

[Readings: Rev. 11:19a; 12:1a-6a, 10 ab; Ps. 45; 1 Cor 15:20-27; Lk. 1:39-56]

Once upon a time, a young person asked an older person to explain the story of Adam and Eve. He couldn't get how Adam and Eve could be told and warned not to do something, but they did it anyway. Even more, how Adam could submit to Eve and eat of the forbidden fruit. Perhaps this modern story might help. A woman ran a red traffic light and crashed into a man's car. Both of their cars are demolished but amazingly neither of them was hurt.

After they crawled out of their cars, the woman said, "Wow, just look at our cars! There's nothing left, but fortunately we are unhurt. This must be a sign from God that we should meet and be friends and live together in peace for the rest of our days." The man replied, "I agree with you completely. This must be a sign from God!" The woman continued, "And look at this, here's another miracle. My car is completely demolished, but my bottle of 75-year-old scotch didn't break. Surely God meant for us to drink this vintage delicacy and celebrate our good fortune." Then she handed the bottle to the man.

The man nods his head in agreement, opened it, drank half the bottle and then handed it back to the woman. The woman took the bottle, immediately put the cap back on, and handed it back to the man. The man asks, "Aren't you having any?" She replies, "Nah. I think I'll just wait for the police."

The story of Adam and Eve is a story of pride and humility. As we make our way along our spiritual journey, we often are confused between healthy pride and sinful pride, and between humility and humiliation. Healthy pride is called self-confidence; unhealthy pride is called egotistical. Humility is learning your place in God's eyes; humiliation is being less than you are called to be.

Parents sometimes are misguided in their comments to their children. One recent college doctoral student was told by his father, "I'm proud of you, son. I always knew you could do it." The son replied, "You never said that to me when I was growing up. If you knew I could do it, why did you always put me down and tell me that I would never succeed?" The father replied, "I did that to make you work harder. My parents used to do the same thing to me."

Again, the end did not justify the means. We can communicate the same message with different words and still obtain the desired effect. Instead of saying, “don’t squeeze that puppy so hard,” we can say, “You have to hold that puppy carefully.” Instead of saying, “Don’t do it like that!” we can say, “Here, let me show you how to do it.” A simple change of words, but the results are positive, healthy, and help build up self-esteem.

Now, in contrast to the things we promised we would never say to our kids, but did say it to them anyway, we have Mary in today’s Gospel saying things the right way. As Jesus Christ is the New Adam, Mary becomes the New Eve. Her self-confidence is tempered with her humility, because the first thing she says, gives credit where credit is due: to God. And because she knows where all good things come from, she magnifies or makes larger and more visible the presence of God within her.

Because of this, Pope Pius XII declared in 1950 these words: “The immaculate Mother of God, Mary ever virgin, when the course of her earthly life was finished, was taken up body and soul to the glory of Heaven.” We don’t know if Mary died first and then went to Heaven, or if she was on the verge of death and then joined her Son in Heaven.

The Church Fathers are on both sides of the debate. Pope Pius XII simply said, “When the course of her earthly life was finished.” And this is only one of two teachings of the church, which have been declared infallible. The other teaching was that of Pope Pius IX who almost 100 years earlier had defined the doctrine of the Immaculate Conception. So from the first moment of her Immaculate Conception to her Assumption into Heaven, Mary is seen as truly full of grace. And the great hope of today’s feast is summarized in the preface for the Assumption: “Where she has gone, we hope to follow.” We will, if we work for what Mary worked for: love, justice, peace, humility and salvation. This is what she and St. Joseph taught her son; this is what you and I can learn.

So, I close with these familiar words: Listen to your mama! AMEN!