

“Human nature deciphered.” Genesis 3:1-21.

“Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but Eve said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’ ” But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree of which I commanded you not to eat?” The man said, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate.” Then the Lord God said to the woman, “What is this that you have done?” The woman said, “The serpent deceived me, and I ate.”

The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel.” To the woman he said, “I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you.” And to Adam he said, “Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, ‘You shall not eat of it,’ cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return.” The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them.”

Grace, mercy and peace from God the Father and our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ!

The first Sunday in Lent. That season in the Church year where we remember and meditate on what the true God has done for us through His Son. And what an amazing reading we have selected for us today! A real treat. Genesis 3. Brace for the feast!

Let me ask you this question – what is Genesis 3 speaking about? Is it about what happened back then in the beginning of time, or is it about what is happening today? What do you think? It may sound like a strange question, but the answer is – it’s both.

That’s right, the ancient message from the time immemorial that we heard today speaks both about the greatest tragedy that happened with our first parents, but it also gives us

tools, very insightful tools to understand what is happening with us and around us today, in our time. We could say that this account provides us with the deepest insights into human nature, it enables us to decipher the mystery of human nature. The insights this account offers us are unparalleled.

Let's look at what happened back then. Then, let's consider how that helps to decipher human nature today. And finally, let's discover in this ancient account the power that helps us to change our very nature as we know it.

What happened? A few things happened. The serpent who is later in God's revelation identified as our ultimate adversary - the ancient dragon, Satan, the devil - he managed to deceive our first parents. How exactly did he achieve that? Let's list four things.

First, by twisting God's Word. God said: "You *may surely eat of every tree* of the garden, but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." The serpent: "Did God actually say, '*You shall not eat of any tree* in the garden'?" With that little twist the serpent turned gracious permission into questionable prohibition.

Second, by doubting the consequences of not listening to God's loving instructions: "You will not surely die." And just like that they surely did die. Third, by painting a very different picture of who the Triune God is: "God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God." Unspoken implications being that He did not want them to have good things, that He deceptively withheld them.

Fourth, by promising that Eve and Adam will be much better off if they did not listen to what God says: "You will be like God, knowing good and evil." That's how it was done. Twisting what God had said, denying any consequence of not following God's wisdom, portraying this picture of God who wants to withhold good things, the best things from us and assuring that by refusing to listen to Him we will gain so much more.

And as soon as our first parents were deceived to distrust and disobey their benevolent Creator, immediately they were overwhelmed by guilt and shame and fear from the One who had not only lovingly created them in His own Image but also had entrusted them to care for His entire creation. The very goodness of initial creation was tragically lost.

Fast forward to our days. Where are we now as descendants of our first parents? We are exactly in the same situation where they ended up. Yes, we are and that is rather obvious. **Let's see how the Genesis 3 account helps us to decipher our very nature, to understand deep attitudes of our hearts.**

According to our fallen nature, we too believe that it will be better for us if we do not listen to God's instructions. We believe that it is wiser not to listen to Him. Whatever He tells us, whatever He teaches us with the summary of His wisdom, the 10 Commandments. We just don't believe it could be good for us.

So, we don't even want to listen to them or to try to understand what they teach us. And, of course, our attitude is understandable, because - what picture of God do we naturally have in our hearts? The same that Adam and Eve ended up with when they were deceived.

Because they were saturated by guilt and shame, just as we are, they got this picture of God as judge. God from whom we need to run and hide. That's it. But that is not all. We all naturally have this idea of God, who not only makes us feel uncomfortable with His judgmental attitude, but who also wants to hide good things from us.

We naturally believe that His good and wise instructions are robbing us of good things which we otherwise would be able to freely enjoy as it pleases us. That listening to God and obeying His instructions means losing our freedom.

We all naturally believe that to come under the authority of this God is to give up on what brings us joy and satisfaction, instead choosing a life of grayness and boredom. Therefore, even when we read God's message to us, we struggle to get it right.

