

Adam and Original Sin (1st Sunday of Lent, Year A)

Romans 5:12-19—The Sin of Adam and Its Consequences for Humanity

¹² Therefore as *sin came into the world through one man and death through sin*, and so *death spread to all men because all men sinned*—¹³ sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ *Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sins were not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come.* ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift in the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the effect of that one man's sin. *For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brings justification.* ¹⁷ If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Then as one man's trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one man's act of righteousness leads to acquittal and life for all men. ¹⁹ *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by one man's obedience many will be made righteous.* (Romans 5:12-19)

1. "**Sin**" (Greek *hamartia*): came into the "world" through "one man" (Rom 5:12)
2. **Death**: "reigned [as king]" (Greek *basileuō*) from Adam to Moses (Rom 5:14)
3. **Transgression**: descendants' "sins" not like Adam's "transgression" or "overstepping" (Greek *parabasis*) (Rom 5:13)
4. **Adam**: a "type" (Greek *typos*) of the "one who was to come" (= Jesus) (Rom 5:14)

One Man (=Adam)
 trespass
 brings death
 condemnation
 disobedience
 makes many sinners
 (Greek *hamartoloi*)

One Man (=Jesus Christ)
 free gift (of grace)
 brings life
 justification/acquittal
 obedience
 makes many righteous
 (Greek *dikaioi*)

The Catechism on Original Sin

Following St. Paul, the Church has always taught that the overwhelming misery which oppresses men and their inclination toward evil and death cannot be understood apart from their connection with Adam's sin and the fact that he has transmitted to us a sin with which we are all born afflicted, a sin which is the "death of the soul." Because of this certainty of faith, the Church baptizes for the remission of sins even tiny infants who have not committed personal sin.

How did the sin of Adam become the sin of all his descendants? The whole

The Mass Readings Explained

human race is in Adam “as one body of one man.” By this “unity of the human race” all men are implicated in Adam’s sin, as all are implicated in Christ’s justice. Still, the transmission of original sin is a mystery that we cannot fully understand. But we do know by Revelation that Adam had received original holiness and justice not for himself alone, but for all human nature. By yielding to the tempter, Adam and Eve committed a *personal sin*, but this sin affected *the human nature* that they would then transmit *in a fallen state*. It is a sin which will be *transmitted by propagation to all mankind*, that is, by the transmission of a human nature deprived of original holiness and justice.

And that is why *original sin is called “sin” only in an analogical sense: it is a sin “contracted” and not “committed”—a state and not an act. Although it is proper to each individual, original sin does not have the character of a personal fault in any of Adam’s descendants*. It is a deprivation of original holiness and justice, but *human nature has not been totally corrupted: it is wounded* in the natural powers proper to it; subject to ignorance, suffering, and the dominion of death; and *inclined to sin*—an inclination to evil that is called “concupiscence.” Baptism, by imparting the life of Christ’s grace, erases original sin and turns a man back toward God, but the consequences for nature, weakened and inclined to evil, persist in man and summon him to spiritual battle. (CCC 403-405)

Questions for Discussion and Reflection (1st Sunday in Lent, Year A)

1. Where in the Bible does the Church get her doctrine of “Original Sin”?

2. Was there anything in the Church’s teaching that surprised you? What is the good news of Jesus, the new Adam?

For Further Reading

1. *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, nos. 385-421. Summary of the Church’s doctrine of the Fall and Original Sin. Essential reading.