

Homily (notes) from Canon Philip Dyson
26th February 2023 - 1st Sunday of Lent

Readings (Year A): 1st: Genesis 2:7-9,3:1-7. 2nd: Romans 5:12-19. Gospel: Matthew 4:1-11

What many people are feeling and saying is ‘what a mixed-up state the world seems to be in.’ Along with it is living in a blame culture. The temptation to blame others for our own wrongdoings and failures.

It can seem that today is worse than ever, but in fact what the book of Genesis, our 1st reading is trying to show is how the world came to be in such a mixed-up state. It is not so much a book about human origins as about human nature and one crucial central affirmation: that a human being is a being who has to do with God. For us a God who becomes like us in all things but sin, and who lives and dies and rises for us: the human race.

Beneath the poetical descriptions of the garden, the trees, and the serpent there is the reality of people wanting to escape their personal responsibilities.

When God confronts Adam for eating the forbidden fruit, what does he do? He blames the woman. Likewise she shifts the blame on to the serpent. Nobody will admit responsibility. It is a story that spotlights a constant temptation in human behaviour – to make excuses for oneself and lay blame at someone else’s door.

Jesus faced the responsibility of who he was and what he was called to be. His temptation in the desert was a deep inner conflict within his mind and heart. Shortly before, at his baptism in the Jordan, he had received extraordinary powers from the Holy Spirit to fit him for his life’s work as Messiah and Saviour. His temptations were to use these powers for immediate success and avoid the way of the cross.

The devil often tempts by what appears to be good. Everyone knows temptation. A temptation is not as sin in itself but can sometimes lead to sin. It puts us at a crossroads: do we give way or take a stand on the side of conscience?

That is part of the challenge of Lent. It is an invitation to renew our faith. The opportunity of a fresh beginning. Do we take a step forward or slip backward? There is no standing still in the Christian life. The devil does his demolition work by discouragement.

Family quarrels, difficulties at work, break up of relationships, not to mention ill health and natural disaster, all can narrow our vision and forget to bring God into the bigger picture.

Hence the Lenten emphasis on Prayer to **God**, almsgiving for **others** and fasting for **self**, all to draw us closer to the Lord in his temptations and his fast.

God is not a killjoy. He doesn’t try to prevent our happiness or even boss us about. God is no dictator. In fact, God has seen fit to create us for freedom. We can respond to God, just as we respond to each other. There is no threat, no pressure, except the call to do what is good and right.

Goodness always demands our attention and our obedience, and that is where humanity falls down.

The fall of Adam and Eve describes the “big picture” of the world. In every human life, in every ‘little picture’ that fall is repeated.

We can choose to follow God or to give in to the temptation to do wrong. Sometimes we give in. We are a fallen race and we know it. The evidence is all around us. If it destroys our hope and belief in God we can be greatly harmed. We need good news; a reason to believe, a reason to hope, a reason to go on.

That is Jesus, The Second Adam, who to the fight and rescue came. As the letter to the Hebrews says, “because he has himself been through temptation, he is able to help others who are tempted.”