

## **First Sunday of Lent - Lectionary: 22**

### **Reading 1 - [Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7](#)**

The LORD God formed man out of the clay of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and so man became a living being. Then the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the LORD God made various trees grow that were delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

Now the serpent was the most cunning of all the animals that the LORD God had made. The serpent asked the woman, "Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?" The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, lest you die.'" But the serpent said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! No, God knows well that the moment you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods who know what is good and what is evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

**Responsorial Psalm - [Psalm 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17](#) R. (cf. 3a) Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned.**

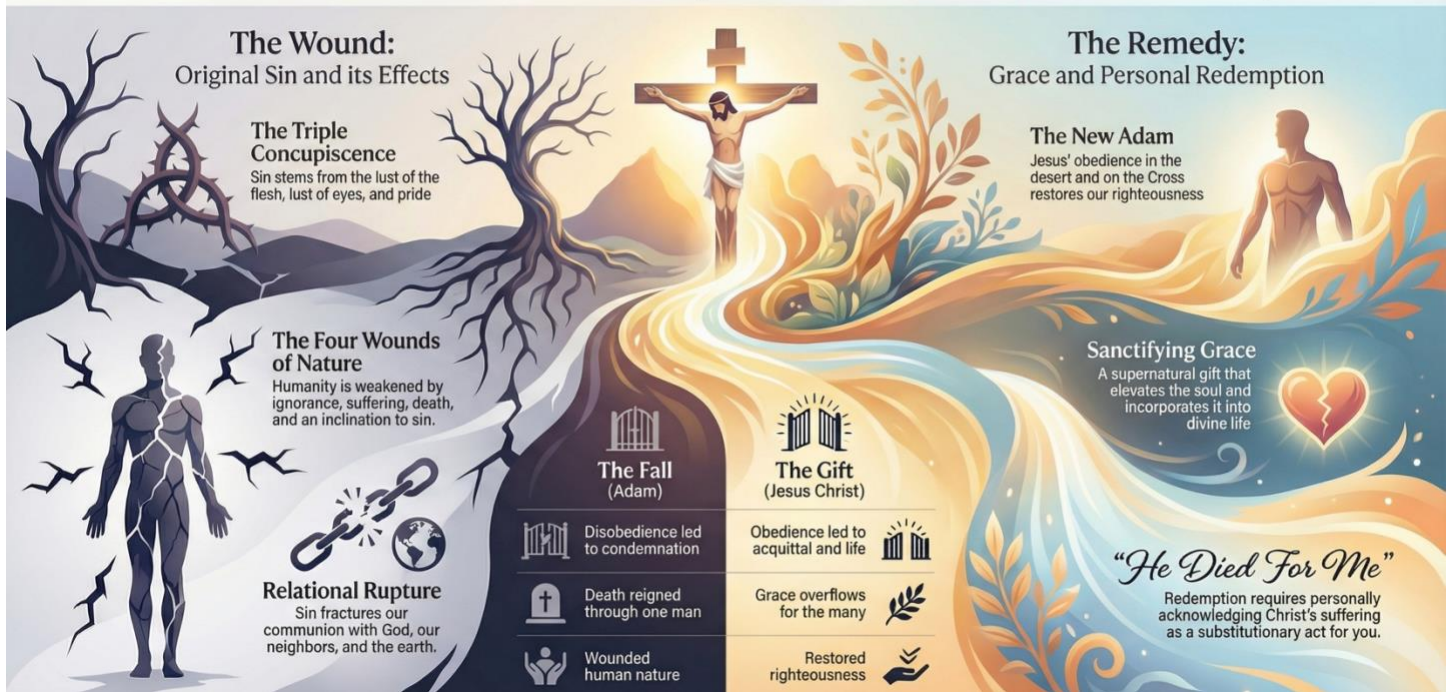
### **Reading 2 - [Romans 5:12-19](#)**

Brothers and sisters: Through one man sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all men, inasmuch as all sinned—for up to the time of the law, sin was in the world, though sin is not accounted when there is no law. But death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those who did not sin after the pattern of the trespass of Adam, who is the type of the one who was to come. But the gift is not like the transgression. For if by the transgression of the one, the many died, how much more did the grace of God and the gracious gift of the one man Jesus Christ overflow for the many. And the gift is not like the result of the one who sinned. For after one sin there was the judgment that brought condemnation; but the gift, after many transgressions, brought acquittal. For if, by the transgression of the one, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through the one Jesus Christ. In conclusion, just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all. For just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous.

