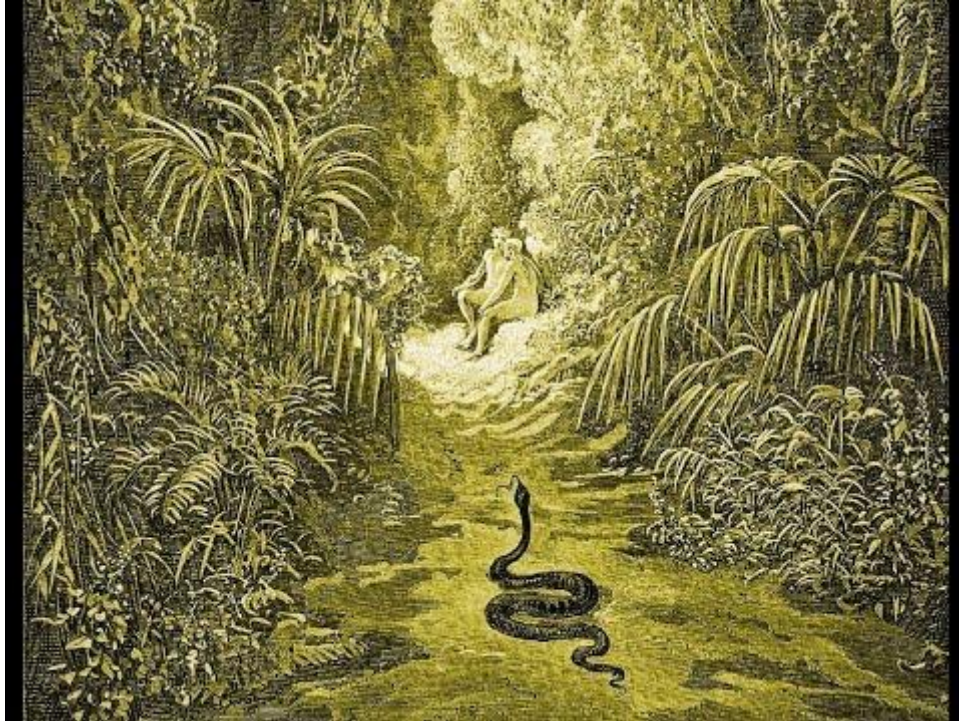


March 10, 2024
Homily on John 3:14-21
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God's Love Brings Us Back to The Garden



Lord, give me the confidence in the power of your Gospel. Grant me clarity in understanding and proclaiming the truths of your Word.

Please be seated.

Good morning to you all here and watching at home.

God loves us. Sometimes I wonder why. In the recent TV movie, House of Gucci, which is about the fall of the Gucci fashion house, Aldo Gucci talks about his son, Paulo. Paulo is not what you would call bright, a nut that fell far, far from the tree. Aldo admits that Paulo is an idiot. But, he says, "He's MY idiot." And, so, he loves him, despite his faults.

Today's Gospel goes to the core of our belief in the all-encompassing and restorative power of God's love for us and all creation. Today's "God So Loved the World" reading brings us full circle from our banishment from the Garden of Eden to the fulfillment of God's plan, through Jesus, for our salvation, despite all our faults.

The restorative power of God's love is the first response God has to Adam and Eve's disobedience in eating the forbidden fruit. Before expelling them from the Garden, God turns to the serpent and vows, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers. He shall crush your head and you will strike his heel."

Enmity, or inherent opposition, is now set in motion between the forces of good and evil as Adam and Eve are about to enter an existence in which that battle will be ongoing. But God had a plan from the very beginning to give humanity the spiritual guidance to find a way back to the Garden. The Annunciation through the celebration of Easter is all foretold by God before our expulsion from Paradise, a testament of His love for us.

When I was growing up, I had a built-in shelf next to my bed which housed dozens of religious statues, bought from a store next to the Catholic church went to. I had saints, popes, wise men, Joseph, and numerous Mary's. My favorite was Mary atop the earth with her foot on a snake. I had this statue before I really understood what it referenced, so I just thought it meant she had magical healing powers.

And, so she did, by accepting the good news of the Incarnation by the angel Gabriel, countering Eve's acceptance of temptation.

Whether Adam and Eve understood this, God's curse on the snake was the very first prophecy of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, God's plan to restore what we lost by our betrayal and rebellion against Him. It was God's divine love that set in motion the path to our salvation even before Adam and Eve set one foot out of Eden. A love as great as this comes with great hope and trust in our doing the right thing. For any of you who have children, remember those teen years, the rebellion, the close encounters with trouble. For all the angst you felt, I suspect you still held out hope and trusted in the fact that, as you tried to teach them of consequences, and right and wrong, they would eventually end up being the people you hoped they would be. So, it is with our relationship as children of God.

We behave badly; we are punished. Yet God continued and continues to put us on the path of righteousness as he still loves us, despite our very nature.

We behaved so badly that to save us God had to give His only begotten son, his sole heir, the only one He fully accepts and loves without condition, to be sacrificed for us. Through Jesus, God's love is actionable and sacrificial.

He is engaging us, through Jesus, to connect with him, to have a relationship with him. He wants us to be people who do not simply follow rules, but to have a love for God that can combat temptation.

Jesus' obedience on the tree of the cross reversed our disobedience, our giving into temptation at the Tree of Knowledge.

Jesus' vanquishing of Satan, the symbol of temptation, is a recurring theme since the beginning of Lent. Jesus rebukes Satan in the desert, He rebukes Peter for trying to tempt him to the turn away from a death that is his only path toward our salvation. In today's Gospel, reference is made to Moses fashioning a serpent out of bronze and affixing it to a pole to save those bitten by a snake. All these references to temptation, harking back to our original sin, resolves in Jesus' sacrificial death, a death that will

destroy the one who has the power of death, meaning, Satan. The gauntlet thrown; the victory won, God's vow to the serpent fulfilled.

Another part of today's reading is this: "Those who believe in Jesus shall not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him."

Jesus' mission was not to chastise us, although he made clear which of our actions would bring us to him or remove us from the light of salvation. Jesus' mission was to restore us, return us to our most perfect state, as we were in the Garden. The "might" be saved in our reading today can only become "will" be saved if we adhere to what Jesus named as the greatest commandment: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind and, by extension, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

In Jesus, the obstacle of our separation from God is overcome. Eden again awaits us if we accept and live Jesus' teachings and understand the depth of God's commitment to redeem and be reconciled with humanity. It is our mission to return this love by carrying the message of God's love to a world in need. How do we do that? Do not give something up for Lent, add something that spreads God's love to others. Show your gratitude by embodying God's love through your actions. Perform acts of kindness, consideration, and compassion toward others, as a way of reflecting the love you have received. Volunteer in your community. Take part in the drive for necessities for those less fortunate. Donate to a food bank. All these actions complete the circle of love, uniting us once again with God.

Amen.