

Sunday Afternoon Readings

(By RIGHT REV. MGR. POWER for the N.Z. Tablet.)

VII—ORIGINAL SIN.

Satan, as we have seen, is radically opposed to divine grace, and wages incessant war upon it. He takes no delight in sin except in so far as it means the casting out of grace. It is an error to think that he and his hosts are confined to hell; some of them are there, attending to the lost souls, but the multitude pervade this air, tempting us. This is necessary for our trial and greater reward, it is through many tribulations that we are to enter into the Kingdom of Heaven. Let us see how he tempted our first parents, how he overcame them, and what were the consequences of Adam's fall to the race of which he is head.

God created the earth, filled it with every flower and fruit and fragrant healing plant that could charm the sight and ravish every sense. He decked it with leafy arches, shady groves, and majestic forests; He filled its fields with animals and fowls of every kind that could serve the use of man; He made its seas and rivers team with fish, and above the verdant fields He sent flying through the air birds of every entrancing color and form. This theatre of beauty now needed only a lord to govern it; and the three persons of the Blessed Trinity, taking counsel, said: "Let us make man to our own image and likeness"! And so the lord of this creation came, partly of the earth, but chiefly of the spirit; his body not essentially different from the earth on which he trod, but his soul spiritual and immortal. He is more, however, than the union of body and soul, for God has given divine grace as a dower to this new being, as He had given it to the angels. Adam was not created in a state of mere nature, but in what we call the state of Original Justice.

And God loved Adam, the new creature of His hands, and had consideration for him, and He said: "It is not good for man to be alone; let us make him a help like unto himself. . . Then the Lord cast a deep sleep upon Adam, and when he was fast asleep, He took one of his ribs, and filled up flesh for it. And the Lord God built the rib which He took from Adam into a woman, and brought her to Adam."

O, Eve, Mother Eve! The earth has hitherto seen none so fair as thee. Remember thy beauty and thy grace, remember Whose gift they are and their purpose, stand true to our father, and to us, his children yet unborn; keep safe and pure our heritage, and hand it down secure and unstained to us! Ah, no. The grace-bating serpent sneaks into Eden and makes an idle hour for Eve. "What lovely trees are these in your garden of delights!" Turn away, turn away, O Mother! from the uncanny thing; he is only a devil, the foulest of them all, and can bring you no good. She listens on. "Why do you not eat the fruits?" "But we do eat, and of every tree except this one, which it is death for us to touch since the Lord has forbidden it." "Not death," says Satan, "but glorious life; eat it and you shall

know all that God knows, you shall be no longer dependent upon Him, but shall be as gods yourselves." She eats and gives to Adam who also eats; he knows it is wrong, but he will not disoblige his beautiful partner. They are cast out, exiles from Paradise, rebels like Satan, naked and ashamed, the curse of their disobedience clinging to their bones, and trailing, like the trail of the serpent to every generation of Adam's race.

Well might we put to them the question put by St. Paul to the Romans: "What fruit therefore had you then in those things of which you are now ashamed? For the end of them is death." The sin of Adam came down prolific to his race, darkening man's understanding through the Fall and weakening his will, making him less a man and more a beast. "Man when he was in honor," says the Psalmist, "did not understand: he was matched with senseless beasts and became like unto them." Many amongst the learned think it not unlikely that the savage state of what Anthropologists and Geologists know as "primitive man" was part of the punishment of Adam's sin. Do the words of Cardinal Newman in the *Dream of Gerontius* indicate this.

"He dreed his penance day by day,
And step by step began
Slowly to doff his savage garb
And be again a man."

O sin, sin, terrible degrading, murderous sin, it has killed the beauty in our first parents' souls, robbed them of their dower of divine grace, opened beneath their feet the yawning gates of hell, into which they must inevitably fall if some one who is more than man come not to atone to God's majesty for their disobedience. But repentance is possible to man, for he is not an angel whose act is irretrievable, and our first parents retrieved their personal sin by a long course of continuous penance.

Their personal sin, yes. But Adam's sin was more than personal: it was the sin of the race summed up in Adam, and its consequences still flow upon the race. Adam was not merely an individual man; he was the human race, and as such received the gift of Original Justice for himself and for the race, with the promises and penalties attached thereto. By this stupendous gift, the human will was made perfect, so perfect that there was nothing in it that was not for God: it was subordinate to the will of God and in harmony with Him. Because the soul is what the Scholastic Philosophers call the *Forma Corporis*, or form of the body, its activities are so taken up with animating the body, that without this gift it would be ever sinking towards matter; but with this gift it would feel itself directly, totally, and easily rising up to God. And because God wished the soul to have this gift, because it was contained within the order established by Him for human life, its rejection became a mortal offence to Him. Therefore the

soul without it is in opposition to Him and must now begin its career without His grace. That is, simply as I can put it, what original sin is: we are born without God's grace, without original justice.

How is this sin or state of disinheritance transmitted to us? By the fact that we are all children of Adam, it comes to us from him by way of origin. We are members of the one body of Adam, naturally sprung from him, so that as St. Paul writes to the Ephesians, we are by nature children of wrath. Although the sin has not been actually committed by ourselves, we nevertheless share in its guilt because, says St. Thomas, guilt is transmitted by way of origin from father to son. In a word, we inherit Adam's nature which is a sinful nature. The gift of original justice has not been given to us, solely because it had been lost to the race through the act of the father of the race. The universality of this privation and its restoration to the baptised are expressly taught by St. Paul in the fifth chapter of his Epistle to the Romans:

"For if by one man's offence death reigned through one; much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of justice, shall reign in life through One, Jesus Christ. Therefore as by the offence of one, unto all men to condemnation; so also by the justice of One, unto all men to justification of life. For as by the disobedience of one man, many were made sinners: so also by the obedience of One, many shall be made just."

Learn from this what a terrible thing sin is, what an outrage against the Divine Majesty, what an upsetting of the harmonious order designed by Him. We should not easily forget this, for in addition to original sin itself, there are consequences which it had and which also have come down to us. Original sin, by the mercy of God, has been washed from us in Baptism, but the infirmities, the wounds of human nature, have not been taken away. We are still members of a fallen race, and are prone to the things that are not of the spirit; our intellects are darkened and our wills weakened.

One thought more to keep us on our guard against sin is this, that wherever there is an absence of God's grace, whether it be wilful, as in the case of actual mortal sin, or inborn, as in the case of the unbaptised, there the devil has power, there he wields his principality over the earth. When at the end of Mass we ask God to thrust Satan and his wicked spirits down to hell, we are only asking God's grace against Satan and his wiles. God will not yet thrust Satan down to hell, for evil spirits will remain around while God's children remain on earth to be tried and to be tested.

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