### **Gospel - [Matthew 4:1-11](#)**

At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. He fasted for forty days and forty nights, and afterwards he was hungry. The tempter approached and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones become loaves of bread." He said in reply, "It is written: One does not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." Then the devil took him to the holy city, and made him stand on the parapet of the temple, and said to him, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down. For it is written: He will command his angels concerning you and with their hands they will support you, lest you dash your foot against a stone." Jesus answered him, "Again it is written, You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test." Then the devil took him up to a very high mountain, and showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, "All these I shall give to you, if you will prostrate yourself and worship me." At this, Jesus said to him, "Get away, Satan! It is written: The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve." Then the devil left him and, behold, angels came and ministered to him.

# From the Fall to Redemption: The Lenten Journey



## Summary

The liturgical readings and reflections for the First Sunday of Lent establish a profound narrative arc from the introduction of sin into the world to the restorative obedience of Jesus Christ. The central theme explores the transition from "original sin"—characterized by the "threefold lust" and a wounded human nature—to "justification" through Christ's substitutionary sacrifice. A critical takeaway is the distinction between intellectual assent to Church doctrine and the visceral, personal realization of Christ's sacrifice. This document synthesizes the theological foundations of the Fall, the nature of human woundedness, and the necessity of moving from spiritual indifference to a radical internalization of the reality that "He died for me." This transformation is illustrated through the conversion of St. Ignatius of Loyola and narrative examples of sacrificial love that challenge the "hardened hearts" of the modern faithful. The homily concludes with a call to move beyond a "theological knowledge" to a radical transformation of life.

- **Overcoming Desensitization:** Modern believers may be desensitized to the crucifix. To counter this, the homily suggests contemplating more "penetrating" imagery, such as the **Sacred Heart of Jesus** or the graphic depictions of Christ's torture in the film *The Passion of the Christ*.

- **The Core Objective:** The goal of Lent is to internalize the brutality endured for the love of the individual. This awareness is intended to transform one's ability to love God and neighbor and to strengthen the resolve to "go and sin no more."

**Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned...**

St Ignatius of Loyola was a broken young man, living the consequences of the Sin of Adam in his own body, and very likely living most of his days without sanctifying grace. As a young man he threw himself into the battles with France that raged in the borderlands surrounding his home. Much to his dismay, he was injured, blasted with a cannonball and had to spend months in bed, recuperating. Just as none of us

are overjoyed about being sick and bedridden for days let alone months, neither was he, but unlike us, his only available distraction was the technological innovation, books. He asked for some romance novels to read. By this is meant, he was asking for narrative fictions focusing on aristocratic adventure, courtly love, and knightly valor. These stories, often written in prose, featured quests, enchanted forests, and supernatural elements. None were available in the castle, his being a deeply Catholic Basque family in Spain, but they did have *The Life of Christ* and another *The Flower of the Saints*.

Just to pass the time, he began to read them. Soon he began to be moved by them, and the Holy Spirit began to stir in him. By the time he recovered, he had become firmly convinced of the vanity of earthly glory. So, transformed by his experience was he that he made a pilgrimage and began leading a truly Christian life, laying deep foundations of intense and heartfelt prayer and building up an impressive spiritual edifice of self-denial, charity, and dedication to the Kingdom of God. He then took up studies for the priesthood at the University of Paris. Being a good missionary disciple of Christ, the Holy Spirit was able to work through him and gather some fellow students around him. They too became convinced to dedicate their lives completely in service of Christ. That little group was the seed of the religious order now known as the Society of Jesus, which has had more of an impact on the world, perhaps, than any other within the Church. It all started because he began to actively feed his soul with truth, instead of falling so willingly for the threefold lust.

In the life experience of St. Ignatius, like so many saints who spent much of their early lives in sinful separation from God, we can so easily see ourselves. Hopefully, we can also see ourselves in their conversion stories and subsequent years lived in service of Christ. We also see, reflected in their lives and ours, the thread running through the readings for this 1st Sunday of Lent, '[original sin](#)' and salvation. I believe it is often better to explore theological truths, doctrines of the faith, through the lens of the lived human experience. When we can identify and name our own experiences in the light of scripture and the teachings of the Church, we better understand and are moved toward greater trust of and openness to God. This homily incorporates the theological / scriptural / doctrinal truths touched upon on this 1<sup>st</sup> Sunday of Lent and moves beyond being a theological lecture on Christ's desert temptations, to explore the deadly designs of selfish love and the transformative power of sacrificial love.

