

Thursday of the First Week of Advent

For generations of Catholics the sacraments became simply remedies for sin and Christmas was the beginning of a rescue mission and the Last Judgment awaited everyone, pure and simple.

European male mindsets enshrined concepts of sin and law and judgement and justice and forgiveness and love and literature as if they were the templates come from the hand of the Creator. They were not.

Baptism took away original sin, you could not receive Holy Communion if you were in a “state of sin,” marriage allowed you to have sex without sinning providing a whole lot of other policies were followed, the Sacrament of the Sick, popularly known as Last Rites, was to get your sins forgiven as close to your last breath as possible, Holy Orders was to create those men who could forgive your sins, and then, of course, Confession or the Sacrament of Penance became a central feature of Catholic life, what you did to try and hedge your bets for the Last Judgment.

Confirmation in this mindset was a tagalong depending on where it was placed in the life of a Catholic, most recently in many quarters it was a kind of refresher course on all of the rest but just at the beginning of adolescence when life gets interesting.

“Making the human sojourn less sad” is, I think, what Jesus had in mind and what he did if we take the Gospel stories as a whole and not reduce them to a few verses in the Gospel of Matthew about the end of time and a last judgement.

Seeing all of the Gospel stories through the prism of these few verses of Matthew as I think many do narrows the Christian/Catholic faith to a kind of battle of the wills—God’s will versus our wills.

That entire story of Adam and Eve and the tree and the serpent as I have said many times has far too much influence in how we interpreted Jesus Christ and The Kingdom of God and Christmas.

That Genesis story is an ancient synthesis of many threads of myth and fable and poetry that relies on understandings of metaphors long lost to the conscious imagination.

Our taking that story so very literally as if it were an eyewitness account and believing that in the course of less than a day Adam and Eve could undo The Divine Creators creation and turn God into a small minded, petty, unforgiving, vindictive kind of guy just doesn't make sense given all of the other stories and plot lines hidden in the Biblical texts.

Rather, if we work to get out from underneath all of that negativity as I suggested yesterday, we might hear stories that speak to our weary, angry, worried Christmas this year of our Lord, 2020.

If you actually read the first three chapters of Genesis, really read them, I think you will see a conflict of wills, but it is not between Adam and Eve and God, but rather between God and the storyteller.

It is the storyteller that wants to make of God the strongarmed enforcer, if you read it. God takes the cues gets the lines from the storyteller except in Chapter 3 verse 21: The LORD God made for the man and his wife garments of skin, with which he clothed them.

God is taking care of God's creation, protecting them, loving them while the storyteller rages on.

It is very difficult for me to accept that the careful artisan of that first chapter who saw all that was made as good and that sensitive creator aware of the loneliness of Adam without a suitable partner in the second chapter would become the enraged tyrant of the third.

In all of the instances of the creative act God acts in a most erotic and intimate manner, kissing, opening, sleeping, touching and shaping bodies

Building the faith of Christians on the grave of Adam and Eve as artists have showed us that we have done has done terrible damage to the human heart and soul.

In a very important and memorable conversation once with one of my young friends, I became intensely aware of how fragile he is, not physically or mentally, but spiritually and really, and then I became intensely aware of my own fragility and reality and the blessing that it was to sit together in our fragility with one another.

I can only imagine but I suspect that every parent knows what I mean.

Those experiences come in graced moments; they are not permanent states of our minds. Our minds lose their hold on the Spirit but that does not render the grace of those moments null.

Why would we expect God to be any different than us in regard to loving one or trying to do the best that we can?

Living in the incompleteness of the present with our own incompleteness and the incompleteness of everyone else, could we not think of Christmas as the sitting with us in that incompleteness, the Holy One who brings all things to fulfillment?