

10th Sunday of the Year

Today's readings offer us a lot of material for reflection – the loss of Paradise by Adam and Eve but also the promise of redemption; the promise of a dwelling in heaven when the tent of our earthly body wears out; how Our Lord's role is misunderstood or misrepresented by his human family and the scribes together with a warning about the sin against the Holy Spirit!

However, there is a common thread running through them. The devil divides but God brings unity. Before the creation of the material universe some of God's spiritual creatures, whom we know as angels, chose to reject the authority of God so as to make themselves his equal. This manifests itself in a desire to sow seeds of division and destruction throughout God's material creation, and especially among human beings because they are created to share in God's spiritual nature and have the potential for eternal life. The temptation and fall of Adam and Eve is the Bible's way of explaining how sin and division came into the world. All the evils that human beings suffer, including physical frailty and death, are seen as the consequence of this.

As a consequence of the fall of our first ancestors each of us is a kingdom divided. Even St Paul had to admit that this division existed within himself: "I do not do the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do" (Romans 7:19). Adam and Eve have taken the bait of illusory freedom. But immediately Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the snake. Henceforth they are divided not only within themselves, but from each other and from God. This is a triple form of alienation: from self, from others, from God. But God also promises a remedy. While the serpent will bite the heel of their descendants one of them will crush the serpent under his heel. The word 'seed' in Hebrew is feminine so we can see this as Our Lord, or through her part in his work, his Blessed Mother.

The scribes cannot visualise this. Jesus is a carpenter. He can exercise control over the forces of evil only if he is in league with the Devil! Even his human family cannot understand what he is up to. In truth he is the one who brings God's healing love to bear on all the ills of humanity through the power of the Holy Spirit. By the power of his death on the cross and of his resurrection he crushes evil underfoot. The power is already at work in his public ministry. God denies his healing love to no one but we must be open to receiving it. By rejecting his work as that of the Devil the Scribes close their hearts to the love of God and while this continues cannot find healing. They have chosen to accept the division brought by the Devil instead of the unity Our Lord offers them.

This does not mean that their position is hopeless. As long as we live the Holy Spirit tries to find a way through the hard shell we allow to grow around our hearts. This is the meaning of the Feast of the Sacred Heart we celebrated on Friday. The thorns of our sin that surround his heart are the wounds of our rejection of his love but this does not dampen the fire of his love. When his heart is literally broken by the piercing of the lance blood and water flow out – signs of his grace in the sacraments especially baptism and the Eucharist. Our prayers and devotions and above all those of Our Lady not only strengthen us against the temptation to dismiss Our Lord's love and the means of grace he gives us but also serve to cast light in dark places. They prepare the way for the Holy Spirit to touch hearts that have become hardened and closed to God. Those who do not share our faith may dismiss all this as nonsense but in today's Gospel Jesus tells us that those who do God's will are united to him more closely than even his human family. United with Christ there is no evil we cannot defeat because the victory is his, not ours.