

Paradise Lost

I. REVIEW OF WEEK #4

A. Loss of Supernatural Life

Adam and Eve lost something greater than natural life when they sinned; they lost supernatural life, original holiness, and original justice. Losing this life is true death – a death much worse than any they would have experienced had they simply lost their bodily lives.

Confronted with the choice of preserving their earthly lives on the one hand or surrendering the supernatural life in their souls on the other, Adam and Eve chose to love themselves more than God.

The consequence of the death of grace in Adam and Eve’s lives was the distortion and disordering of their spiritual and physical faculties.

- They ran and hid from God;
- They wanted to remain autonomous from Him and from each other;
- On top of that, they seemed blind to their condition;
- How will God break through this wall of pride and darkness?
- How will He convince His children that their happiness is in His hands?

B. Pain and Suffering Enter the World

Because their choice to turn to Him must be a free one, He will have to give them a reason to make that choice. And so, pain and suffering enter the human story.

- If, in their pride and fear of God, they will not run into His arms, will pain and suffering drive them to it?

They did not lose their knowledge that God exists when they disobeyed. But they cannot see Him for Who He is. If their lives become an experience of weakness, trouble, and desperation, will they humbly cry out for their Father’s help?

This kind of additional punishment of Adam and Eve is meant to help them do the best possible thing with their lives:

- Cast themselves on God for His mercy and help.

- If it must come through pain and suffering, so be it.
- Better to experience short-term pain than to endure the everlasting pain and darkness of separation from God.

The death through disobedience that God warned Adam and Eve to avoid was immediate and complete.

Their bodies didn’t die immediately, but something inside them did. They were still spiritual and corporeal [bodily] beings. They retained their souls, but their ability to see spiritual realities correctly was lost.

The Church teaches us that what died in Adam and Eve was the supernatural life of grace. God created them with natural and spiritual faculties (body and soul). By His grace in them, their spiritual faculties were meant to keep their bodies’ natural faculties under control.

C. Back into Chaos

Just as there had been order in the universe, there was order within human nature. That harmony in man’s nature died in the Garden. Adam and Eve broke the covenant God had made with them and with all creation.

- Stepping out of the covenant, they stepped into chaos.

We saw the signs of that chaos as soon as God approached them. But we also saw signs of something else. The outline of hope slowly began to take shape in the midst of the rubble.

There was nothing in the humans to give rise to it, but the promise of God to defeat His enemy through the woman and her seed permeated the darkness like the first rays of dawn.

Just as the chaos that once existed on the earth, when it was without form, had been dispelled by God’s spoken word [“And God said. . .”], a Word of promise from Him is the first step in rescuing man from the chaos of sin.

D. God is Still in Control

At this point in the story, the focus is not so much on Adam and Eve, as on God, Who shows Himself to be entirely in control of everything and everyone, including the devil.

He has a battle plan in place. He is not about to give up on His children. He loves them too much.

E. What Does the Future Hold?

But what will happen next? We are cheered by the hope of the continuation of mankind, and we are certainly very curious about the woman and her seed, with whom mankind’s future seems so intimately linked.

We are confident that God actually loves these creatures, even though they themselves cannot perceive it.

Will everyone and everything carry on as usual until the appearance of the Mother and Son?

- Was spiritual death the end of God’s punishment of Adam and Eve?

To answer these questions we must press on to finish Genesis 3.

II. ADAM AND EVE ARE PUNISHED

Last week we saw how God dealt with Satan, since Satan is the actual villain here. He is God’s true enemy. Therefore God’s most severe punishment after the Fall is reserved not to the man or woman but to the serpent who tempted them.

Satan is cursed and his pride and power crushed. The verdict and punishment on Satan was meted in Gen 14-15, as we saw last week.

Nevertheless Adam and Eve are also responsible and they will now have to face God’s judgment on them.

By their sin Adam and Eve brought suffering into the world. Sin is the reason for suffering. All the good things God had planned for us will now be tainted by suffering.

Now the humans will reap the consequences of their sin:

- When we carry out God’s wish for us to “be fruitful” childbirth will be painful;
- Our family life will still be an image of God’s love, but relationships will be marred by sin;
- Work – which was designed to be a joy – will be toil; it will not always be fruitful, but may bring forth thorns and thistles. Labour will be carried out with difficulty, in sweat.
- Even life itself will end in suffering. Physical death is inevitable.

F. What is the Purpose of Punishment?

Before we consider the punishment of Adam and Eve, there is a question we need to consider.

