

Year A First Sunday of Lent (Feb. 10, 2008)

Gn 2:7-9; 3:1-7; Ps 51; Rom 5:12-19; Mt 4:1-11

The readings for the first Sunday of Lent contain the most profound teaching to be found in the Bible. They contain in a nutshell all of God's revelation to us.

The whole of the Bible story is about humanity's falling away from God's order and plan, which alone can enable us to be on intimate terms with him and thus find bliss. This is the story of the sin of our first parents, which resulted in the first exile, that of the "poor banished children of Eve." What was their sin? Disobeying God by wanting to be like gods. And this prototypical sin is what we are really doing when we disobey God.

God began his plan to save us from this destructive estrangement from him (i.e., from "Eden" or Paradise) by choosing a people to reveal himself and "educate" them. His promises at first were commensurate with what could be understood at the time: land and offspring (and don't we still sometimes limit ourselves to just this?). But even the path to the "Promised Land" was tortuous, as Israel failed to trust and obey, and thus wandered in the desert (Dt 1:19-45), wasting time away from God. Jesus retraced this path of temptation (meaning "testing") in the desert. In his forty days and nights there (like Israel's forty years), he did not put God to the test (Dt 6:16), as Israel had done, but was instead put to the test, as Israel also had been (Dt 8:2-6, from which Jesus quotes in today's gospel). Jesus, unlike Israel, successfully passed the test: he obeyed God his Father, humbly accepting divine correction *for us* (the "education" I alluded to before, Hebrew *musar*, Greek *paideia*), as in Dt 8:5. This is also the "correction" or "discipline" the Suffering Servant underwent in Isa 53:5, which brought us salvation.

Jesus indeed is the new and last "Adam," who reversed the "original sin." As described in Phil 2:5-11, unlike the first Adam, Jesus did not grasp at divinity, but humbled himself, taking the form of a slave, and furthermore accepting the most ignoble punishment. This was the opposite of what Adam did, but only Jesus, the Son of God, could perfectly reverse Adam's sin: Jesus freely divested himself of what our first parents so coveted, divinity. Only he could do this. But since with God there is always more, we can respond to the second reading with St. Augustine's *felix culpa*, oh happy fault!