

FIRST SUNDAY IN LENT

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One of the reasons I love the Book of Genesis is that it reads like an epic case study on the way sin impacts us and the people around us.

Today we have the familiar story of how sin entered the world:

- ❖ God tells Adam that he's free to eat of every tree in the garden but one.
- ❖ The serpent convinces Eve that this is unreasonable.
- ❖ So Adam and Eve decide to eat the fruit.
- ❖ All hell breaks loose – well, not *all* of it, but definitely more than enough.

This is also the basic pattern for how sin always enters the world:

- (1) sin is proposed,
- (2) we're either pleased or displeased,
- (3) we consent to it or reject it.

Since this is always the pattern for temptation, we can learn some things from Adam and Eve's mistakes.

The first is that our relationship with God *must be loving and personal*.

- ❖ Eve gets tripped up on the exact *wording* of the commandment pretty *easily*,
- ❖ *but* what causes her to *fall* is *believing* the lie that God was withholding something *good*, that he *didn't* love them as much as he *said*.

We all know from experience that if person A tells us something unflattering about person B, what we know of person B greatly affects the way we respond.

- ❖ If we know them really well, we might say, "That doesn't sound like the person B I know," or even, "I know that's not true."
- ❖ Of course, if we don't know person B, there's not much we can say.

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Therefore, we need to take every opportunity to meet God in the Church and the sacraments.

- ❖ We need to invite him into our lives through prayer, fasting, studying the Bible, and serving others.
- ❖ We need to bring him into every corner of our lives so that we'll notice right away when something doesn't match up.

That's vital because the other takeaway from Adam and Eve's mistakes is that we're not strong enough to fight off temptation on our own.

- ❖ While Eve never should've let the serpent engage her, Adam (who's been standing there the whole time) says *nothing*, but still eats the *fruit* – so clearly *inaction* isn't the answer either.
- ❖ So are we damned if we do and damned if we don't? Not at all – we usually just need to take action sooner than we think.

Think back to the process of temptation – (1) presented, (2) pleased/displeased, (3) consent/reject.

- ❖ We might naturally assume that the big choice comes when we either consent to sin or reject it, and that's our problem.
- ❖ The critical moment actually comes in step 2 because allowing temptation to hang around at all is playing with fire.

If we allow ourselves to take any pleasure in the temptation, its embers float around in our souls.

- ❖ So even if we reject *that* sin *that* time, we'll eventually get burned later,
- ❖ either by that same sin or by the smoldering pride we've been fanning by thinking that we could control it.

So when faced with temptation the best thing we can do is respond like the spiritual children Jesus tells us we must become.

- ❖ Because they know their weakness, whenever little children feel threatened they're quick to run to whoever makes them feel safe.
- ❖ That's what Adam and Eve should've done as soon as the serpent tried to portray God as something other than what they'd experienced.

The obvious question then, is, "How do I do that," and St. Ignatius of Loyola gives us a practical, concrete way.

- ❖ He suggested that as soon as we see that we're being tempted, we can discretely put our hand over our heart and pray the Jesus Prayer: "O Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me a sinner."
- ❖ Even though it might seem like a small thing, it's really effective because taking both spiritual and physical action against temptation ingrains the response and helps us become more aware of the ways we're tempted.

We should do our best to make this a habit because

- ❖ not only is turning quickly from temptation and running to Jesus is exactly what makes little children the greatest in the kingdom of heaven,
- ❖ it's also the pattern for making that kingdom come on earth.