

Go Forth...

A SERVICE OF U.S. CATHOLIC MISSION ASSOCIATION

MISSIONARY COMMENTARY

RENEWING OUR HEARTS



SUNDAY READINGS:

Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7

Psalms 51:3-6, 12-14, 17

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

LENT: SEASON OF CONVERSION

An impressive body of literature exists on the conversion process as a religious experience. Various approaches help reveal the depths of this profound, transforming reality: biblical-theological perspectives, psycho-social aspects, missionary dimensions, as well as other insightful approaches.

Foundational Perspectives. Avery Dulles, SJ, has noted that conversion demands "a radical shift in a person's apprehensions and values, accompanied by a similar radical change in oneself, in one's relations with other persons, and in one's relations to God." According to Bernard Lonergan, SJ, conversion takes place on four levels related to the four levels of understanding: affective (experience), intellectual (understanding), moral (judging), and religious (deciding). Succinctly stated, becoming a renewed Christian requires this fourfold conversion. As Paul wrote to the Ephesians, conversion demands that "Your hearts and minds must be made completely new and you must put on the new self..." (Eph 4:23-24).

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God's Powerful Grace. Such a total transformation is nothing less than the work of God's grace and the action of the Holy Spirit. It is impossible to conceive of authentic religious conversion apart from the gracious self-communication of God. Missionaries—all Christians—repeatedly experience the fact that "the Holy Spirit is the principal agent of evangelization (EN 75; cf. RM 21, 30). Mission belongs to God; it is "God's project." Only in the power of the Spirit do mission and conversion progress and bear fruit. Recall that illuminating Vatican II quote: "we must hold that the Holy Spirit offers to all the possibility of being made partners, in a way known to God, in the Paschal mystery" (GS 22).

Liturgical Insights. Personally, this author has always found that the Church's Lenten Prefaces profoundly capture the entire conversion process. Since we may often miss the message read during Lenten Masses, the heart of all four Prefaces is reproduced here for our repeated meditation; such ongoing reflection will certainly bear much fruit.

Preface One: "Each year you give us this joyful season when we prepare to celebrate the paschal mystery with mind and heart renewed. You give us a spirit of loving reverence for you, our Father, and of willing service to our neighbor. As we recall the great events that gave us new life in Christ, you bring the image of your Son to perfection within us."

Preface Two: "This great season of grace is your gift to your family to renew us in spirit. You give us strength to purify our hearts, to control our desires, and so to serve you in freedom. You teach us how to live in this passing world with our heart set on the world that will never end."

Preface Three: "You ask us to express our thanks by self-denial. We are to master our sinfulness and conquer our pride. We are to show to those in need your goodness to ourselves."

Preface Four: "Through our observance of Lent you correct our faults and raise our minds to you; you help us grow in holiness, and offer us the reward of everlasting life through Jesus Christ our Lord." ▶ ▶ Friends, enjoy a renewing, transforming Lent!

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NOTES ON THE SUNDAY READINGS:

First Reading - Genesis 2:7-9; 3:1-7: Today's first reading from the book of Genesis deals with the mystery of sin. We are reminded that all through life we struggle with sin and the devil. The reading portrays the symbolic drama showing the reality of original sin—that sin which has had unfortunate effects on the entire human race.

Responsorial Psalm - Psalm 51:3-6, 12-14, 17: This psalm, known as the *Miserere*, expresses one's sorrow at sinning against God. This profound prayer of repentance is attributed to King David after his adultery with Bathsheba and the killing of her husband Uriah. We continually pray: "A clean heart create for me, O God."

Second Reading - Romans 5:12-19: Here Paul is addressing the community in Rome. In a somewhat complicated presentation, Paul compares the Lord Jesus with Adam. From Adam came sin and disobedience; from Christ comes obedience and grace in a wonderful, generous fashion.

Gospel - Matthew 4:1-11: Our Gospel today from Matthew portrays Jesus as the new Adam. Jesus is led into the desert where he fasted for forty days and forty nights, facing the devil's worst temptations. Jesus resisted the temptations; thus, he becomes our hero and model, both during Lent and in all of life.

Notes and Commentary by Maryknoller James H. Kroeger, who has recently published *Walking with Pope Francis: The Official Documents in Everyday Language* (Orbis Books) as well as *Exploring Vatican II Treasures: Actors, Events, Insights* and *A Joyful Journey with Pope Francis* (Faith Alive Books).

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