All of us are children of parents; some of us are parents of children. Because of that, we are equipped to answer this:

- Why do good parents punish their children?
- What are the purposes of punishment?
- And why is punishment always a sign of hope? Read Hebrews 12:4-11.

III. EVE’S PUNISHMENT

It is as wife and mother that Eve will experience the consequences of her sin. The punishment is threefold:

- Woman bears children in pain;
- Her desire for her husband, despite its consequences, is controlled with difficulty;
- Man dominates woman in the domestic and social order. Man’s natural authority [or rule] over woman, although part of the order of creation, is distorted by sin beyond the divine plan.
- Discrimination against and the abuse of women is here seen as the outcome of sin. It is something, therefore, that the Bible regards as evil.

Read: Genesis 3:16

[16] To the woman he said, "I will greatly multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children, yet your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you."

G. Pain in Childbirth

Eve’s pain in childbearing represents God’s call to her in the midst of her most important work: bringing life into the world. Her body and her nature were designed by God to bear and nurture human life.

This act, in marriage, will enable her to fulfill her human vocation on earth. If it is, therefore, the centerpiece of her earthly existence, it is very appropriate for God to use its pain as the means to humble her and draw her to Him.

Had she remained humble and dependent on God in the face of temptation, childbearing would have been painless.

Because of sin, she will experience pain in order to motivate her to desire God’s help and intervention.

In addition, think of the symbolic meaning of the fact that from that point on, all human beings enter the world through pain. We are meant to understand that mankind is under a curse that things are not as they should be.

Something has gone very, very wrong.

H. Desire for her Husband

The phrase “yet your desire shall be for your husband” (vs. 16) does not necessarily refer to sexual desire. It has within its meaning the idea of wanting to master or rule someone or something. Read Gen. 4:7 for another example of it.

Why would the impulse for Eve to rule her husband be a form of punishment for her?

If Eve has a desire to rule her husband, she will have an on-going experience of discord, frustration, impatience, and disappointment.

It means that in spite of the pain of childbearing, she will want to be married, but she will not settle into the helpmate role she was designed by God to live.

Instead, she will want to continue doing what she did in the Garden - make the decisions for her husband.

This will mean a perpetual experience of being at odds with herself. She will know, somewhere deep inside, that the role of decision-maker is not really hers; she will long for Adam to stand firm, as he didn’t do in the Garden, but she will not be able to resist the impulse to step in and take charge.

This will produce suffering in her. And suffering always has the purpose of rehabilitation and hope.

If Eve looks for the happiness in marriage that it was designed to give and finds misery instead, will she cry out to God for help?

IV. ADAM’S PUNISHMENT

Unlike the serpent, the man is not cursed directly, but through the earth. The effects of sin that man will experience are closely connected with his God-given mission – to till and keep the garden.

Read: Genesis 3:17-20

[17] And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life; [18] thorns and thistles it shall bring forth to you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. [19] In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; you are dust, and to dust you shall return." [20] The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living.

A. Curse and Cure

The harmony between man and nature has been shattered by sin; from now on man is going to find work burdensome and it will cause him much distress.

- The curse that Adam and Eve brought on themselves was not God’s revenge.
- It was the cure for their illness.
- God’s wrath is not the opposite of God’s love; rather, his wrath is a manifestation of his love.

B. Adam’s Authority Turns to Domination

Adam delighted in the creation of Eve because she was his equal. She was to be the remedy for his loneliness and was given to him to assist him in his work on earth.

Because she came from him and was made for him, he would exercise a role of authority in their relationship. But this relationship would be characterized by joy, harmony, cooperation, and mutual satisfaction, as the two become one flesh.

The effect of sin on marriage would be to shatter all this. Adam’s authority, exercised in nurture and tender care, will become rule. Both Adam and Eve will suffer in this new scenario.

Adam will be tempted to tyranny and domination, a radical departure from the image and likeness of God in him, leaving him frustrated with himself (just as Eve would be).

- Eve, as a result, will seem more like Adam’s slave than his helpmate.
- For both, marriage will fall far short of its original ecstasy.
- Will this loss move them to seek God’s help?

C. Adam Listens to Eve Instead of God

Adam listened to the voice of his wife rather than listening to God’s voice. In this, he failed both of them. Eve should have been able to look to Adam for help and protection against the serpent. She should have been able to listen to his voice, but his voice was silent.

He should have had the memory of God’s Voice telling him to avoid the forbidden fruit ringing in his ears. To turn from that divine Voice for an earthly one was a choice to count human knowledge and wisdom greater than God’s. It was the birth of human pride.

