

“FIRST IMPRESSIONS” 10TH SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME (B)

Genesis 3: 8-15 Psalm 130 2 Cor. 4: 13--5:1 Mark 3: 20--35

By Jude Siciliano, OP

Dear Preachers:

To get a better flavor for the Genesis reading you might want to start reading from the beginning of chapter 3. It is a popular story, and it is often interpreted. The snake is never really described as the devil, just as the “slyest of all the wild creatures.” The snake doesn’t cause sin, as if sin were something we could blame on external forces in our lives. However, the snake does pose subtle questions that provide the material for the humans’ excuses. Evil is around us, asking questions that seem to give us excuses for our misdeeds, and our compromises. We say, “Everyone does it,” or “It’s not such a big deal”, or “I can’t change the system, may as well go along with it.” or “That’s someone else’s responsibility.” The story is concerned with the painful effects of sin in our lives. Our experience and that of our world is one of violence, broken and disrupted relationships, and pain. All these, and much more, come from sin, our treatment of one another and our turning our backs on God. We cannot blame all this on some external force, as if we do not play a role in it all.

The sin of the humans is that they chose to follow their own desires, not the “will of God.” Notice the Gospel reading, where the antidote for our estrangement is doing the will of God and as a result being united in the one family of Jesus. Sin has introduced disharmony shown in a world where humans look elsewhere to lay blame: she made me do it--- the snake made me do it. The story sums up the human situation then and now; our human existence is broken; relationships are froth with blame and mistrust. We do yearn for the Garden experience, how it was before sin was introduced into the world. We have a sense of how life should be, how we desire it to be. But we face the harsh realities of how it is. The tale told the ancients and tells us that we are the way we are because we have sinned, we have not obeyed God’s will for us. So, God enters the scene is looking for us and wants to ask the poignant question, “Where are you?”

I was at a retreat day recently and the director asked us the same question God asks in Genesis, “Where are you?” There’s a homily in that question and in our attempt to name where we are, how things are with us. Summer is beginning, normally a time of easing up a bit, some vacation may lie ahead. As we begin the season we hear the question asked of us, “Where are you?” It is also the kind of question someone might ask us when we seem distracted or not paying attention. “Where are you, where did you go?” Maybe we have just lost track of where we are, who

we are and where we should be going. Maybe we just plod along, very busy, very scattered by the rush and routine. Or maybe, like Adam, we are hiding out, afraid to face or deal with something that needs addressing. Summer usually provides some space and leisure for people, maybe it's a good time to ask ourselves the question of this first reading, "Where am I?", and then try to add, "And where am I going?"

The entrance of God on the scene and the question we are asked, don't have to be frightening or foreboding events. This could be the kind of question that a loving parent concerned about the wellbeing of a child might ask. "Where are you?"

Today's Gospel story is a complex one. It might help in interpreting this passage if we note its structure. One story (3:22-30) is placed between two parts of another story (3:20-21, 31-35); the story of Jesus' family has within it the accusation by the scribes that Jesus is possessed. Jesus' own family does not appreciate who he is and what he is doing. And the scribes think he is possessed. Notice the implied popular belief the scribes express in their accusation against Jesus. They reveal a belief that evil possesses power and could do impressive acts. They seem to believe that not all-powerful deeds are of God and that these powers are not always well intentioned ("He expels demons with the help of the prince of demons."). Their thinking is not too far removed from what we experience today: that there are powerful forces that can do horrendous evil in the world. At first glance these powers seem to be doing good for humanity, we call it: "progress" "modern discoveries," "technology," etc. But these forces can do harm, and we need to ask if they are really advances and at what price; who gains and who loses? And where does all this power lead us anyway?

Jesus suggests that Satan's house has been entered from without. It's a strong image of Jesus, a thief or intruder who enters, restrains the owner and plunders his house. Jesus is putting Satan "under restraint." The dissension and fragmentation caused by sin, depicted in the first reading, is now about to be healed. Mark had promised in the beginning of this Gospel, through John the Baptist, that a "strong one" (1:7) was to come. He has arrived and is strong enough to overcome the power of evil in our world (racism, poverty, abuse of power, etc.) through those who are united with Christ and who now share in his power.

Now we come to the line about the "unforgivable sin." Jesus has just said Satan's house is being overcome. Sins are being forgiven, and evil is driven out.

However, to say that the Holy Spirit is not the source of this goodness, is to "sin against the Holy Spirit," it is the unwillingness to accept God at work in Jesus'

healing of the brokenness that goes all the way back to the beginning of our humanity. Sin seems to have always been with us and to “blaspheme against the Spirit” is to name what God is doing as the work of the devil, or as an evil event. Not recognizing God is taking oneself out of the realm of mercy Jesus is proclaiming. Unwillingness to recognize this mercy is be out of its forgiving scope. Trusting in the mercy available for us places us within God’s forgiveness and thus nothing is unforgivable.

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Thank you.

“Blessings on your preaching”,
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