



A Family of Faith: Volume I

November Lecture Notes

HUMANITY BEFORE CHRIST: Creation, the Fall, and the Old Testament

Introduction

- I. Created by God, like God, and for God
- II. The Fall
- III. The Old Testament
- IV. Sacred Art Discussion: *The Deluge*

Introduction

A. Opening Questions

1. If you contracted with a painter to paint your house, and he didn't paint it, what would happen?
2. If you contracted with caterers to serve filet mignon at a party, and they showed up with hamburger helper, what would happen?
3. If you set house rules, and your children break them, what happens? Do you disown your child?
4. If you agree with your spouse that one of you will clean the house while the other gets a much-needed break with friends, and at the end of the day the house is still dirty, what happens?

B. Our Story

1. In the last presentation we talked about God – who He is and how we come to know Him. Now it's time to talk about *us*, Who we are, and where we come from.

This is the **Story of Humanity**

2. ILLUSTRATION OF A NOVEL: Imagine you pick up a novel, and instead of starting at the beginning, you just open the book right in the middle, or even skip to the end and start reading. What will happen?

You'll be totally lost! You won't understand anything, because you don't know what came before. ["Oh... so the Butler did it. Um, what did he do?"] You won't understand the events or the characters or the references – *because you don't know the story.*

3. So how can you possibly understand what it means to be a Catholic, or a Christian, or *even a human being!* unless you have a firm grasp on what the human story is?

That's what this session is all about – understanding ourselves by understanding our story.

C. Now the Human story before Jesus has basically three parts

1. First, how our original parents were first created
2. Second, how our original parents first sinned
3. Third, how God continued to reach out to humanity through his chosen representatives

So let's start the story

I. Created by God, *like* God, and for God

A. First of all, Adam and Eve, the first human couple, were created **by God**

1. And, like everything God makes, they were good.
 - a. So human nature is fundamentally good. It's a good thing to be a human being. Very good.

B. Secondly, Adam and Eve were created **like God**

1. We're like God because we have **intellect** (intelligence) and **will** (freedom)
 - a. God is intelligent and free, and so are we!
 - b. That's one of the reasons Genesis says we're made in God's "**Image and Likeness**"

2. Now our intellect and will are the powers which make up our spiritual (=immaterial) soul, which means although the human body has material causes, every human soul is always miraculously produced by God.

3. So the human person is a combination of **body and soul**

- a. Our intellect and will are the powers that make up our spiritual (= immaterial) soul.
 - They are how we know and desire things that aren't detectable by the senses (like love, justice, honesty, etc...).
 - Because we have a spiritual component, it means that although the human body has material causes, every human soul is always miraculously produced by God.
- b. And it's good that we are body and soul! The angels are spiritual creatures, rocks and trees and animals are material creatures, and we're both! We unite all the elements of God's creation.

- Also, it means that even if you destroy the body-part, the soul-part is still left, which is why human souls survive death

C. Finally, we were made **for God** – for an eternal **relationship with God**
So what went wrong?

II. The Fall – Humanity's first Sin

- A. What happened when Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command?
1. God is our foundation, and when you reject your own foundation, everything starts to break down. So our whole humanity suffered.
 - a. Our **intellects** were darkened, so it became hard to perceive and grasp the most fundamental truths
 - b. Our **will**s were weakened, so it became difficult to do what is good
 - c. Most importantly, we broke **our relationship with God**. And once we had broken it, we couldn't fix it.
 - It's always possible to break something you can't fix (like if you break a stained-glass window, or set fire to a mansion you don't have enough money to rebuild).
 - And with sin we broke the most beautiful gift we had – our relationship with God – and we couldn't fix it.
 2. Adam and Eve, as the first parents, received a perfect human experience that was supposed to be our inheritance – but they squandered it, and so their descendants are born poor, with a weak human nature and a loss of God's presence.
 - a. God made humanity to be an interdependent community – which is a beautiful thing – but when one member of a community fails, especially the parents, the others suffer; and all humanity suffers from original sin.
- B. This is how we know Adam and Eve were real – because we experience the results of their choice
1. That's why it's a mistake to act as though the story of Adam and Eve was a fable, or a fictional story with a nice moral.
 2. The story of Adam and Eve is an *explanation* of our human condition, and our need for a savior.

