

The Origin of Sin, Part 2

Last week's bulletin article took up the passage in Genesis 3 relating the origin of sin – the fall of Adam & Eve. The article first explored the message that our good Creator is teaching us with the term 'serpent' and concluded with the connection between the words 'naked' and 'subtle.' This week's article will continue the examination of this passage, starting with the "conversation" between Eve and the Satan.

3. The Conversation

- He said to the woman, "Did God say, 'You shall not eat of any tree of the garden'?"
- And the woman said to the serpent, "We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; but God said, 'You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the middle of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.'"
- But the serpent said to the woman, "You will not die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

He said to the woman...Pause on this. Is this not the nature of virtually every temptation against what God has revealed and teaches definitively in and through His Church – ah come on, can't we at least talk about it? What can just talking hurt? Everybody knows that dialogue is the supreme good. Well, and then as we talk, maybe we can come to some understanding – some negotiation and compromise, that's the way; you see, we can be friends and if we're friends, I won't hurt you. You'll understand me and I'll understand you. All of this is a way to bring the person around to saying: what is settled (by God) is not settled; what cannot be changed, can change. Women cannot be ordained to the priesthood, period. Oh come on now, can't we at least talk about it? Any use of sexuality outside of marriage is a grave sin, there's no getting around it. But you don't understand me, let me tell you. See how it victimizes me and my feelings?

...and she replied. At that moment, when she entered into conversation with the tempter (or we might say with temptation), her fate was pretty much sealed. We cannot enter into a conversation with the tempter or temptation – he will win every time. The intellect of the fallen angel is too great for man to oppose. We cannot carry on a conversation with temptation. No is no and yes is yes and that's it. If you dilly-dally with it, you're done.

The subtlety of the tempter is seen from the start. Did God say...? He doesn't come right out, at least not at the start, and say: God lied to you. No, he begins with a question, so innocent. He *leads you into* questioning God. Questioning God is a crucial part of the temptation but he doesn't immediately question God *directly*.

But even that is not the thrust of the matter here. There is an even greater subtlety, namely with what he leaves out. Prior to this (in Scripture), God was referred to as *Lord* God (Adam & Eve were naked (dependent) and unashamed – they depended on the Lord). Now Satan does not fail to call God, God. He just simply leaves out the Lord part. Sure, God can be "God," but not Lord – a Lord is one that has governance over me and on whom I am dependent. The serpent does not argue outright about God being Lord, he simply, shrewdly, and unnoticeably sets it aside. *And*...it's accepted by Eve. It is a way of setting the terms of the "argument." This is part of many temptations: God is not Lord. The conviction that God is Lord has to be overcome if the tempter is to make real headway. That has to be circumvented. Well, we don't even need to talk about it, we'll just casually set that aside, it's not even open for debate, that part is settled. You see, how nice. We are friends already. This tells us something about reaching true happiness and not letting temptation steal it away: I have to fix God as Lord in my mind. He is Lord, not me, not my feelings and desires, not anyone or anything else – He and He alone.

Did God say...a questioning of God, it is a hint, not really saying what he means, not suggesting it outright but just a little question, with the real question being: can God really be trusted?

Another characteristic is that the serpent intentionally, albeit subtly, distorts what God says. He would try to use this same tactic on our Lord. But in that case, the "expert" on Scripture (on what God said) meets the authority. He knew what God said, how else would he know about the tree. But, just like in the case of leaving

out ‘Lord,’ he changes what God actually said. How often do we encounter this in everyday life today? Who are you to say what God means? *That* is actually true, I’m nobody to say, but our Lord gave us an authority that we can rely on, which is the teaching authority of the Church. That has to go too from the viewpoint of the tempter. And indeed, it has been set aside by many.

Another subtlety – he blends the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in with all the rest of the trees, not outright, but just by glossing over it; it’s now just another tree, just like all the others. Do we not see this frequently? Good and evil? What’s the difference? There is no such thing. Today good is frequently called evil and what is evil is called good. Are we prepared to recognize it and reject it?

Eve replies. Notice that she now follows suit, she is now, already, following the tempter and not God. She too changes what God said. She mentions the *fruit* on the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Fruit, in Scriptural language, means that which is good for man. God *never* said that what was on that tree was fruit. Like the tempter, Eve now also changes what God said. Do we begin to see how necessary it is for the Church to teach the truths of the faith plainly and clearly? Do we care? Eve goes further in changing what God said: she adds to it: nor shall we even touch it. God did *not* say not to touch it. Is this showing some sign of irritation at God’s command? Isn’t it unreasonable that we can’t even touch it? Yes, God’s commands are unreasonable. You see, so says the tempter, I am a good person, I am your real friend, your real benefactor, I am on your side, I am here to free you from your oppressor. Ah, yes, how easily we get drawn into that one. And finally Eve, again following the tempter, does not refer to God as Lord God but only God. He has been set aside as Lord. Now it’s all but over.

The tree of the knowledge of good and evil, is a central part of this passage. Knowledge, as Aquinas points out, involves a union between the knower and the thing known; the essence of the object known becomes part of him; this is the meaning of knowledge in Scripture. It appears, then, that Eve had already begun to “know good and evil” simply by conversing with the serpent. She was, it appears, coming to know Satan in the biblical sense and in starting to become one with him, she also begins to imitate him. “Well” done, oh destroyer of goodness – and all so very subtly, all so very friendly.

Satan speaks next: you will not die. He did not *start* with an outright contradiction to what God had actually said but we see now that’s where he was headed. We fall deeper and deeper into evil, one step at a time. Listen, set aside confession, why should you confess your sins to a priest? Confession has to be stopped, from the perspective of the destroyer and enslaver of man, because it will cut off those steps. It has to go. And it is now largely gone. Victory to the killer. Man has willingly handed himself off to his own executioner. It is a sad thing for even me to see – imagine how sad it must be for the one who gave His life so that we might receive His mercy. Once we have progressed so far in evil we become blind and anything goes – including outright contradiction to what God has revealed.

Let us take note, very clearly, that Adam & Eve did in fact die. So who actually lied, God or Satan? Who was the real benefactor of man? How easy it is to set aside basic truths, basic realities. It teaches us the necessity of recalling these truths over and over again until they became irrevocably fixed in my mind.

We will finish up next time with some final thoughts on “The Fall,” starting with what happened with Eve after the tempter left her.

God bless you,

Fr Kuhn.