

1st Sunday in Lent

By Steven N. Guillotte

Jesus came to Galilee proclaiming the gospel of God: "This is the time of fulfillment. The kingdom of God is at hand. Repent, and believe in the gospel." (Mk 1:14-15)

God has given mankind two great blessings: creation and salvation. First, God made man and gave him all the fruits of the earth; then when man sinned and stained creation and his human nature, God saved man gratuitously and offered him all the fruits of his grace.

Grace is the gift of God's supernatural life. In the Church we say that grace is "a gift, freely given". However just as with any gift, the grace we receive in the sacramental life can be left unopened, or opened but not put to use, or put to use but for a selfish purpose.

Now Lent is a time for prayer, fasting, and almsgiving. Yet, all three of these essential spiritual exercises are practiced not as an end unto themselves but as a means to the renewal of the life of grace.

The life of grace begins in the waters of baptism. The masterful psalmist tells us what the baptized man is like: "He is like a tree planted near streams of water..." (Ps 1:3). These streams are baptism, and all the other sacraments which are the fountains of grace.

God created us to be whole and good, yet God is ever aware of our failings and our tendency toward sin. He knows that even though man is saved and sanctified in the waters of the Spirit at baptism, man remains attracted to evil which often appears as something good just as was the case with our forebears Adam and Eve. Thus, it is also grace (freely given) that when the baptized person sins, God offers forgiveness through the confession of sins to his priest who stands in persona Christi.

In the sacrament of confession we earnestly repent of our sins. Repentance is sometimes called contrition or sorrow. It is the free, human will acknowledging that it has strayed and offended God. Repentance is also regret for all these offenses and a resolve within one's will to amend one's life. The Sacrament of Confession brings us face-to-face or rather soul-to-soul with Christ.

In keeping with this notion we place on our bulletin cover for this 1st Sunday of Lent a work by the Counter Reformation painter El Greco, entitled Christ Blessing The Savior of the World (1600 - [courtesy wikiart](#)). El Greco was a Greek who lived in Spain and was born one year before the great Carmelite, St. John of the Cross.

El Greco's method, like that of St. John's, can be called "mystical" or "spiritual" and in this work we see Christ tall and uplifted in the Spirit. He raises His right hand while resting His left hand on the world. This left handed blessing is creation; the right handed blessing is our salvation. What we look upon here is no undecided Lord, but one firm of judgment who already knows our sins and awaits with true purpose to forgive these same sins if only we will approach Him in contrite love. El Greco gives us a sacred image that might even be used this Lent in the preparation of our confession of sins.

During this Lenten season let us be aware that we are God's creation; and let us be thankful that in our weakness and sinfulness God rushes to our salvation.