Now the question is, How did God respond to our sin?

III. The Old Testament: *God reaching Out*

- A. God didn't leave us in our wretchedness. Although the story of humanity is a story of continual sin and sadness, it's also a story of God taking initiative time and again to bring us back into relationship with Him.
 - 1. How does He do that? By choosing certain leaders – and their communities – to be His representatives to the rest of humanity.
- B. For instance:
 - 1. God started with **Adam**, who was the head of the first human **couple**
 - 2. Then God initiated a relationship with **Noah**, and saved all of Noah's **family** from the flood
 - 3. Then God made contact with **Abraham**, and his **extended family**, who became the recipient of magnificent promises of land, and many descendents, and ultimately salvation.
 - 4. When Abraham's descendants became numerous and were enslaved in Egypt, God called **Moses** to lead this new **nation** to the promised land.
 - 5. Generations later, God chose **David** to be in charge of the **Kingdom**, and promised that one of David's descendants would be the universal and eternal king.
- C. In all these cases, we see God's generosity growing, even though the chosen people are continually sinning.
 - 1. But we also see a pattern where God chooses **one man** to govern all of God's people. *And* we see a pattern where God's people keep growing.
 - a. So where do we see today the largest international community of believers, governed by one man who represents God?
(hint: it's the Catholic Church)
 - 2. But before we talk about the Catholic Church, we have to talk about the most important part of the story of Humanity: namely, **When God Himself became human.**

That's what we'll look at next time.

IV. Sacred Art Discussion: *The Deluge by Michelangelo*

- A. What event has Michelangelo depicted in this fresco?
 - 1. The Flood. Specifically, he has chosen to focus on those people who are being wiped out by the Flood waters.
- B. What are some adjectives you would use to describe the action in this scene?

1. Accept all answers.
- C. Where is the ark?
 1. It is in the background of the scene. Here you might point out that depictions of the Flood often focus on the Ark, whereas Michelangelo places it in the back. The effect is to create a scene that focuses on the terror of those whose lives are about to be lost.
- D. Where is Noah?
 1. You have to look hard, but he is on the Ark, his arms raised heavenward.
- E. What does the ark look like?
 1. The Ark looks less like a boat and more like a building. Specifically, one could say it looks like a church building.
- F. Is the ark in a place of prominence, or is it in the background?
 1. It is in the background. Point out that Noah's Ark is a type (or foreshadowing, or prefigurement of) the Church. Noah and his family were saved from the flood waters in the Ark. We are saved in the Church. If the Church is in the background of our lives, as it is in the background of this painting, we will not be saved from the waters!
- G. Read Genesis 7:13-24. How does this fresco help you understand the Scripture?
 1. Allow the conversation to go in unanticipated directions!

Discussion Questions

1. Does the fact we are created in the image and likeness of God mean we look like God? Explain.
 - a. *No. It means we have certain qualities and capacities that God has.*
2. What three qualities of human persons mean we alone out of all Creation are made in the image and likeness of God?
 - a. *Intellect, free will, and the capacity to love.*
3. We are created for communion with each other and with God. How does this truth connect to being created in God's image?
 - a. *God is love, and He created humanity out of love and a desire to share His divine life with us.*
4. Our culture tends to treat love as a "feeling." But love is not a feeling; it is a choice. How does Jesus' life show us this truth?
 - a. *Jesus loves unfailingly, even through pain and suffering. If love were only a "feeling," Jesus would not have endured the Crucifixion. Jesus' life shows us that love is a free choice to give of oneself for the good of another.*
5. How would you define Original Holiness and Justice?
 - a. *Man was created in a state of Original Holiness and Original Justice. God gave Adam and Eve all the knowledge that they would need, and their wills did not tend to sin. They were God's friends, and they shared in His divine life. They were filled with grace. Adam and Eve's original state of grace is called Original Holiness. Original Justice means that all Creation was in harmony, and nothing in Creation could hurt Adam and Eve. They would never be sick, suffer, or die.*

