

## First Sunday in Lent, year A:

### Five Reflective *Insights* Based on the **Seven Points**

**Readings:** Genesis 2:7-3:7 (snippeted!); Ps 51:3-17 (snippeted!); Rom 5:12-19; Matt 4:1-11

Recall: what we are aiming to do:

- start with our lives as they engage these classic readings; realign afresh;
- allow ancient narratives and contemporary cosmology to engage each other and us;
- analogy:     falling in love or having a child: “everything” changes!  
                  have a profound experience: everything shifts!  
                  continue, as we age, to engage God, Jesus, Holy Spirit; don’t stall!
- process: I will start with some of the *seven points* (rather than with the text); and offer *five reflective insights*; the seven points are what we will be exploring across Lent and on Easter Sunday;

1. **time moving ahead:** We are accustomed to hearing this Genesis reading and Paul’s comment on it as a story about our human past: ‘once perfect, we slipped seriously and had to leave the garden; now want to leave earth and get back into the garden;’ that is the traditional interpretation and has had a long run. We are unlikely to ever forget it. Ancient cultures almost all have a similar deterioration dynamic. But: New Cosmology (hereafter NC) invites us also to consider the idea that we are not just sinners in trouble, hoping for a redo, but creatures all called forward by God to new possibilities; we will not be escaping earth or rewinding the clock but are invited to what lies ahead; go back or move ahead? Try ahead. Creation continues, thanks be to God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Earth, Universe!

2. **integral ecology:** The Genesis story, Paul’s comment, and Matthew’s story of Jesus on retreat in the desert stress conflict or struggle among creatures; we know it happens! But if we can sideline that for the moment and ask ourselves to look at indications of *solidarity*, those are on offer. The “early garden” stresses collaboration and flow among all the participants as a possibility: they/we need each other and help each other. A mystery posed by the narrative and not resolved is why they/we are unable to sustain such relatedness, why we humans struggle so with this. Humans, over time and across cultures, have a tendency to exalt ourselves at the expense of others, to compete, to compare, to categorize, to others’ detriment. But: We are invited, notably by Pope Francis, to let some of our “Berlin Wall” (or Tupperware) categories go and consider relatedness instead of stark difference. Humbling, maybe, but helpful. Consider that after his 40 days, Jesus writes thank you notes to the creatures that accompanied him on his retreat. He thanks them for what he learned! To whom might you write today with gratitude, as we begin our Lenten Retreat?

3. **suffering and sin:** St. Paul is very clear that the Genesis reading is about sin and suffering. That's the usual interpretation, thanks to St. Paul; St. Augustine intensifies it by saying that "original sin" is inherited, a designation I suspect he regrets; others do! That's a heavy trip to lay on human beings and especially on unbaptized innocents (and their parents). There is no doubt that humans regularly fall short of our best, likely animals do as well; and suffering abounds. But not everything that feels bad to us or others is usefully categorized as moral and punitive. NC points out that some 99% of all that ever was is now gone, or refashioned into other being. That is the way of the universe, and presumably part of God's creativity: re-use, re-fresh, and re-fashion, re-combine. Insofar as creation is ongoing, parts come and go, dance with new partners. We grieve it but that does not make it bad. We may know the phenomenon where small children often interpret family matters (e.g., divorce) as "their fault"; a broader perspective suggests it is not so, even if they feel it. Suffering happens and is not always "about us." We construct it personally, but it may not be. Sin is in need of re-thinking as well. For starters, back to the man and woman in the garden: their clearest breach is of solidarity, several times; why does it happen? Why are we such beings? How is their "breach" suggested? At several points in the story, I suggest, it happens, well before the woman is looking at the fruit! We might talk about it next Thursday! If sin is *refusal of relatedness* or *violations* of it, that's provocative. Matthew's "the devil" is urging Jesus to use other creatures to get a better position. Jesus refuses.

4. **beyond videos:** Certain of the Christian (and Jewish) ancients held to a very literal dictation of these biblical stories, and to prescribe tight, finished meanings, closer to how we think numbers signify. Since the age of modernity in the West (17<sup>th</sup> century or so, with the rise of modern science), we have become much *more* literal than the ancients were, and our move is hard on these biblical narratives. We can note genre: Genesis is a deep *narrative*; the psalm is a *prayer*; Paul does want to offer us his view on what he thinks is *doctrine*: theologically viable; Matthew shapes common *tradition* about Jesus (the start of his ministry) distinctively into his story of it, showing us something-s about who Jesus is. It is all to be engaged, interpreted, to be grown as we get older and wiser. Literal is not the only way to read—clearly not best here. It's good for recipes and bank statement but not always for Scripture.

5. **powers of the universe: allurements:** These (eleven or so) powers are non-traditional. Allurement is analogous to gravity, but says that there are many and mysterious "draws" among many parts of the universe (big to small), as we know we are drawn to some things powerfully in ways we don't understand. To suppose that the universe is a constant play of allurements is a fresh view of what we may have thought. (These are posted in a separate document.)

If I were to *develop a homily* on these ... it would be about the great mystery and challenge of *relationship*: what is possible, what is worth striving for, how we are assisted by God and Jesus (and each other), why we fall short...how to work on one of the "short" aspects. We can think of players as fundamentally separate or as in relationship, in ever-changing, kaleidoscopic relationship. What fun! But how challenging! Whee! Zoom discussion on these next Thursday!