

## First Sunday of Lent, Year A

Gerald C. Liu

### Lectionary 22:

Gen 2:7-9; 3:1-7 [Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized that they were naked]

Ps 51:3-4, 5-6, 12-13, 17 [Give me back the joy of your salvation, and a willing spirit sustain in me]

Rom 5:12-19 or 5:12, 17-19 [Through the obedience of the one, the many will be made righteous]

Matt 4:1-11 [At that time Jesus was led by the Spirit into the desert to be tempted by the devil]

<https://bible.usccb.org/bible/readings/022226.cfm>

### **Possible preaching paths:**

- Knowing **good and evil** requires facing human frailty and death.
  - God gives Adam specific instructions not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil [Gen 2:17] and Eve misinterprets and generalizes the restriction as being forbidden to eat the fruit of the tree [Gen 3:3].
  - The contrast is not so much about a woman distorting divine instructions given to a man.
  - It is better understood as a paradox clarified through a shared and specific action – digesting that which provides knowledge of evil and its relationship to good – resulting in recognition.
  - Evil opposes good at all costs, even the cost of life.
- **Jesus saves us from evil** in ways that undermine safety, power and protection, typically conceived.
  - Jesus outsmarts and expels Satan with only God’s words, not delivered in a garden but a desert literally starving his existence.
  - Jesus opposes supreme evil by understanding that even death cannot conquer good.

### **Possible scientific resources:**

- **230 million-year-old mass graveyard of Shonisaurus actually a birthing ground of mass life:**
  - [https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822\(22\)01761-4](https://www.cell.com/current-biology/fulltext/S0960-9822(22)01761-4)
  - <https://www.popsci.com/science/ichthyosaurs-whale-birthing-ground/>
  - <https://attheu.utah.edu/facultystaff/ichthyosaur/>

- **The Cathedral Church of St. John the Divine and its watery foundation:**

- <https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/23/science/cathedral-st-john-divine-nyc.html>
- <https://digitalcollections.nypl.org/items/510d47da-548e-a3d9-e040-e00a18064a99>
- Short video on the history of the Cathedral, [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8m71LX\\_ogJQ](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8m71LX_ogJQ)

### **Homily outline: Good and Evil, Death and Life**

- We are familiar with the doctrine of **original sin**:
  - belief that a “fall” occurred in Eden when Adam and Even ate fruit from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.
  - They committed an “original sin,” realized they were naked and covered themselves with fig leaves.
  - Their disobedience introduced death for them and for all humanity.
  - But this is not the end of the story for Christians.
- Paul introduces **Jesus** as redeeming the original sin of Adam:
  - “Just as through one transgression condemnation came upon all, so, through one righteous act, acquittal and life came to all” (Rom 5:18).
  - Paul’s argument sounds instantaneous and it makes sense reading it today to understand it with such swiftness.
  - But the life Jesus brings, redeeming the death introduced by Adam’s transgression, is one that unfolds over time.
  - We can still experience its unfolding today in multiple ways.
- Even **scientific revisions** of longstanding assumptions about death and life more ancient than Paul and Jesus reveal the power of Paul’s logic.
  - It was long believed that a fossilized record in Nevada’s West Union Canyon recorded a mass death among large marine reptiles (ichthyosaurs) some 230 million years ago.
  - Paleontologists reexamined the site using 3-D scans and updated investigations of mercury and oxygen levels preserved in the rock.
  - They also studied old fossils leading them to see what was once overlooked – much of the bone material was embryonic, i.e., newborn ichthyosaurs.
  - Paleontologists newly reimagined the site not as a graveyard, but a birthing ground; the fossils were evidence of animals grouping together in a normal life cycle, not a mass catastrophe.
- Even the **frailty of a great church building** can emphasize the wisdom of Jesus in the desert that absolute deliverance requires nothing more than faith in God.
  - The Cathedral of St. John the Divine is set on a cliff in uptown Manhattan and most visitors do not realize it is incomplete.
  - The original design included a 445-foot high tower. JP Morgan, the Astors, the Vanderbilts, and the Belmonts gave millions to have the tower finished.

Unfortunately construction crews found that the foundation of the church was built over a porous network of spring water that made building such a tower architecturally impossible.

- Though the church tower was never completed, for a time, the spring water was piped up to the baptistery and used in the baptismal font. Lamentably the water's acidity was discovered to be damaging to the marble of the font and the spring water was soon replaced by public city water.
- Still the hidden waters remain underneath the building. The Very Rev. Patrick Malloy, Dean of the Cathedral, considers the water as "a great blessing" that "connotes life."
- **Life from death, hope from frailty**
- Where paleontologists once saw mass destruction in a Nevada canyon, their willingness to look with new eyes revealed life instead.
- Where architects once imagined weakened foundations for St. John the Divine, a pastor perceives a spiritual truth that this and every church is founded on the waters of baptism.
- Where some might only see the "original sin" of Adam and Eve, Paul reveals that transgression as the trigger for unexpected salvation in the righteousness death of Jesus.
- Scripture, like science, continually invites us to take a second look. When we look through the eyes of faith, and a Jesus lens, we come to understand in new was an authentic knowledge of good and evil, and the assurance of eternal life even in the face of death.
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**Tags: architecture, everlasting life, evil, good, paleontology**

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### **About the Preaching with the Sciences Initiative**

A primary way Roman Catholics explore their faith and nourish their spirituality is by participating in Sunday Mass and actively engaging in the homily. However, few preachers explicitly connect faith or spirituality with science. The Preaching with the Sciences initiative, made possible by a generous grant from the John Templeton Foundation, gathers scientists and leading homileticians to explore the positive contributions science can make to preaching, and consequently contribute to more contemporary modes of believing. Such contributions are grounded in the rich imaginations that scientists bring to their work as well as in scientific discoveries that have a potential for revealing religious truths and even shedding new insight on ancient teachings and beliefs.

With guidance from world-renowned scientists with differing areas of expertise, a select number of homileticians will draft homily outlines for preaching key Sundays and feast days across the 3-year lectionary cycle. Over 100 homily outlines will highlight some of the way's sciences and the contemporary search for religious meaning can interface. These free homiletic resources have the potential to influence thousands of preachers seeking help each week in crafting sermons and helping to shape a scientifically informed religious imagination among future preachers.