

Articles on Catholic Theology and Teachings - Part 5 - The Doctrine of Original Sin



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Therefore, just as through one person sin entered the world, and through sin, death, and thus death came to all, inasmuch as all sinned -
-Romans 5:12

The first man: Adam

In order to understand the doctrine of original sin, it is necessary to begin with the first created man, Adam. Scripture and Tradition tell us that "God created man in his image; in the divine image he created him; male and female he created them" (Genesis 1:27). The first human, Adam, was created by God as the progenitor of the human race. From Adam's ribs, God created his wife and companion, Eve. Together Adam and Eve, were given the loving gifts of free will, original justice and original holiness. God gave them the fruits, pleasures and duties of tending to the Garden of Eden where they lived in harmony with God, each other and God's creations.

From the very beginning man held a special place in God's creation. Composed of both flesh and spirit, man was created in, "the divine image" (Genesis 1:27) of the soul and was imbued with original holiness, justice and freewill. God placed mankind with, "dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that move on the earth" (Genesis 1:28).

Along with the gift of a soul came the gift of freewill. God, desiring the free love of mankind and viewing them as his children rather than slaves and servants, gave Adam and Eve the freewill to accept or reject God's love. Before their temptation at the hands of the devil, Adam and Eve chose to accept and return the love of their Creator, as well as submit to obedience out of love for God. This harmony before the fall of mankind is sometimes called original justice and original holiness.

**THE ANSWERS YOU SEEK
NEVER COME WHEN THE
MIND IS BUSY, THEY COME
WHEN THE MIND IS STILL.**

through one, Jesus Christ. Therefore, as by the offence of one, unto all men to condemnation; so also by the justice of one, unto all men to justification of life" (Romans 5:17-18). St. Paul's letter to the Romans tells us that by Adam's sin all men were convicted and now Christ's obedience and passion redeem all men. The redemption of Jesus Christ is a gift to the world for the expiation of original sin and personal sins.

Choose the gift of everlasting life

The redemption is extraordinary in that it has been offered to all men for the forgiveness and of sin. Yet like all gifts, we must choose to accept it. God's other gift to us, free will, has not been revoked. Thus God will not force his love and grace upon us; we must choose the grace of God and offer our souls to conformity with his will. Christ says, "unless a man be born again by water and the Holy Ghost, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5). Baptism, the sacrament of faith, cleanses the soul and sanctifies it with grace of the Holy Spirit. By baptism's water of rebirth, original sin is forgiven and cleansed away and replaced with the grace of God.

Christ also tells us, "if thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments" (Matthew 19:17). He tells us that it is necessary to obey his commandments and precepts (both those of Sacred Scripture and the Church's teachings) for justification. We seek the wisdom and teachings of Jesus through Scripture ("All scripture, inspired by God, is profitable to teach, to reprove, to correct, to instruct in justice"—2 Timothy 3:16) and the Church ("the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth"—1 Timothy 3:15). By baptism, faith and obedience to God, we can attain the graces of God for remission of sin and purification of the soul.

Satan: The author of sin and Prince of evil

A dark and seductive voice entered into the domain of man. Out of hatred for God it sought the ruin of the human race. The Church teaches us that the source of sin and evil is manifested in the fallen angel, Lucifer, or as he is more commonly known, Satan the devil. Church Tradition and teachings implore that evil could not originate from God, the source of justice and quintessence of holiness. Evil itself, the rejection of the loving grace of God, began with the angel Lucifer. God created Lucifer as a good angel, a being of pure spirit. Lucifer as a spiritual creature was one of beauty, power and intelligence. Like all creatures Lucifer was created to love God and serve him, but Lucifer began to focus on his own individual power, intelligence and qualities. Rather than attribute his strengths and qualities to the service and love of his creator, Lucifer turned from God and sought himself as the source of his own pleasures and service. By a free choice, Lucifer rejected God and fell from his place in heaven. He also took with him many other angels, who likewise rejected God. By separating themselves from the creator, the fallen angels introduced evil into creation and authored the first sin. The fallen angels sin could not be forgiven because, "It is the irrevocable character of their choice, and not a defect of the infinite divine mercy, that makes the angel's sin unforgivable. 'There is no repentance for the angels after their fall, just as there is no repentance for men after death" (CCC 393).

Satan and the fallen angels became the essence of evil, and the tempter of mankind. Out of evil, hatred, and malice Satan opposes God at every turn. Satan "has sinned from the beginning (1 John 3:8), was a murderer from the beginning and...is a liar and the father of lies" (John 8:44).

The fall of Man and Original Sin

God warned Adam from the beginning, "You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and bad. From that tree you shall not eat; the moment you eat from it you are surely doomed to die" (Genesis 2:17). The parable of the Garden of Eden focuses on the first sin of Adam and Eve. The Garden of Eden contained two special trees. The first was the forbidden tree of knowledge of good and bad and the second tree was the tree of everlasting life. The Genesis story tells us that Adam and Eve disobeyed God's commandment and fell into sin under the temptations of Satan. They freely chose to defy God by eating from the forbidden tree of good and bad. The Church teaches us that this first sin of man constituted a loss of trust in man for God and an abuse of the freedom of mankind. Because man had disobeyed their creator and indulged in sin, man finally knew of evil and lost his original justice and holiness. Man's privileged and harmonious state in the Garden of Eden was torn asunder and devastating results ensued. For the first time, death entered into the world and man was doomed to experience a terminal nature. "For you are dirt and to dirt you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). Man was now destined to toil and work for a living for, "by the sweat of your face shall you get bread to eat" (Genesis 3:19). Women received the pains of child birth and were placed under the dominion of man, "I will intensify the pang of your childbearing; in pain shall you bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall be your master (Genesis 3:16)." Finally, nature turned against man, "Cursed be the ground because of you! In toil shall you eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles shall it bring forth to you, as you eat of the plants of the field" (Genesis 3:17-18).

Concupiscence

Adam's Sin brought devastating consequences: death and the upset of the harmonious balance between God, man, and creation. In addition, the will of man is forever weakened by the first sin. Original sin, the loss of original justice and holiness, impacted the progeny of Adam and Eve through weakness of will. Man no longer harbors original justice and holiness and instead is drawn toward evil and selfish pleasures. We call this weakness of the will concupiscence. The continuing temptations of Satan and the loss of the gifts of original holiness and justice marred the soul of Adam, and as he is the head of the human race all of his descendants were likewise convicted. The stain of original sin is inherited by all humans at the moment of conception and brings its effects of ignorance, concupiscence, death and suffering.

Where sin abounds grace abounds all the more

By the very nature of man's original sin, no person can hope to receive the kingdom of God upon natural death. Original sin has separated God from man and weakens the will of man to prefer evil. Job laments, "Who can make him clean that is conceived of unclean seed?" (Job 14:4). Man, through the father of our race, has rejected God's love and privileged state and cannot hope to attain everlasting life by his own merits and power.

Fortunately, God's mercy prevails over sin and death. Jesus Christ, Son of God, true God and true man, offered himself to an undeserved death and became the sacrifice for man's sins. The passion, death and resurrection of Jesus was offered once and for all for the sins of mankind, so that man can be saved by the grace of God. "For if by one man's offence death reigned through one; much more they who receive abundance of grace, and of the gift, and of justice, shall reign in life