The two other stories included from human experience, I believe, really go to the heart of the theme of sin and salvation in the readings. The first is a story about a Civil War substitute who gave his life for a neighbor and the second of a defiant soldier softened by the image of the crucifix. Together they emphasize that redemption requires a personal acknowledgment of the Savior. Insofar as it's true to say that I yet remain an obstinate sinner, it's also true to say that I must identify and move past my particular spiritual indifferences and recognize with an ever-increasing depth of awareness, that Christ's suffering was a substitutionary act performed specifically for me. Ultimately, this is a Lenten call to radically and intentionally cooperate with God to transform one's life by internalizing the profound reality that "*He died for me.*"

In the first reading from the Book of Genesis, we are looking into a moment in time when God and Man (Adam and Eve) are united in love. Despite this union with God, they succumb to the truth twisting and lies of the once extraordinary Angel Lucifer, now the fallen angelic enemy of man, and commit the first human act against God and their own nature. This original sin consisted of three parts which the Jews, upon being told this story, would recognize as the three root causes of all sin. The Church refers to this as triple concupiscence, or the threefold lust. St. John, in his first letter itemizes these as; the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.<sup>1</sup> Sure enough, as soon as they had rebelled, they suffered the loss of

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<sup>1</sup> 1 John 2:16

sanctifying grace, and death in its many forms was introduced. Having thus corrupted human nature, broken unity with God, and become materially mortal – the sin of Adam which condemned us all; they were exposed, naked, and shamed.<sup>2</sup>

We have all heard of this ‘original sin’ of the first created human beings. We know the story as it’s told in Genesis. Most of us have heard or have some understanding that this is related to our own sinfulness. We have heard that this is why we need a savior. Yet, as central to the faith as these teachings are and as much as it is part of our catechetical formation in the faith – too many Catholics, lacking a deeper more intellectually and spiritually mature understanding, fail to connect these truths to their own lived experience. Looking in a mirror with too much light we are uncomfortably at risk of seeing the truth of ourselves and the choices we make. Without such an understanding, we will always struggle to care that ‘he died for me’ as deeply as we ought and to allow God to transform us as completely as God desires.

Original sin transmits a wounded nature "by propagation",<sup>3</sup> entailing death as punishment.<sup>4</sup> What, specifically are the wounds to human nature. Post-fall humanity universally bears "four wounds"; "*human nature is weakened in its powers, subject to ignorance, suffering and the domination of death, and inclined to sin (this inclination is called 'concupiscence')*." They can be healed by grace but not always eliminating natural frailty. We have inherited a weakened condition, but we’re not totally depraved. We became inclined to sin but not bound to sin. Reason no longer orders the passions, at least not reliably, occasioning moral disorder. As well, bodily death was introduced.<sup>5, 6</sup> This woundedness affects our ability to have authentic relationships of love. Sin, by its nature, fractures communion and therefore initiates broken relationships: with God (fear), neighbor (enmity), earth (conflictual dominion).<sup>7</sup> These consequences—loss of grace, wounded human nature, dominion of death, relational ruptures—universalize humanity's need for Christ's redemption, summoning spiritual battle amid persisting frailty. Baptism heals the privation but not all effects.

St. Paul, in the second reading, provides the Romans as well as us an opportunity to reflect on the very core of the whole Gospel. He also invites us to reflect on what it means to live with or without sanctifying grace. He recounts that God created the human family in perfect harmony, peace and prosperity. But Adam, the leader of that family, sinned. He disobeyed God when he ran into the devil in the Garden of Eden, and all of us, Adam's descendants, suffer the painful consequences. This original sin ruptured the harmony of creation and resulted in a world transformed by rebellion against God and fraught with conflict and suffering in all our relationships. Helpless to save and reconcile ourselves, we needed a savior, someone to restore us in a right relationship with God, others, and ourselves. Jesus was God's response. Jesus, the Son of God, was and is that Savior. When he ran into the devil in the desert, the Garden of Gethsemane, and on the cross at Calvary, he obeyed God the Father, and his spiritual descendants receive from him the restoration of righteousness - a right relationship with God.

