

The First Sunday of Lent

Sunday, March 13th, 2011

The Original “Fiat”

Adam and Eve.

The bane of our existence.

If only they hadn't screwed up!

What kind of world might we be in right now if they'd only followed instructions?

What was not-to-like in Paradise? Everything that needed to be made was already there. Everything and everyone, presumably, got along. Eve, the First Woman, wasn't even afraid of snakes. There was no want.

Or, was there?

Innate to woman, at least (the storytellers tell us), is Wanting. Wanting to experience that which is Not-Yet-Hers. Wondering. Speculating. What if . . . ? Maybe. I wonder . . .

We blame men for a lot, but long before Eve was a twinkle in Adam's eye, in the time before fig leaves and loin cloths, she already was entertaining possibilities beyond what she could see and feel and hear and taste; and touch. She wondered. She took a chance. She made a judgment.

Number One Man, Numero Uno, was a quick learner, though. A “Show Me” guy, he was right there, ready for something new. He's probably the one who figured out the fig leaves.

He definitely was the one who started the Blame Game. “Uhh, uhh, it was the Woman – the one YOU gave me”, Classic. He doesn't just blame Her. “It was The Woman. The one YOU gave me!” Stack the deck. Blame GOD. “YOU gave her to me! “

“Ahh, but! ” says she, “it was that *snake*. I should never have trusted that snake!”

And so, every culture on Earth seems to have inherited the Culture of Eden: **The Culture of Blame**. Nature and science teach us to observe in terms of cause and effect. Religion, universally, teaches us Blame.

Every culture has its Creation story. Someone who has the best of everything messes up, and the rest of us pay for it forever. We know, from our own experience, that every relationship has its story; its blames; its judgment calls; its surprise outcomes – some temporary, some lasting. For better or for worse, religions draw on this familiar human experience.

Religion is a culture; embedded deep within families and communities. Religions shape a people even while people etch in stone the tenets of “their religion”.

Religions enable a community to experience itself as a community. Religions embody beliefs, experiences, understandings, hopes, expectations, fears. They define what is acceptable and what is not. They prescribe self-sustaining behaviors.

Religion as a culture is less and less regional as physical borders fade in importance and ideological borders redefine *and re-segregate* the human family, often inside common physical borders.

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Religions ritualize traditions, preserving them beyond, perhaps, their otherwise relevant lifetime.

Way too often, the experience of belonging, of trusting, of finding meaning, of feeling safe and welcome and understood, becomes inseparable from the religion within which framework it was first experienced. It is not Faith, but Religion that allows divisiveness, and mis-trust, and blame, and fear to build walls that confine the experience of Belonging to small, nervous, segregated ant-hills of community -- suspicious; guarded; threatened by proximity to whatever is not within its control; ready to prey upon non-conforming others . . . of course, first blaming them for not belonging to the offended culture.

We don't even have to look at the mid-East, North Africa, the U.S. Congress, at what passes as political discourse in our world today. Right here – our own Church – persistently is unwelcoming to so many!

When explaining today's fractured human family to today's children, it is easier to explain the sweeping terror of a tsunami than it is to explain how and why intelligent, sensate women and men find it necessary to destroy life; and at the same time, can be instantly angry at God for destroying life when an earth-rocking wave re-shapes the Earth in a few anguished hours.

Lent is our traditional time to re-think how we got to where we are – ourselves, our families, our church, our communities, our world. Time to make a judgment call. Wondering; like Eve,

“What could it be like?”

“Should we be doing more than what we're doing?”

Do we still think that the deity makes all things happen by a simple FIAT? Let there be . . . ? Poof?

In the realm of tsunamis, the geothermal dynamics of the Earth and earthquakes will taunt our inquisitiveness for generations – but far more significantly, does even God's **FIAT** move us to reshape the world in which we still have time to make footprints?

“When I was young, I thought as a child”, says Paul. “And then, I put away the thoughts of a child”.

Lent invites us to GROW UP. AGAIN. THIS YEAR. To try something new; or to try again.

My “poster” for this first week of Lent is Michelangelo's **Creation** – the finger of God reaching out, not quite touching the finger of newly minted Man.

This first week of Lent, reach out, and touch someone.

FIAT. Let there be . . .

Let there be Humanity. Touch someone new. Someone who lives in the subway. Someone aged. Someone annoying. With pimples. With a limp. With bad breath. Touch each other, with unexpected kindness.

FIAT Lux. Let there be Light; and Peace. Kindness. Hope. Trust. Gentleness. Compassion.

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Simple ways. Who gets the bathroom first? Letting the passing stranger know that you notice him, not look right past him. Getting to know and revere the diversity of which you are a tiny part.

FIAT. LET THERE BE WELCOME. Let there be Belonging. Belonging creates *new* expectations, new *possibilities*.

LET THERE BE TOLERANCE. Let it be. Even the self-righteous *can be* right.

FIAT. LET THERE BE A WILLINGNESS TO RE-THINK; to accept changed understandings. So often, we are blinded by what we see, oblivious of all that we don't see.

LET THERE BE PATIENCE. It is possible to make the same mistakes over and over again, even when trying. Like jam, if you keep at it long enough, something sticks.

LET THERE BE FORBEARANCE. The way God is with us: "Just try. We'll deal with the mistakes later".

LET THERE BE HUMBLE, ANTICIPATORY REVERENCE for all that we have not yet discovered. Tread gently. You don't know the magnificence that's not yet unfolded.

Every wound, every injury has a core where possibility lies.
When someone, someday, touches that core, new possibilities emerge.

We heal each other. We open the possibility of healing by simple touches.

Not everything can be fixed, but the paralysis that comes from isolation and despair can be relieved by something as simple as companionship. Kindness. By touch. By listening. By forgiving. By not calling attention to a blooper.

This unfolding world, this vibrant, vast universe – it really **IS all about us**. The world of God's creating won't happen any other way. It's up to us.

Come to ME Come to **ME**, all you who are burdened. Come to **Me**, you Hungry. Come to **ME**, you who languish alone, and **I – I** will refresh you!

Can our church say this?

Can we?

This **IS** the Way. And the Truth. And the Life.