

First Sunday of Lent, Cycle A
Genesis 2: 7-9, 3: 1-7
Psalm 51: 3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17
Romans 5: 12-19
Matthew 4: 1-11
Rev. Charles B. Gordon, C.S.C.
The Garaventa Center
The University of Portland

Why did they do it? Why did our first parents let the serpent talk them into eating the forbidden fruit? When the old devil reminisces about his great victory on the satanic version of the history channel, what does he say finally won the day? Oh, Eve gives us reasons enough: She saw “the tree was good for food, pleasing to the eyes, and desirable for gaining wisdom.” But I’d be willing to bet that those are all rationalizations after the fact, and that the real reason Adam and Eve bit the apple comes down to one little phrase in the serpent’s sales pitch: “...you will be like gods.”

Now that is the kind of pitch that sells fruit. And the fact that Eve bought it affords proof, if proof were needed, that she is mother of us all. I mean look at the family resemblance. An outsider who tried to describe human life and human aspirations could sum it all up by simply using that phrase: They want to be “like gods.”

Like little gods, we want our own way. Our motto could be “Let my will, not thine, be done.” We want glory, and honor, and power - for ourselves. Deep down we want our every desire, no matter how trivial or perverse to be gratified, right now. If given free reign our egos could swallow whole worlds and not be satisfied.

So our first parents threw it all away – immortality, paradise, walks in the garden with God – all for the promise that they could be gods

themselves. And if you sat down and watched TV commercials for a day, you'd probably come away believing that, given half a chance, we would do the same thing today.

Of course, the last thing the serpent wanted was to make gods of us. But he knew there was no real chance of that. We weren't built for it. We were made to love and serve God. And if we rejected that role, we would inevitably end up loving and serving something less - money, power, status, alcohol, Internet pornography - essentially, we would end up loving and serving the snake.

And so we come to Lent, the season in which we do our best to frustrate the grasping little would be god inside each of us. By fasting and almsgiving and various forms of self-denial, we determine to eat and drink less than we could. We resolve to leave pleasures - that are right there within our reach - unenjoyed, for forty days. Self-denial - what an extraordinary concept for aspiring godlings!

Now our Lenten discipline can have two possible outcomes: we can succeed, or we can fail. If we succeed - if we manage to keep our Lenten resolutions - we might check our headlong rush toward self-gratification long enough to experience the people around us as people and not as potential means to our sordid ends. And we might even be able to spare some attention for the miracle of grace that is Easter.

If we fail to keep our Lenten promises - well, that might be even better for us. It might altogether puncture our inflated egos. We might come to the realization that we are pretty poor candidates for master of our universe if we can't even give up chocolate and root beer for six weeks. We might learn that we are making not gods, but fools of

ourselves, and that we are in desperate need of someone to save us from our absurd pretensions – and from the snake.

That someone is Jesus Christ, who has restored our right relationship with God, if only we will give up self-worship for discipleship. He restored that relationship by doing what our first parents could not: He walked out into the desert, stood up to the devil, and faced him down. There it is in our gospel – the same offer made to Adam and Eve – stripped of its sugarcoating: “the devil showed him all the kingdoms of the world in their magnificence, and he said to him, ‘All these I shall give to you if you will prostrate yourself and worship me.’ At this, Jesus said to him, ‘Get away Satan! It is written: *The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone will you serve.*’”

And so in the words of our second reading: “just as through the disobedience of the one man the many were made sinners, so, through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous.

It is for the glorious resurrection of that one, that we prepare in this Lenten season. Good luck with those Lenten resolutions.