What is sanctifying grace? It is a supernatural gift that elevates the human soul, rendering it pleasing to God and incorporating it into divine life."<sup>8</sup> It differs from actual graces (transient helps for specific acts) by remaining permanently with us unless lost through mortal sin. Original sin transmits a wounded nature, depriving the soul of this grace and introducing separation from God. Baptism restores it, remitting original sin's guilt while healing its effects. Thus, freedom from original sin inherently means possession of

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<sup>2</sup> ‘Original Sin’ deprives humanity of sanctifying grace, wounds human nature in its powers, introduces concupiscence (inclination to sin), subjects us to ignorance, suffering, and death, and disrupts relationships with God, others, and creation—yet human nature is not totally corrupted. Catechism of the Catholic Church #405, 418

<sup>3</sup> CCC #419

<sup>4</sup> Council of Trent, cf. CCC 405

<sup>5</sup> Catechism of the Catholic Church #1018

<sup>6</sup> Gaudium et Spes #18

<sup>7</sup> Laudato Si, #66

<sup>8</sup> CCC #2024

sanctifying grace—the Holy Spirit Himself dwelling within. What does it mean, precisely, to lose this grace. It is in a sense, the death of the soul.<sup>9</sup> The primary effect is spiritual: a privation of original holiness and justice, called the "stain of sin", leaving the soul in habitual aversion from God until restored by baptism. This deprivation separates us from supernatural friendship with God, imputable through our origin in Adam, though not a personal act.<sup>10</sup> The Council of Trent describes it as "privation of justice that each child contracts at its conception."<sup>11</sup>

This brings us to the Gospel reading in which we hear about a seemingly odd experience of Jesus being led by the Holy Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil. Although each of the three temptations that he faces touches on Jesus' identity as the Son of God, revealed during his baptism,<sup>12</sup> they are also the threefold lust temptations. When dealing with temptation to sin, sin, and salvation - it is important to recognize, since original sin has not left us completely depraved, it is very much still part of our nature to desire the good, true, and beautiful. Unfortunately, that's also Satan's way in! All temptations—and these put to Jesus are no exception—come to us under the guise of what is good, true, and beautiful. No sane person chooses the purely evil unless some positive benefit is seen to come from it. In each of the three temptations, Jesus is being led to do something which would seem to enhance his mission as Lord and Savior. But, in identifying ourselves fully with the vision of life which God gives us through Jesus we too can avoid falling to these temptations. Listen to him, and what he says! Jesus' obedience and one righteous act lead (through the Cross) to acquittal and life, and the many were made righteous. The way of the Father is the only way that will lead him—and us—to the life that never ends. And then, all tears will be wiped away.

Now I'd like to focus on those two stories that I think really capture at its heart what's going on in these readings today. They're stories from real life. Stories that because of their relatability, because they ring so true, are consistently told, especially among people of faith, because they are arresting, they immediately inspire reflection and feeling. The first one is about something that happened during the Civil War. One of the rules of that war was that you could have a substitute. It was permitted for one man to take the place of another in the army. And so, it happened, that a farmer named Blake was drafted. He was grief stricken because he had a wife and children to take care of. The day before he was supposed to report for service, a young neighbor, Charles Durham, came to Blake's farm. "Farmer Blake," he said, "I will go instead of you." Imagine what went on in the heart of Farmer Blake, who accepted the young man's self-sacrifice and said, "Thank you." The entire village turned out to honor and say goodbye to the young man. Sadly, in the very first battle that he was part of, he was shot and killed. When Blake read the name of his young neighbor in the list of the dead, he saddled his horse, rushed to the battlefield, found Charles body, and brought it back to the little churchyard of the village. He found a large stone and on it he carved an inscription. He placed the stone above the sod covered mound in the churchyard, and this is what it said. "C D He died for me."

This story speaks to us of a deeper truth. That above the cross of Christ, each one of us must carve the words, 'He died for me.' Each of us must come to the depths of realization that Jesus took upon himself the suffering and evil unleashed by Adam's sin and perpetuated by our own. His perfect loving obedience up to death on the cross, set us free. He has therefore lit in our hearts the flame of certain hope that will lead us to eternal life. 'He died for me'.<sup>13</sup>

The second story takes us deeper, I think, into the reality of many of our lives and it reminds us, starkly, of what we daily take for granted. Our salvation. His suffering and sacrifice. His love and mercy. It's a true

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<sup>9</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia, Original Sin