D. The Earth is Cursed

For God to curse the earth is a demonstration of the magnitude of Adam’s sin. As a result of his disobedience, all of nature will be affected. This is an indication to us that Adam’s sin was first in the order of severity.

His failure to heed God’s voice ushered in catastrophe everywhere. All of life will lose the joy and harmony of the Garden, a life that cannot be sustained apart from God’s grace in the human soul.

Creation itself groans under the weight of Adam’s disobedience. As St. Paul says, the creation was subjected to futility (Rom. 8:19-23) as a result of the fall.

Because man was created with a desire for goodness and happiness, his cursed earthly habitation will be a continual frustration of that desire. He will never really feel at home again. The immediate consequence for Adam will be one similar to the consequence of Eve’s disobedience. That is, his physical work of

subduing the earth - the centerpiece of his vocation - will be an occasion of pain and suffering.

- Finding hardship, not happiness, in his life’s work, will he humble himself to cry out for help?

E. Return to Dust

Another significance of the curse on the ground is that it had been the stuff of which Adam was made. He had been much more than dust, of course, because God breathed His own breath into man (Gen. 2:7). But now, he is going to undergo physical death. He’s going back to dust.

The Church teaches us that even though man’s nature is mortal, God had destined him not to die.

- Death was therefore contrary to the plans of God the Creator and entered the world as a consequence of sin (CCC 1008).
- Man, destined to be immortal, would ever after dread death as unnatural and contrary to what he knows himself to be.

As it approaches, will he cry out for help?

F. Adam Names his Wife Eve

The name he gives his wife, Eve, is one that is full of hope. Perhaps he was overjoyed to know that not only would they continue to live but that “the woman and her seed” would figure prominently in God’s battle with His enemy.

Possibly this exalted role of a mother moved him to choose that name for her. There’s an irony in it, of course. Eve would become the mother of the spiritually dead. It would take another woman to be Mother of all the spiritually living. But in the name, Eve, there is hope.

To be named “Mother” before she had consummated her marriage is to present her as a virgin mother.

V. EXPELLED FROM PARADISE

Even after the fall, God still takes care of man! Man will continue to populate the earth, in spite of death, thanks to the woman’s role as mother. God comes to the rescue of man’s nakedness, which made him feel so afraid and ashamed.

Man’s place in history emerges with his expulsion from paradise. He now knows good and evil; he is deprived of the happiness for which he was created and, with death as his fate, he yearns for the immortality which in fact belongs to God alone. This is the human condition; it affects everyone and its cause lies in sin.

Read: Genesis 3:21-24

[21] And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins, and clothed them.

[22] Then the LORD God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever" --

[23] Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken.

[24] He drove out the man; and at the east of the Garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

A. Properly Clothed

God still cares about these first humans. The fig leaves would not provide the covering they needed - too insubstantial. He wants them to be properly clothed, in garments that will last. So he makes them garments of animal skin.

The first shedding of blood on earth happened when God acted to cover the shame of Adam and Eve. It is the first episode of innocence covering guilt. In the context of the story, it is a grave indication of the seriousness of sin and the lengths to which God will go to rescue man from it.

The animals had not been created by God to serve this purpose. Would the killing of an innocent animal become a gesture of remembrance or thanksgiving to God from men after that?

Would they have an impulse to offer up an animal in order to re-enact this provision from God to clothe the nakedness of His fallen children? Does it have some connection with the universal practice of animal sacrifice among ancient cultures?

Something to reflect on!

B. The Tree of Life

13. God seems not to want the humans to eat from the Tree of Life and live forever. Why not? Surely it is because of the condition into which they had

fallen. To live forever in a state of spiritual blindness and disorder in their natures would literally be a fate worse than death.

C. A Severe Mercy

It is provocative to examine why God expelled man and woman from the Garden instead of just doing away with it. The expulsion, as severe as it seems, is actually a sign of unimaginable hope. It is truly a severe mercy. It says two things at once.

First, it suggests that the original plan of God for His human children did not die with the death of grace in them. Could it be that in allowing the Garden to remain, guarded by an angel and a flaming sword, God intends to return His creatures there someday to the life they once had?

Second, that God does not want His creatures to live forever in their fallen state opens the door to the hope that someday that systemic wound in their natures could be healed.

D. Can the Original Wound be Healed?

How could that ever happen? How could they ever receive a new human nature? When they leave the Garden, with its Tree of Life, their physical bodies will be subject to death and decay.

- What could possibly happen to them that would turn things around so dramatically?
- Will they ever taste of the Tree of Life?

