

## THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

By Al Mansfield

### FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Psalm 51

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

## THE PROBLEM AND THE SOLUTION

Problems...we've got them! Personal, social, financial, political, etc., etc. - all kinds of problems surround us. How did we get into such a mess anyway? Today, on the First Sunday of Lent, we hear about the cause of all our problems - the root problem called the original sin. But we also hear about the solution, found in the gospel - about the one who resists the devil and overcomes sin.

### GENESIS

Our first reading gives us the details of how our problems started - disobedience to God's specific command. Notice the strategy of the devil, who begins with questioning God's word: "Did God really tell you...?" The devil then proceeds to contradict God's word and attack the character of God: "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 evil."

Our first parents believed the lie of the devil and disobeyed the Lord. So, humanity became a fallen race and inherited a huge problem. Psalm 51, the *Miserere*, is entirely appropriate as the Responsorial today: "Be merciful, O Lord, for we have sinned."

### GOSPEL

If the first reading presents the problem, then our gospel presents the beginning of the solution with Jesus succeeding where our first parents failed. Jesus resisted each temptation brought by the devil: to change stones to bread to satisfy his hunger; to throw himself down from the temple and expect God to rescue him; to bow down and worship the devil in exchange for worldly kingdoms.

Not only did Jesus resist the devil's temptations, but he did it by using Scripture, the word of God. No wonder St Paul calls Scripture "the sword of the Spirit" (cf. Ephesians 6:17).

Today's gospel ends by saying that "the devil left him," only to return, of course, at a later date - the time of Jesus' Passion.

### ROMANS

Our second reading today from Romans is a kind of commentary on original sin and our redemption by the cross and resurrection of Jesus.

St. Paul here contrasts the "gift" and the "transgression." As tragic as the transgression was, Paul says, "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."

So, death came through the old Adam, life through the new Adam - Jesus. Our reading ends with verse 19 of chapter 5. It is also worth citing verse 20, however: "Where sin abounded, grace abounded all the more."

### GRACE IS GREATER

Sin is our problem - grace and mercy through the new Adam, Jesus, is our solution. A line in an old gospel hymn says, "*Grace will always be greater than sin.*"

As we embark on our Lenten journey, what are three takeaways from today's readings? First, **God's amazing grace** - that God took pity on a fallen human race to send his Son. Second, **God's powerful word** - able to meet, answer, and overcome the temptations of the devil. And third, **overwhelming gratitude to the Lord** for all he has done for us. Have a blessed Lent!