<sup>10</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia, Sin

<sup>11</sup> Catholic Encyclopedia, Council of Trent

<sup>12</sup> Matt 3:17

<sup>13</sup> *Illustration adapted from "Stories for Sermons" by Fr Arthur Tonne, vol. 2, p98*

story, about a group of soldiers sitting around the barracks letting off steam. The talk happened to swing around to religion and one soldier, a fallen away Catholic, claimed he no longer believed in confession. His buddies dared him to go to the Catholic chaplain and make a mockery of the sacrament to prove he didn't believe it anymore. You can imagine how that conversation went. So, he went to the confessional, knelt, and this is what he said; "I have taken the Lord's name in vain a hundred times a day, and I couldn't care less, I haven't been to mass in years, and I couldn't care less." He went through all the commandments in the same way, ending with, "I couldn't care less." When he was through, the priest said, "For your penance, put a crucifix on a table." And then, looking at the crucifix, say, "You died for me, and I couldn't care less." Say that five times. When the soldier left the chapel, his buddies were waiting for him. Of course, you can imagine the scene. They laughed and jeered, asking what happened. He laughed with them and told them all about it. They insisted that he do the penance because, of course, that was part of confession, and the dare had been to do a full confession. So, they pulled up a table and put a crucifix on it. And the soldier sat down and looked at it, surrounded by his buddies. There, as he is looking at the cross, it suddenly isn't funny. Looking at Jesus on the cross, all he could say was, "You died for me." He tried. He tried hard, but he just couldn't bring himself to add, "and I couldn't care less." Tears welled up in his eyes as this was going on. Finally, he got up, ran back to the chapel to make a real confession.<sup>14</sup>

I'm not sure, because of the ways in which we get so desensitized and considering that we have crucifixes hanging on our walls that we ignore every day, I'm not sure this penance would have the same effect for us as it did for this soldier. Thinking of our sins, gazing at the cross, would it – does it, cause us to run to the Priest and seek reconciliation. Does our awareness and contrition so easily go that deep. We might need stronger imagery, unfortunately. I might suggest during this Lenton season of finding a more traditional image of the Sacred Heart of Jesus, where the gaze is so effectively penetrating. The artistry is so incredible. Gaze upon that image and contemplate the cost of our salvation. He died for us, for me. Contemplating honestly and deeply our sinfulness and the consequences of our sins, realizing that if I'm to move forward and grow in holiness, I must care deeply that he died for me. Maybe, because of the hardness of some hearts, we need to watch that scene in the Passion of the Christ in which Jesus is so vividly tortured and beaten, bloodied, his flesh ripped from his body. To do so, ever presently aware, that he died for me. This brutality he endured for me. This, for love of me, that I could be reconciled with God. He died for me. How much do I care? Enough that it radically transforms my life, my ability to love God, neighbor, and myself, and my resolve to go and sin no more. How much do I care?

## Glossary of Key Terms

| Term                     | Definition   |
|--------------------------|--|
| <b>Actual Grace</b>      | Transient, temporary divine assistance given to individuals to perform specific good acts or resist temptation.  |
| <b>Concupiscence</b>     | The human inclination toward sin that remains even after Baptism; a consequence of the wounded nature inherited from original sin.                       |
| <b>Lust of the Eyes</b>  | One of the three parts of triple concupiscence; the desire for things that are pleasing to look at or represent material wealth.                         |
| <b>Lust of the Flesh</b> | One of the three parts of triple concupiscence; the disordered desire for physical or sensory pleasure.  |
| <b>Original Sin</b>      | The first act of rebellion against God by Adam and Eve, resulting in the loss of sanctifying grace and the wounding of human nature for all descendants. |

<sup>14</sup> Illustration adapted from "Stories for Sermons" by Fr Arthur Tonne, vol. 2, p115

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| <b>Pride of Life</b>        | One of the three parts of triple concupiscence; the desire for earthly glory, wisdom for self-exaltation, or self-sufficiency apart from God.             |
| <b>Sanctifying Grace</b>    | A permanent, supernatural gift that elevates the soul, allows it to share in divine life, and makes it pleasing to God.                                   |
| <b>Society of Jesus</b>     | A religious order, also known as the Jesuits, founded by St. Ignatius of Loyola and his companions following their conversion.                            |
| <b>Substitutionary Act</b>  | An action where one person takes the place of another to receive a penalty or perform a duty, specifically referring to Christ dying in place of sinners. |
| <b>Triple Concupiscence</b> | A theological term for the three root inclinations to sin: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life.                            |