We perceive it as restrictive, even as we doubt or deny that there may be real consequences for those who act against His will. All of this is true even for us, Christians, according to our fallen nature. That deceptive voice still echoes in our hearts, and in this age, we won't be able to completely erase it.

Do you recognize that this is how the fallen humanity thinks about God, that this is what the deep attitudes of human hearts towards God are? This is what the Genesis 3 account helps us understand about our nature. Today.

But, the Genesis account doesn't stop there. It does so much more. **Genesis 3 helps us to discover this source of incredible power that changes our old nature. From inside out.** How? Let's see. Remember what happened next?

God Himself comes looking for Adam. He knew what had happened. There is sadness in His voice: "Where are you? What have you done?!" He knows what it means. But not only God Yahweh comes looking for Adam, but instead of lashing out at Him for the unfathomable flood of misery for entire humankind that His disobedience had unleashed, God gives him... a promise. A most beautiful promise.

God Yahweh gives what the Church knows as the first Gospel promise. The promise of what He will do. **"I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."**

That promise sounds obscure when that is all that we read, but in the light of God's full revelation in Jesus, even that obscure text makes sense. What did God promise? God promised to restore what was broken, our relationships with Him, the lost trust.

Also, relationships among ourselves, relationships with His creation, our innocence and goodness. He promised to free us from the deceptive spell of that ancient serpent. He promised to deliver us, whatever the cost. Whatever the cost for Him.

There is one more very important clarification to make. Who was this God Yahweh who was walking in the garden, who called Adam, who gave this promise? Who do you think it was? We often miss the power of this story by assuming it was God, in some general sense, who made that promise. But, we do know better.

It was the Second person of the Trinity. The Eternal Son of God. Do you see how that changes so much? It was the Son, whom we know as Jesus from Nazareth, who came to our first parents right after they had brought sin and death into God's very good creation. It was Him who promised that He will take full responsibility for what had happened and that He will fix everything, even as it will cost Him His life. He knew what fate awaits Him, He knew what He will have to suffer. Still, He came looking for us and promised that eventually everything will be fine. The Eternal Son did it..

You see, it is the same for us today. As the Genesis 3 account reveals to us, it is always the Son of God who comes looking for us, for each one of us: "Where are you?" It is always Him who makes the first move, but now He has already done something incredible.

He has fulfilled that ancient promise. I don't know whether our first parents realized what He had promised. Today we know what our God, the Son of God, Jesus, has accomplished. That amazing, out of this world demonstration of His fervent love.

Today we know what He has revealed to us so clearly - what kind of God He really is. He did it most vividly - on the cross. Allowing to be arrested, beaten, humiliated, willingly stretching out His hands to be crucified. Laying down His very life in the most painful way to enable us to receive what we otherwise couldn't - forgiveness and live eternal.

When you learn about God coming as one of us, about taking our place, about sacrificing Himself, instead of punishing or destroying us as we would fully deserve. When you learn that He has done all of that to keep that ancient promise so that we would trust Him, not because He says we should, but because of what He has done for us. That message blows to pieces our old selfish self and transforms us into a new creation.

Those are the Good News, the Great News. Powerful news, heart transforming news. Because of our fallen nature we have had it wrong. We were deceived. The truth is so much more beautiful. The true God is so different from what we naturally imagine.

Before you know Him, He cares for you. While you are His enemies, He comes looking for you. Before He demands anything, He gives you everything. Before He expects anything from you, He sacrifices Himself for you. Before He asks you to trust Him, He lays down His life for you. True God. Your God. Jesus...

This is what this account in Genesis 3 helps us to understand. Both what happened back then and it also deciphers fallen human nature for us. And when the Holy Spirit opens this powerful message to us, it also transforms us, our very nature.

It gives us a correct, most beautiful picture of who true God is, so that we can't help - we want to get closer to Him, we are able to trust Him again and we long for the day when we will again hear Him walking in the cool of the day.

But then, we won't be hiding anymore, we will run toward Him. And that day cannot come soon enough. Glory be to the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit!

Amen.