

Holy Thursday – 2024
Exodus 24:3-11
1 Corinthians 10:16-17
Mark 14:12-26

By ingesting the fruit that dangled from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil we ingested the serpent who tempted us to eat it. I am using the first person plural pronoun intentionally. Eve is us. Not historically; Eve was an autonomous individual, real and unique as you or me, entirely her own person. But she is the mother of all the living; fully and beautifully and faultlessly human. That “faultlessly” bit is different from you and me. Original sin; it has come to us without us asking for it, much like life itself. Life is the gift of God. Original sin is the gift of Adam and Eve. “In sin did my mother conceive me” (Psalm 51:5). So wrote King David. David’s father also had a hand in David’s conception. King David’s father gave him the same original sin that your father gave to you. Victimhood is the art of constantly blaming someone or something else for one’s own misfortune, for one’s own failures. My three children, if they were devoted to victimhood, could blame me and Alise for their sinful nature. Do you suppose that Cain subconsciously blamed Adam and Eve when God cursed Cain for killing Abel?

Let’s define original sin before we go too much further down this road. Original sin means that every person is born *without* the innate ability to fear and love God – we are conceived spiritually blind and spiritually dead. Sin makes us enemies of God, deserving His temporal and eternal death sentence. Original sin makes us sinners, having corrupt desires that plague us throughout our time on this earth. Original sin is a powerful enemy that lives in us, from which we have no power to extricate ourselves. We are born into the enemy’s camp. In the Bible, Satan is described as the “god of this world” and the “ruler of this world” (2 Corinthians 4:4; John 12:31). That’s not hyperbole or flowery theological phraseology. Satan is the god of this world, small “g”, by virtue of man consuming the fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. By consuming the fruit we consumed the serpent who endorsed the eating, endorsed the rebellion, endorsed the sin. Darkness and death, deceit and death, rebellion and death – Eve unleashed it but we too have eaten or are we victims? Are we masters of the art of victimhood?

I have discovered that unbelievers are prone to diminish the gravity of our problem. Either by intention or some juvenile naiveté, unbelievers are regularly pooh-poohing the idea that sin has consequences, grave consequences, for the one transgressing God’s commands. The bible says that the law is written on the heart (God has inscribed His moral order on man). Unbelievers tell us that sin is a learned construct, a subjective phenomenon that comes from years of societal refinement. Do you believe that sinful man is accountable to a holy God? Do you believe that man is progressing in his pursuit of virtue, in his pursuit of the good, the pursuit of wisdom and justice? Is wholesomeness even a thing in our age? Does the heart of man cry out for what is holy or has the god of this world blinded the minds of the unbelievers to keep them from seeing the light of the glory of God in the face of Christ (2 Corinthians 4:4)?

Even some churches don’t want to talk about sin. They go the extra mile down this misbegotten path by taking the crosses out of their sanctuaries. Sin is a downer; put sin in mothballs. Crosses are a stumbling block; exile them to the broom closet. The word “judgment” is removed from their vocabulary. Some do this in an effort to make Christianity palatable to a worldly mind.

Some do it because they just don't like the substance of our faith. If you diminish the problem that humanity faces do you know what else you diminish? The Divine Solution. The solution shows us the glory of God. The glory of God – not the glory of man – that is Christianity. The Son of God is crucified on the altar of the cross, giving His life as a ransom for sinners – that is the glory of God, that is the glory that invades this world, that is the glory of this night.

“The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil” (1 John 3:8). Humanity was held captive by a craven evil, an embittered merchant of death. Listen to this hymn verse penned by Martin Luther: “Fast bound in Satan’s chains I lay; Death brooded darkly o’er me. Sin was my torment night and day; In sin my mother bore me. But daily deeper still I fell; My life became a living hell, So firmly sin possessed me” (Dear Christians, One and All, Rejoice). That accurately states our problem. Christianity is not a tepid answer to a passing emotional depression. Christianity is salvation from death and the ferocious grip of a relentless enemy. The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. Crush the serpent’s head! The serpent would strike Christ’s heel. Jesus would crush the serpent’s head by suffering spikes through His hands and feet. To “destroy the works of the devil” means that the Messianic King must die. Sin is placed on Him and the Son of God suffers the just penalty for our sin. Jesus pays the price. That is the redemption of the human race. That is the human race’s only hope. God designed and enacted it and He gives it to you as a free gift.

Have you ever heard of a “groaning table?” Picture a dining table so laden with the most magnificent food that there isn’t a spare inch of space. A groaning table; it is a reference to the weight of the food on the table – that the table itself is groaning under the burden of the food. Jesus instituted a meal. The food of His cross, the food of His suffering, the food of His victory; Jesus instituted a meal. There was nothing “spur of the moment” about this meal. Like creation itself, it was planned. Christ’s death and resurrection were welded into this meal. Forgiveness in the food of His body; a banquet unlike any other; Jesus instituted a meal. Food; the reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the works of the devil. Man fell by eating. Sin and death enveloped humanity by eating. Now Christ transforms that sorrow by giving you the fruit of His body, the wine of His blood, the bounty of His holiness. His glory is in that food.

The glory of that food is constantly on our altar. What if our altar could speak? What if that inanimate object, that sacred but inanimate structure of wood could vocalize its reaction to the honor of being employed in God’s service, its proximity to Christ’s transcendent body and blood? The altar wouldn’t groan, it would sing. The altar would herald its joy at being counted worthy to be in the immediate vicinity of the holiest thing on this earth – the ongoing presence of the astounding sacrifice of the King of kings. Isn’t that you? Isn’t that the privilege that you receive? Christ’s holiness, His sacrifice of love, His limitless self-giving, His power and His humility in a sacrament that conveys His death and resurrection – that is what you receive in Holy Communion.

Eve’s eating is replaced. Original sin is dismissed by the pierced Lord of the cross, by the pierced Lord of the empty tomb. The glorious weight of Christ’s body is given to you in simple bread. The sublime wonder of the blood of the Savior is given to you in a chalice of pure grace. By receiving the sacrament of Holy Communion we receive Him who died and rose again. We ingest life. We ingest the Prince of Heaven. Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit. He had no

earthly father, no original sin. Holy, perfect, and full of life; “In Him was life and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4). That’s exactly what you receive tonight. Christ’s life, Christ’s glory, Christ’s death and Christ’s resurrection. Here’s how He put it: “This is the bread that comes down from heaven, so that one may eat of it and not die. I am the living bread that came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread he will live forever. And the bread that I will give for the life of the world is my flesh” (John 6:50-51).