6. How would you define Original Sin?
 - a. *Adam and Eve used their free will to rebel against God. It is called original because it happened at the origin of man and is passed on to each person at his origin.*
7. How did Original Sin change humanity's relationship with God?
 - a. *We are born without God's grace in our soul.*
8. Mercy is love that keeps loving even when it is rejected. How does this definition apply to the story of Adam and Eve?
 - a. *God did not abandon humanity after the fall.*
9. What is Salvation History?
 - a. *The story of how God made Himself known in specific ways, to prepare His people for the gift of salvation.*
10. Where can we encounter the story of Salvation History?
 - a. *In Scripture.*
11. How is God's love for humanity a love story? How is it unlike any human love story?
 - a. *It is the story of God pursuing his beloved: humanity. Unlike any human love story, God is unfailingly faithful.*
12. God made Himself known in specific ways, to prepare His people for the gift of salvation. What attributes of God that we learned about last month apply to His plan for salvation?
 - a. *All the attributes of God connect to this truth.*
13. With whom did God make the very first covenant?
 - a. *The very first man – Adam.*
14. What promises did God make to Abraham?
 - a. *God made Abraham three promises: a land (or nation), a name (or dynasty), and a worldwide blessing.*
15. Which covenant fulfills all other covenants?
 - a. *The New Covenant in Jesus Christ.*
16. What are some ways that all of us today are like the ancient Israelites?
 - a. *We, too, must wait and prepare for the coming of our Savior.*

Reminders and Announcements

- A. The next Community Meeting picnic will take place at **[location]** on **[date]**.
Provide information for your parish

Living the Faith At Home

- A. Put up the **November Fridge Page** and the **Car Conversations hang tag**.
- B. Choose the activities that will work best for your family. For example, some children may prefer reading and discussion, while others might prefer crafts.
- You are not required to do all the activities in the book.
- C. Your children will learn the Faith from your witness as parents better than through any structured activity.
 1. Fridge page and car conversations can be found in their Parent's Guide at the beginning of this month's lesson.
 2. This program is first and foremost about their own formation, and secondarily

about helping them teach their children. “Put your own mask on first,” as they say!

Key Points in Our Reading This Month

- A. Human beings are created in God’s image, which means we have intellect, free will, and the capacity to love.
- B. The soul brings life to the body.
- C. Grace is a free gift from God and the life of God in our soul.
- D. Original Sin is the sin of Adam and Eve.
- E. Because of Original Sin, we are born without Grace in our souls.
- F. A covenant is a sacred promise that forges family bonds.
- G. In His mercy, God entered into a series of covenants with mankind.
- H. The New Covenant in Christ would fulfill all other covenants and offer eternal life to all who believe.

Closing Prayer

- A. Ask parents to reflect on this quotation for a few moments, and then close in prayer.

“Those who celebrate the Sacrament [of marriage] say, ‘I promise to be true to you, in joy and in sadness, in sickness and in health; I will love you and honor you all the days of my life.’ At that moment, the couple does not know what will happen, nor what joys and pains await them. They are setting out, like Abraham, on a journey together. And that is what marriage is! Setting out and walking together, hand in hand, putting yourselves in the Lord’s powerful hands. Hand in hand, always and for the rest of your lives.”

— Pope Francis

Lord, thank You for the chance to spend time together learning about the wonderful way You have chosen to reveal Yourself to mankind. Bless all of the married couples in this room, and give them Your grace to persevere in their marriage covenant. Bless all of our homes this Thanksgiving. Help us especially as we enter the Advent season, to wait patiently and prepare our hearts and homes to receive You.