

Today's first reading in symbolic and imaginative language tells the story of the origin of sin in this world. The serpent is the symbol of all temptations. The two people, elsewhere called Adam and Eve, are referred to simply as the man and the woman to indicate that they are no different from any other human being. They stand for the entire human race. They are us.

The story is a tragic one. The man and the woman attempted to become like God by abandoning him and his will. They actually wanted to put themselves in the place of God. The result was the opposite of what they hoped for: instead of becoming divine they fell from divine favor and were separated from God. Rather than being satisfied with all the gifts God had given them they wanted more, and yet they went from good to evil.

Their story **is** our story. Every temptation that comes to us is a drive to abandon God's will, to put ourselves in the place of God, to worship ourselves rather than God. Listen and watch the news on television, the Internet, or any of the other technological means of obtaining and communicating information, or read the daily newspaper, and the reality of the on-going presence and consequences of Original Sin is clearly obvious.

Yet the situation of the man and the woman who fell from grace in the garden and our situation of also falling from grace is not without hope. Today's traditional gospel story on this First Sunday of Lent proclaims Jesus, the Son of God become human, as the antidote to the poison of sin. Today's gospel directly follows the scene of Jesus' baptism by John in the Jordan. By submitting himself to John's baptism of repentance for the forgiveness of sin, Jesus as Son of God and thus without sin, freely chose to fully immerse himself into our human condition. The temptations Jesus experiences in the desert, to find the meaning and purpose of life in the satisfaction immediate physical need or desire and the acquisition of material wealth; the wielding of absolute authority (over the forces of nature, gravity in this case); and to absolute power and dominion (political and military) are the common lot of all of us.

Saint Paul in today's second reading which in Church tradition is seen as the Scriptural basis for the doctrine of Original Sin through Adam, the first human being, proclaims Jesus to be the second or new Adam who reverses our common "No" to God with his "Yes" thus opening for us the way to eternal life and union with God, repairing the breach of Original Sin, restoring original (sanctifying) grace, and so enabling us to "be like gods" as originally intended in our creation by God.

This first Sunday of Lent reminds us that each of us is confronted over and over again with the choice to *personally* serve God and God alone or not. It is the choice about whose cause will be advanced in this world. Lent is the time, for those among us preparing for baptism into the life of Jesus at Easter through membership in his body, the church, and for the rest of us the already baptized to take stock of our life. Lent is a time of discernment of our choices, not only the "big" choices of our life, but the choices that make up the bulk of our lives, those of the everyday, whether those choices bring us death or life. The good news of this First Sunday is that in our struggle with temptation we are not alone. God "will support us" in making right choices. If the man and the woman in the first reading showed us the way to sin and death, Jesus in the gospel shows us the way to confront and overcome temptation and so find life.

Confronted with temptation Jesus responds to the devil's enticements by focusing his attention on his relationship with God the Father and his Kingdom. Jesus reveals that obedience to God, far from reducing or negating human freedom, is the way to life. Sin is to affirm one's freedom over and against God, to cling to oneself, to see God as a rival, as a competitor. To sin is to refuse to open oneself to God's loving invitation to personal relationship. Jesus shows us that our deepest freedom, individuality, and self-determination are found through radical and humble self-surrender in obedience to God. This is what we pray for each time we petition God in the "Lord's Prayer" – "Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Today's liturgy is an invitation to to abandon the sinful illusion that God is either a threat that must be resisted, or a tyrant who must be feared, and instead, open our hearts to a Father who stands ready to supply our deepest needs, who longs for us, who offers us communion so that we can, indeed, be like gods.