



HOMILY by Father Robbie Low

1st Sunday of Lent Year A

Did God really say....?

Readings: *Genesis 2:7-9 – 3:1-7, Ps 50, Romans 5: 12-19, Matthew 4: 1-11*

When I was a little boy we lived with my grandmother. Under her roof she also sheltered her brother, my great Uncle Charlie. Charlie kept his not so secret supply of cider in the garden shed and 'wasted' more money that he didn't have on the football pools. If we could only win the top prize of £75,000 all our problems would vanish so he would occasionally treat me to a penny line. (You may recall that for £75K you would never need to work again and could buy all the houses in the street).

I used to pray that we would win. God clearly did not listen. But then I had an idea. If God didn't listen maybe the Devil would....

So I used to say loudly as I walked round the garden, 'You know I couldn't be tempted even if I won £75,000 !!' As you will gather the Devil didn't listen either and I have spent my life in badly paid jobs.

As a more mature adult I have come to recognise that God, in His infinite mercy, knew sudden and ridiculous wealth would be bad for me and the Old Enemy, in his cunning, reckoned that he could lead me astray for much less. So when I come to reflect on the Temptations put before Jesus in the Wilderness by Satan himself I always feel a bit out of my league.

Nobody is offering me world domination, angel assisted flight or a novel interpretation of rock cakes. But I do resonate with the fatal dilemma of my ancestors, Adam and Eve, in the pre-lapsarian paradise.

I understand it because I hear those temptations daily in the society in which I live and in the daily encounters with my own fallen nature.

God, you may recall, had given the plenitude of Eden to Man, Adam - the creature of blood and dust – and Eve – the mother of all who will live. At the centre of this paradise are two trees, the Tree of Life and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. The latter is the only place off limits.

Let's remind ourselves of the pattern of temptation.

The tempter asks Eve, 'Did God really say you were not to eat of the fruit of any of the trees?' The very first move is to change or distort what God has actually said, to make the simple requirements of God for obedience, trust and holiness into a huge tangled web of unreasonable and dictatorial demands.

He lies about God. You will find just such dishonest caricatures of our loving creator everywhere from the revolutionary Jacobins to the latest Darwinian atheists. Eve, to her credit, corrects the Tempter. That is not what God said.

The Tempter then turns from the insinuation of dishonesty to the 'lie direct'. He refutes the Word of God absolutely. Knowing full well that it will cost Man his place in paradise and indeed his very life and destiny and make him a slave of sin, the Tempter pronounces God to be a liar who is afraid of

His own creatures and terrified that they will become gods too and threaten His power. 'You will not die. God knows that you will become like Him'. Succinctly put this is the motto of the black magician and the occultist throughout the ages. The desire to become gods haunts the realms of the agents of the dark lord.

Eve takes and eats of the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil and, like all sinners, encourages others to participate. The rest is our history, yours and mine.

We should thank God always that she went for that tree first and not the Tree of Life. Imagine eternal life locked into a pattern of irredeemable wickedness. But the Tree of Life does not disappear with the closure of the Gates of Eden. It will reappear, in the fullness of time, on the hill of the skull outside the Holy City, Jerusalem and on it will hang the first fruits of the Resurrection.

While the servants of the dark lord spend their time in self glorification, self justification and the pursuit of their own power, the 'god within' as the occultists claim, they become, ironically and tragically, ever more deeply enslaved and bitterly entrenched in the ranks of death and in servitude to the enemy of Man.

Those who seek the way back to Eden, humble themselves on the Via Dolorosa, pursue a life of joyful service and liberating penance. What Eve and Adam sought in disobedience, the divinisation of Man, is achieved in Christ by obedience. As God becomes Man in Jesus, so Man is lifted, sinless, reconciled, restored to the Father in the Sacrifice of Calvary. This is the immensity of God's love for you and me.

This is what we celebrate every time we offer the Mass.

Our road home is 'through Him and with Him and in Him', as the Mass attests when the priest raises the Body and Blood of Christ for adoration.

Obedience to the Word and utter trust and faithfulness are the watchword. The sacraments, of course, contain both the clues and the reality, the route map and the treasure.

In the Lenten season we go back to the beginning of the Gospel call, 'Repent' and focus particularly on the Sacrament of Reconciliation. The confessional is the place where we constantly relearn and receive the loving and healing mercy of God. It is where we submit ourselves to the restorative truth of His Word, receive true liberation and set out on the road anew, strengthened and joyful, to the Crucified Lord on the Tree of Life and onward into the eternal mystery of the Third Day.

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