

[Readings: Genesis 3:9-15; Ps. 130; 2 Cor. 4:13 – 5:1; Mark 3:20-35]

If you expose yourself to the news today, you'll learn the same thing Genesis warns about. That there's trouble in Paradise. Things aren't as they should be, and someone (or lots of someones) will pay a bitter price.

So, what does this trouble look like? In the original story in our First Reading, God calls, and Adam hides. We're not surprised by this early game of Hide-and-go-seek. Because you and I are familiar with the dynamics of a fraying relationship. When we're in the wrong, you and I become notoriously hard to find. We hide when we're ashamed of what we've done or failed to do. We become invisible when we have secrets we have no intention of sharing. And we go on the lam when we're afraid of being found out.

And we may do all this while remaining in plain view. Adam ducked behind a bush. But you and I often hide behind words: what we say or withhold. We wear disguises: a false smile, a cold silence, even a smokescreen of relentless chatter that keeps everyone away from the truth we're protecting. All the while, we may be seething with resentment, covering a gaping wound, or wracked with fears we dare not express out loud. We don't want anyone to see how vulnerable we are. Or, like Adam, we're not going to expose our private selves in public.

That's Part I of the trouble: Unpleasant truths get put under wraps.

Part II of the trouble is the opposite, as Saint Paul describes it in our Second Reading: Good news may remain unseen. What we CAN see is often overwhelming: war zones, too many school shootings, epidemics, yet another leader proving to have clay feet. Not long ago I got a panicked email from a friend about an *E. coli* outbreak: *Don't eat the lettuce! Throw it out, now!* I was eating pre-sliced melon at the time, then I saw the news! It's a tough world when you have to fear your food! I eating heart-smart at time, and it could have killed me! Back to White Castle!

Paul encourages us not to limit reality to what's tangible and temporary, but to make room for the unseen -- which has the advantage of being eternal. Media assures us daily we're one step from the apocalypse. The end is near!

Take a hint from the Bible: Every generation is apocalyptic. Humanity is always poised on the brink of disaster. I'm not denying it; I'm saying it's nothing new. You've lived in fear of the apocalypse your whole life and are no worse for the wear. Your own apocalypse will happen the day you die and stand before Jesus Christ on Judgement Day!

Jesus is poised on the brink in today's Gospel, with accusations all around. His family thinks he's crazy. Enemies call him possessed. Jesus roots himself down in the fabulous unseen: his Father's love, abundant life, a new family composed of spirit and truth. We can trust the trouble, or trust the Lord. Because God is always calling. We can choose to hide or choose to come forth.

A psychologist explained something fascinating about shame: No one can put it inside us without our consent. Shame doesn't enter from the outside but responds from the inside. Those seeking to embarrass us are frustrated if we refuse their attempt to impart shame with the slap of a hand or a word. If we accept shame, it's because deep down we're already carrying it.

So Adam, guilty of disloyalty to God, is shamed by his newfound nakedness. Yet Jesus, insulted, beaten, stripped, and humiliated, remains clothed in honor at the cross. Got shame? We've got a sacrament for that. It's called Confession, Penance, and Reconciliation.

Two other points about today's Gospel which strike up a spirited discussion. What exactly is that "unforgivable sin" that Jesus speaks about? And, more importantly, did I commit it? Right? Am I going straight to Hell when I die because I have already committed that unforgivable sin?

There are two schools of thought about this. The first understanding is the more popular one. It says that whatever sin I committed, it is so awful, so terrible, so horrifying, that God could never forgive me of it. Do you know what's wrong with this way of thinking? It puts the power of our most horrible sin ABOVE God's power to forgive.

The second understanding is that when we die, one visionary says that our soul will stand before Jesus Christ who will ask us not once, but twice: "Will

you truly repent of your sins and accept Me and My love? Will you accept My forgiveness and eternal friendship? The visionary, and our Catechism of the Catholic Church say, if we decline that invitation, if even after the moment of death, we still reject Jesus Christ, we condemn ourselves to eternal damnation. Failure to repent, and failure to trust in God's forgiving love for us when we die is the "unforgivable sin."

My final observation is the reference in the Gospel to "brothers and sisters of Jesus." This was discussed as part of our prayer experience at last week's Parish Pastoral Council meeting. Before I could even explain the concept, the most senior member of the Council shouted, "I know, I know! They were not His biological brothers and sisters; they were His extended family." More important is what Jesus Christ says about it. YOU are my mother and my brother and my sister if you do the will of God."

This past weekend, we celebrated the feasts of the Sacred Heart of Jesus on Friday and the Immaculate Heart of Mary on Saturday morning. What would it be like to have an "immaculate heart"? Might it be to love unconditionally? When we are honest about it, we tend to love only those who love us in return, who treat us well, and who respect us. "I will love you only if you love me."

Can we open our hearts a bit more to embrace those who do not return our love in equal measure? Can we go so far as to love our enemies? A tall order, but one worth striving for – one who loves unconditionally, as a good parent loves an imperfect child, as Mary loves her perfect Son.

Practice loving without conditions this week. Who does it better than Mary, the Mother of God? Now THAT is someone whose opinion of us we should care about! AMEN!