The pain that Adam and Eve (and thus all mankind) will experience in the areas that matter most to them is a sign that God wants to join them in their everyday existence. His punishment is aimed at restoring in them what once could have happened by nature to see that He is the source and protector of all that is important to them.

E. Pain and Suffering: A Merciful Blessing

The misery that will permeate the world will make life in it incapable of satisfying man’s innate longing for goodness, truth, and beauty.

- This is a merciful blessing from God, Who knows that His children, disordered as they are, will not, on their own, realize that they can’t be content without Him.

His act of covering their nakedness with the proper garments shows His love to be willing to condescend to human weakness and shame.

- His expulsion of them from the Garden so as to prevent them from living forever in their wretched state of sin is an act of severe mercy.

That He allows the Tree of Life to remain means that, because He loves them, all is not lost.

F. Living under the Curse

Adam and Eve (and all the human beings who come through them) will live lives that fall far short of their aspirations. Having been created by God for a life of blessing, they will now continue their existence under a curse.

- Their relationships with God, with each other, and with themselves will bear the marks of this devastating loss;
- Their human natures will experience chaos because of the spiritual blindness that has overtaken them;
- In their bodies they will experience pain, suffering, and death. Even the earth itself is not the earth it was once;
- Everything is out of sync. What was once easy will become hard (their vocations), and what was once hard (disobeying God) will become too easy (recall Eve valiantly trying to shake off the serpent’s distortion of God’s Word by repeating how dangerous the forbidden fruit was).

G. God Still Loves His Wayward Children

As Adam and Eve leave the garden in sorrow, is the picture completely hopeless? Not at all! Serious, yes! A valley of tears, yes! But without hope? Far from it! The signs of hope are everywhere:

1. God provides garments to cover them in their shame and nakedness. In this He demonstrates to them, in a way they could see and feel that He still loves them. Even in their spiritual blindness, this is a sign they simply could not misunderstand. They take with them the hope of this continued love.
2. God promises to defeat His enemy and theirs in a battle to be waged through human beings - the woman and her offspring. They take with them the hope that someday God will keep this promise so that their mortal enemy can be defeated.

The humans leave the Garden not just with new clothes but with hope that they or their descendants will someday be allowed to return to the Garden. Only God knows.

Summary

1. God punishes Eve and Adam in ways distinctive to their vocations.
 - Pain and misery will characterize the most important part of their lives.
 - Even the earth suffers from their disobedience.
 - In addition, they will face the dissolution of their physical bodies in death.
2. Because we know that God loves these creatures and hasn’t given up on them, this punishment can have only one meaning.
 - It will serve to make it impossible for them to realize the happiness they were designed to have in their lives on earth.
 - They will be restless, feeling their weakness and vulnerability. Perhaps they will cry out to God for help.

3. Man and woman will resume the life God had ordained for them, although it will undergo a radical difference.

Adam names his wife Eve “Mother of all living” a name which represents the hope that through her motherhood, mankind has a future.

4. God clothes His children with animal skins. He cares for them and has not abandoned them.

- This covering of their nakedness required the death of an innocent animal, a drastic measure.
- It signifies what God is willing to do to protect them in their shame.

5. Adam and Eve are expelled from the Garden lest they live forever by eating from the Tree of Life.

They leave with the expectation that someday God will keep His promise to defeat their enemy, the devil, by sending a woman and her offspring. Perhaps

they long for the day when they or their descendants might be able to make their way back to the Garden.

Questions

1. Was Adam originally meant to rule over Eve? How has their relationship changed?
2. What fault of Adam’s does God name (vs. 17)? What is implicit in this accusation about how Adam has failed God and his wife?
3. Adam’s sin meant a curse on the ground, on the earth itself. Why do you think God did that? What will be the consequence for Adam?
4. We understand, as we look at the details of Adam and Eve’s punishments, that we are looking at the beginning of human misery, suffering, and death. Based on what we have thought about in this section of our study, what would you say is the meaning of suffering? Why has the world, from the time of the fall of our first human parents, been like this?
5. See that God clothes the humans with animal skins instead of the fig leaves they had sewed. What does this act reveal about God?
6. Why do you suppose God sends Adam and Eve out of the Garden rather than simply getting rid of the Tree of Life?
7. Why do you think He would allow the tree to continue to exist on the earth, under heavy guard?

Preparation for Week #6

Read:

1. Genesis: Finish Chapter 4 - RSV Catholic Edition;
2. *Come and see Catholic Bible Study* – Genesis: Chapter 4;
3. The Navarre Bible: Genesis – Chapter 4