

# 10<sup>th</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time, Year B

Fr. Samuel Springuel

9 June, 2024

**1<sup>st</sup> Reading** Genesis 3:9–15

**Responsorial Psalm** Psalm 130:1–2,3–4,5–6,7–8

**2<sup>nd</sup> Reading** 2 Corinthians 4:13–5:1

**Gospel** Mark 3:20–35

“Why did you do it?” It is with some form of this question that God addresses both the man and the woman in the Garden of Eden in the aftermath of their eating of the fruit from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil. “Why did you do it?” Both the man and the woman are given the chance, in turn, to explain themselves. When it comes the serpent’s turn, however, God doesn’t ask him “why did you do it?” The serpent doesn’t get the chance to explain himself. God moves directly to pronouncing punishment. So why doesn’t the serpent get the same chance that the man and the woman got? What’s different about the serpent that God doesn’t give him that opportunity?

In thinking about this, the first thing I realize is that the answer cannot lie in some sort of difference in God’s knowledge about the man and the woman versus the serpent. God is omniscient. He knows everything about what the man, the woman, and the serpent have done. His questions aren’t because He needs to learn what is going on. He knows that already. When God asks questions, it is not for His sake, but for the sake of the person being asked the question. So perhaps there’s a better way to think about this. Rather than asking “why *doesn’t* the serpent get the chance to explain himself?” we should be asking “why *do* the man and woman get the chance to explain themselves?” What do the man and woman get out of answering the question? Or at least, out of the opportunity to answer the question?

And I think what they get is mercy. The man and the woman are moral agents. They know Good from Evil, having just eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil after all. They should now know what the right answer is, and more importantly what the right response is: to apologize, to repent.

The serpent, on the other hand, does not. Either because it cannot know that, it is, after all, a mere animal which has not eaten from the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil itself. Or because it denies what the right response is because it is the devil in disguise and has already made an irrevocable choice

to act contrary to God's will. Either way, an apology is not in its wheelhouse, repentance not something it would ever even contemplate doing, let alone actually doing, and so there is no reason for God to provide it with that choice. It either cannot make the choice or has already made it.

Man and woman, for them the choice is still live, and so God gives them that opportunity: "why did you do it?" Unfortunately, man and woman don't take God up on his offer. They point fingers instead. "Not my fault!" "She/it made me do it!" Offered mercy, they refuse it and thus compound their fault. Now they've committed two sins, or perhaps three if you count hiding from God a sin. By their actions they demonstrate the contagion of sin. Once it finds root, sin spreads. Like a parasitic vine, it grows to cover its host. The first fault leads to the next, and the next, and the next.

But even as sin spreads, God's mercy is everlasting; it, too, goes on. In pronouncing his punishment on the serpent God promises that the serpent and man will do battle. The initial sin, Original Sin, as represented by the serpent, is not to be given free reign over man and woman and their offspring: "You will strike at his heel, while he will strike at your head." Man has the capacity to fight. Is promised, indeed, to be the stronger party in the fight. Able to strike a fatal blow while the serpent is confined to nipping at the heels. Man and woman might have committed the Original Sin, but their choice was not an irrevocable one. God, in His mercy, grants them the power to make a different choice. To reverse the effects of their Original Sin and kill the serpent who tempted them.

Of course, Jesus is the fulfillment of this prophecy. He is the offspring of the woman who has struck the serpent the fatal blow, but so are we. We are the Body of Christ and while the battle might be won, it is not over for us. Day in and day out, the serpent continues to nip at our heels, trying to draw us into that Original Sin that our first father and mother made. He would have us hide, deflect, blame others, just as they did when questioned by God. But God continues to pour out his mercy, to ask us, "why did you do it?" Where the man and the woman fell down, God stands ready to hold our hand, to support us as we navigate difficult terrain, and, yes, to help us up if we fall. The knowledge of Good and Evil, gained from eating the fruit, may be the legacy of Original Sin, but God in his mercy uses it as part of our redemption. "Why did you do it?" Are we ready to answer that question truthfully? To be the moral agents that the man and the woman so desired to be when they ate the fruit. God is asking us that question, just as he asked it of the man and the woman, waiting for us to give the right response. "Why did you do it?"