

If you think back to our journey through Lent, we took a bunch of side-trips to the Garden of Eden. We are going back there again today because that is really where the events in today's gospel come from. Side note: yes, I am still wanting to do a Genesis bible study for Adult Faith Formation. Unfortunately, that takes a lot of preparation time and too many things have been dumped on me this past year so I haven't had the time or energy to work on it. Also, we are still working on hiring a youth and Newman Center minister; if we can't find the right person, I will be the new youth and young adult minister which means that bible studies and other adult faith formation activities will have to wait. The application deadline for that position is on Monday and we will be holding interviews once Haydee gets back so hopefully confirmation and youth groups registration will happen in the second half of September. Programs for Middle School and High School students will start later than usual but they will happen. Watch the bulletin for more information about that. For Adult Faith Formation, pray that I am able to hire someone for the youth/young adult position. And...some people have wondered why we have one person covering both the teens and the Newman Center because those require different sets of skills: that is what we can afford based on how much comes in through the offertory donations. Although parishes have many of the same expenses as businesses, we are not a business; we depend almost entirely on your generosity. Thank you for your generosity, but for those who demand more from us, we cannot meet those demands without more money coming in. Those are just the cold hard facts of life, even for the Church.

Back to the Garden of Eden. The second creation account in Genesis shows us a world in which nothing is growing because God had not sent rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the soil. God created man from the dust of the earth, then planted a garden in Eden and put the man there to till and keep it. In the inspired poetry of Genesis, we are being told that God created humanity to serve him in a very special way by working alongside him in his work of creation and to act as intermediaries between heaven and earth. But then along came the serpent and tempted Eve and Adam by causing them to doubt God's goodness: "Did God really say that? You won't die, God knows that you will become like him." The serpent, who will later be identified with Satan, was trying to divert Adam and Eve from their God-given purpose. And he succeeded.

In the gospel, Jesus tells Peter: "Get behind me, Satan! You are an obstacle to me." Jesus recognized Satan trying to work through Peter to divert him from his mission. What was Jesus' mission? To repair the damage done in the Garden of Eden when Adam and Eve were diverted from their mission by

obediently walking the way of the cross and dying for us on Calvary. Peter was an obstacle to Jesus because death and suffering were not part of God's original plan for humanity; it is instinctive for us to reject pain and suffering and do whatever we can to avoid it. We know that this was a real temptation for Jesus' human nature because in Gethsemane, he asked his Father to let the cup—which represents his suffering, passion, and death—pass from him. But—and here is where he reverses Eve and Adam's disobedience—after the prayer to be released from the suffering coming his way he prayed, "Not my will but your will be done." He overturned disobedience by being obedient. He blew right through the obstacles that Satan kept trying to put in his way because he knew that the only way to redeem us was through his sacrifice on the cross.

This leads to a few things for us to consider, starting with the second half of the gospel: "Whoever wishes to come after me must deny himself, take up his cross, and follow me. For whoever wishes to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake will find it. What profit would there be for one to gain the whole world and forfeit his life? Or what can one give in exchange for his life? For the Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory, and then he will repay all according to his conduct." Taking up the cross means sacrifice. Jesus' mission was all about sacrifice. We have professed ourselves as followers of Jesus. Our part in his mission must also require sacrifice. He told us in advance what that would cost us. We were not duped into this; the gospel is very clear about the cost. So what are the obstacles that Satan is throwing in front of us? How is he trying to get us to abandon our own ways of the cross? Satan worked through Peter to make him an obstacle to Jesus. How does Satan set us up as obstacles to others? How do we get in each other's way, maybe even force them off the path?

Abandoning our crosses might make our earthly lives a lot easier. But is it worth the eternal cost? The Son of Man will come with his angels in his Father's glory and he will repay each one of us according to our conduct. We can drop our crosses and immerse ourselves in all the temporary pleasures this world has to offer. Or we can remain faithful and follow in the footsteps of Jesus and set ourselves up for an eternity of truly blessed life in heaven. What choice sounds better to you?