

GRACE EPISCOPAL CHURCH
Sheboygan, Wisconsin

The First Sunday in Lent (A)

Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7

Psalm 32

Romans 5.12-19

Matthew 4.1-11

Lent begins with a parallel drawn between the story of the fall of humankind and the start of a new creation in Jesus (in the readings from Genesis and Romans), while focusing also on repentance (in the psalm) and on Jesus' preparation for His public ministry (in the Gospel).

Genesis 2.15-17; 3.1-7

1. The first verses here are taken from the second story of creation, in which the man is formed from earth.
 - a. The man's name, "Adam," is a play on words in Hebrew, meaning "earth creature" or "one made of earth". ("Earthling" is an accurate rendering.)
2. Two trees are placed beyond human use: the Tree of Life (which appears at the end of the story, at 3.22), and the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil.
 - a. To "know" in Hebrew is experiential and relational, not only intellectual.
 - i. Therefore, to eat of the fruit of the tree is to impart a mastery of life and an autonomy that is inappropriate to the earth creature.
 - ii. Adam and Eve know evil by experiencing it! They ignore God's will.
3. The serpent is not here identified with the devil. This identification of the tempter comes much later in Scripture, but the identification is implicit by description.
 - a. The temptation posed is that the earth creatures "will be like God".
 - i. The temptation is thus of a radical autonomy of self-actualization for creatures which God has made as heteronomous (to be subject to the will of an "Other").

Psalm 32

1. A wisdom psalm cast in the form of a psalm of thanksgiving.
2. The teaching elements of this psalm are included in the thanksgiving offered.
 - a. Confession of sin to God leads to forgiveness and to health in spirit.
 - b. God is willing to forgive one who confesses.
3. Not to confess one's sins is to persist in iniquity.
 - a. Failure to confess is a further ratification of the sin. It is treating the sin like it is not sin.
4. In response to the psalmist's confession, God promises to lead him into the way of righteousness.

Romans 5.12-19

1. The first part of ch. 5 has announced the general theme, that the justified Christian, reconciled to God, will be saved, sharing with hope in Christ's risen life.
2. The present verses expand on this general description of the theme.
 - a. New life in Christ brings perfect freedom. (These verses only serve to introduce this general treatment, which is developed in full from 5.12 until 7.25.
3. Paul compares the condition of the justified and reconciled Christian to the status of humanity before Christ's coming.
 - a. Adam, as the first parent, is compared with Jesus, as the head of the new humanity.
 - i. Creation is "recapitulated" in Christ.
 - b. Paul, however, does not make the comparison exact, for he wants to distinguish between the superabundance of Jesus' grace that reigns instead of the sin and death which reigned from Adam's death.
 - i. Just as sin came into the world through Adam, and this affects all human beings, so through Jesus comes righteousness and eternal life.
 1. But, Jesus' benefit far outweighs the damage done by Adam, and Paul's parallelism in the whole passage is not exact, because he wants to make clear that the "balance" between sin and salvation is not a balance, but a superabundance of grace in salvation.

Matthew 4.1-11

1. Whereas Mark relates Jesus' temptation in the wilderness in just two verses (1.12-13), Matthew elaborates.
 - a. Since the disciples knew that Jesus had been tempted, but could not know how (for temptation is personal!), Matthew's narrative probably represents a *midrash*, a teaching on this subject, intended to make it more pastorally useful for believers.
 - i. Matthew draws parallels between Jesus' temptation of forty days (Mark does not mention a time frame) and Moses and Elijah in the desert, and with Israel's trial of God's patience.
2. The devil, of course, quotes Scripture! All of Jesus' answers are from Deuteronomy 6-8.
 - a. The temptations represent the ways of sinning against the great commandment ("You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might ...").
 - i. This basic theme of the love of God unites the entire narrative.
3. Satan addresses Jesus as the "Son of God". In this he is making a reference to Israel, and not to Jesus as the eternal Son.
 - a. Turning stones to bread would involve rebellion against the divine will.
 - i. Jesus replies by quoting from a section in Deuteronomy which describes the word of God as our chief nourishment.
 - b. Jesus is invited to test God's providential care. The devil's quotation of Ps. 91.11-12 is from the Greek version in the Septuagint.

- i. Jesus replies that the service of the LORD is not to be undertaken lightly!
 - c. Jesus is invited to prefer power and wealth over God.
 - i. Jesus replies that only God is worthy of worship.
- 4. Jesus represents all of Israel in this episode. He is the beginning of the new people of God.
 - a. The basic temptation is not to love God with a unified heart, even at the risk of life or the cost of wealth.
 - b.

A Liturgical Addendum: On the First Sunday in Lent it is customary to begin the liturgy with *The Great Litany* (found at pp. 148-155 in *The Book of Common Prayer*). The Litany is found using only Rite I language, and this language is used regardless of whether the celebration follows Rite I or Rite II.

The Litany was written by Archbishop Thomas Cranmer at the command of Henry VIII, as a supplication offered following reversals of English fortune in France. It is thus a uniquely Anglican document, and has not been used in worship in other Church traditions. Litanies, however, are not uncommon. The form of a litany is one of repeated prayer, including a responsorial element which is repeated. This form is common in Eastern Orthodox worship.

The use of the Litany is not restricted to any particular Sunday, or to Lent.