*...what God had *already given them...openly*.

So, now, as we turn to the quote from the book, *iGen*, we may begin to see, more clearly, that it’s **not all that unusual for the Devil to use non-human instruments to distract and confuse**.

When asked about the effect of her **smartphones** on her life, a young girl named **Sophie** said:

“The minute I start my homework I have to have my phone by me to see what my friends are texting...It’s like someone is constantly tapping you on the shoulder, and you have to look.”

iGen, p. 56

Kind of **strange language**, don’t you think?

Saying her phone “behaves”—“**like someone...tapping [her] on the shoulder**”.

Notice that she didn’t say, “**The Devil called me on my phone.**” Rather, the phone has a kind of “**pull**” on her that we would not ordinarily attribute to a **device**...but, rather, to a **person**. These phones do **a lot of things**, but last I checked, **tapping** someone on the shoulder is **not** one of them!

So, we need to ask ourselves a question:

Why is a **snake that talks** any **stranger** than a **phone that tempts**? These are actions that we would expect from a **person**, but not from a **serpent** or **smartphone**.

When it comes right down to it, it's not the *type* of **instrument** that the Devil uses that matters. What matters is *what the Devil is doing*.

So, how, then, does something like **social media**—accessed through a **smartphone**—tempt a person to *take the place of God* in his or her own life?

Well, for starters, each **social media user** decides what kind of **image** of themselves they *create* and *present* to the **world**. There's a great temptation to create an **online persona** who is always surrounded by **lots of friends** and always doing **fun things**—someone who is never **alone** and never **bored**.

But, the reality is that human beings are quite frequently **lonely** and **bored**. Worse, when a person actually *is lonely* and **bored** and sees all of his or her online friends with *seemingly perfect, exciting lives*, it leads to yet **another** temptation...

Unhealthy forms of *affirmation-seeking*, as a **cheap substitute** for *genuine love* and **connection**.

Instead of measuring one's self-worth by his or her **virtues**, social media entices users to measure their **dignity** in terms of: **quantity of text messages...Instagram "likes"...**and **Snapchat "streaks"**.

Another young lady, interviewed in "*iGen*", said:

"When they ignore your texts, and then you're like, Well why am I even alive?"

iGen, p. 106

Online popularity, then, becomes the standard, not just for **self-worth**, but even of *life and death* for many of our young people! Not surprisingly, the **suicide rate** for *social media addicts* is significantly higher than that of **non-users of social media**.

If you don't think that those kinds of **dangerous ideas** originate from the **Father of Lies**, then perhaps the truly "**childish**" **worldview** is *not* the *religious* one, but rather the **smug secular worldview**.

Yet **another** enticement of **social media** is the *ability to control the universe of people* with whom you interact. You can **friend**, **unfriend**, **unfollow** or **block** others—**maximizing** the odds of hearing what you **want** to hear, and **minimizing** exposure to thoughts, words and ideas that **upset** you.

So, social media gives a user the power to *create themselves* in their preferred *image*; to **assess their personal value** based on the opinions of others; and to **include or exclude** whomever they choose in their **personal universe**.

When a person has **that** kind of control of their **world**...who needs God?

With all this in mind...should we be surprised that *the logo on the back of an iPhone is an apple...with a bite taken out of it?*

You can almost hear the phone promising: *“You will be like God!”* (cf. Gen 3:5)

Now let’s consider what all this has to do with **Easter**?

By listening to the **snake** in the garden, Adam and Eve **forfeited the eternal life** that was theirs from the **beginning**. As the **Book of Wisdom** proclaims:

God created man for incorruption, and made him in the image of his own eternity, but through the devil’s envy death entered the world... (Wis 2:23-24)

Human beings were not created to die. But even after Adam and Eve had thrown away eternal life, **God the Father** was not content to leave his children in a *permanent state of isolation* from **him** and from **one another**.

As the **Gospel of John** proclaims:

God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. (Jn 3:16)

Our first parents **lost** the eternal life that they had...from the beginning.

Jesus came to *restore* it.

And **he did precisely that** by dying and then rising from the dead—thus conquering even death—so that, as **St. Paul wrote to the Romans**: *...Christ, raised from the dead, dies no more; death no longer has power over him.* (Rom 6:9)

The **Sacrament of Baptism** “*grafts*” us onto Christ, so that we too are able to conquer death—*precisely through our “connection” to Christ*—and to enjoy eternal life once more...*provided* we stay **united to Jesus in this life**, by investing in our

relationship with him each day, and remaining consistent in the practice of to our Catholic **religion**.

There is *no other way* for us to access eternal life than through *Jesus Christ* (cf. Jn 14:6).

Easter, then, is the celebration of the restoration of eternal life for human beings, lost by our first parents...but *restored by our Savior*...through his conquest of death...by means of his **Resurrection**.

In the **Gospel** today, **Mary Magdalene, Peter and John sought** the missing Jesus with *great urgency*. And that's the **big difference** between **them**...and **Adam and Eve**.

The **Devil** convinced Adam and Eve to **look away** from God and **toward** their own interests. But **love** compelled the **two Apostles** and **Mary Magdalene** to *seek* Jesus with a **singular focus**.

In our **2nd Reading** today, **St. Paul** writes:

If then you were raised with Christ, seek what is above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Think of what is above, not of what is on earth. (Col 3:1-2)

Jesus has given us a *second chance at eternal life* through his **Resurrection**.

But we'll never really **understand** it...and we'll certainly never **enjoy** it...if we **stare at dead screens for hours and hours each day**...living in a *virtual world*...instead of **looking for Jesus** with the same **diligence** and **fervor** as Mary Magdalene, Peter and John here in the real world.

We'll probably never encounter a talking snake. But we will certainly be offered many **distractions** by the **Devil**, to take our focus off of **Jesus** and to direct it toward **inconsequential things**.

Eternal life is once again ours...because of the **love of God the Father**...and the **self-sacrifice of Jesus Christ**.

Whether or not we inherit this gift depends on whether or not **Jesus** matters to *us* as much as **we** matter to *him*!