

If you don't believe in sin, then today's readings won't have any meaning for you.

If you don't believe in sin, then the hurtful, harmful actions of others, EVIL, are just a natural occurrence.

If you don't believe in sin, is there any reason for you to believe in the grace of God?

Sin, the turning of our backs to God, to His love and nurturing, so that we can "be my own person", selfish, greedy, domineering. Sin is a seed that was planted by the devil at the dawn of man, passed down and spread across the globe from age to age, a **PANDEMIC** like no other in the annals of mankind.

Today's story from Genesis about the downfall of man from the grace of God through that original sin of Adam and Eve, opens **OUR** eyes, as it did Adam and Eve's, not so much to what we have lost, but what we can now expect in our lives. Pain, suffering, distress, poverty, hunger, WAR, much of which we inflict on one another by the **free-will choices** we make.

When Adam and Eve's eyes were opened, they realized they were naked, and they felt shame and embarrassment. But why? Their eyes were **ALREADY** open before they ate the fruit of the tree, and they saw themselves naked and were **not** ashamed, but had mutual respect for the beauty and sanctity of the other. After all, they were of one flesh. I say, what their disobedience brought to their eyes was jealousy, pride, selfishness, and disrespect, and the realization and fear of "What have **I** done?"

In their sin they hid themselves from God. But He came looking for them. Like any good and loving Father, He chastised them and then let them do as THEY CHOSE to do, "be their own person." Yet, just as in the story of the prodigal son, the Father continued to look after them, to wait for them to turn back to Him. Stubbornness and pride are a hard combination for our

weak human souls, and try as we might, it takes more than just ourselves to turn us around and to bring us closer to God. It is by the selfless actions of His only son Jesus and the strengthening graces of the Holy Spirit, that we can stand up to the temptations in our daily lives.

Jesus taught this right from the beginning. Before he set out into the desert, he approached John the Baptist in the Jordan River. Immersed in water, just as the world was immersed in the Great Flood which washed away evil across the land, Jesus set the example before us, to be cleansed from original sin in baptism, even though he was sinless. And the Holy Spirit descended upon him, strengthening him with grace upon grace.

From there he traveled out into the desert for forty days, to pray, to fast, to purge and ready himself for his mission ahead. It is there, at his weakest, physically and mentally, that the devil puts the temptations to him, EVEN quoting scripture to add a **GLINT of truth** to the lies, **just** as he did with Adam and Eve, **just** as he does with us every day of our lives.

Yet Jesus was able to resist the devil's charms. HOW? By the grace of the Holy Spirit he received at his baptism, the **SAME** grace we received at our baptism. We, as well as those desiring to enter the Church this Easter through the Right of Christian Initiation of Adults, receive grace upon grace in reception of the Holy Eucharist, the Bread of Life, and in Confirmation where we are "sealed with the Holy Spirit." We, like Jesus, find our sustaining strength by living on "every word that comes forth from the mouth of God." Jesus, by his example, shows us that we need more than just ourselves to fight off the temptations of the devil, to fight off our weakness of will, to help us avoid sin.

These forty days of Lent give us a more focused attitude toward purging ourselves of the things that try to separate us from God, even if just slightly. Yes, we should work at this all the year round, but during this special season the Church helps to

encourage us even more through scripture, programs of giving, and in opening more opportunities to prayer and self sacrifice. We may not go forty days without food, but we can still imitate the free will of Jesus and avoid the very temptations that try to turn us away from the love of God.

Three times the devil tempted Jesus, and three times Jesus defeated him. Three times Peter denied he knew Christ, and three times a repentant Peter acknowledged his love to the Lord. How many times a day are we tempted to turn our backs on Jesus and walk with the devil? How many times will we turn to God and accept His grace to strengthen us against the **LIES** of the devil?

As we are fed by the Word of God, strengthened with the Bread of Life, and dismissed from Mass with the blessing of the Holy Trinity, we are told to take what we have been given and share it with the rest of the world in the name of Jesus the Lord. We have the necessary tools with which to defeat sin in our lives - all the love our Heavenly Father gives us. This Lent, let us move ourselves a little closer to God. Let prayer, fasting, and almsgiving be our "YES" to God, and let us respond as Peter did: "Lord, you know all things; you **KNOW** that I love you."