

Our desire for God & Salvation history

Today we will explore our desire for God & salvation history, because we can only appreciate our role as catholic Christians if we know and understand our past. Unlike some other religions, Catholicism is more than a collection of truths and commandments – it is a call to action (Ja 3:14-24, FCYB p. 1344), to love and serve God and to love our neighbor as we love ourselves. (Mt 22:34-40, FCYB p. 1047).

Critical aspects of Salvation History

- Creation
- The Fall
- Israel as God's chosen people
- Jesus, the "word of God" incarnate
- The Church

Creation

It all started with creation. Although Catholics understand the story of creation in 7 days as an allegory (explain the word – look it up in the dictionary) we also understand that this story tells us certain truths about creation.

- First there was nothing, and then there was something – if kids are interested, talk about the "primordial atom" that was most likely the pre-cursor to the big bang.
- Creation came about as a direct action of God. Nothing was accidental.
- Human beings are created in the image and likeness of God. This doesn't mean that we "look like" God in the same way we may look like our earthly parents. It means that "The desire for God is written in the human heart, because man is created by God and for God; and God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for: The dignity of man rests above all on the fact that he is called to communion with God... For if man exists it is because God has created him through love, and through love continues to hold him in existence. He cannot live fully according to truth unless he freely acknowledges that love and entrusts himself to his creator." (CCC 27 ff)
- Human beings are created with a free will.

The Fall

The allegorical creation story in the book of Genesis teaches us that humanity was created by God and intended to serve as kings and priests over the rest of creation. Original sin, the side effect of free will, led humanity to fall from grace, and often give in to the temptation to worship the things of creation rather than God the Creator.

The mature individual behaves well because it is the right thing to do. But *why* is it the right thing to do? It is right because it is an expression of love, and a reflection of God's love for each of us. If God loves you, I should also love you (*agape* not *eros*). We were created to love God, but our exercise of free will is tainted by original sin. Desire gets in the way of love and damages our relationship with God, interfering with his plan for our salvation.

Israel as God's Chosen People

God called Abraham to be the father of a new nation and made a covenant with Israel – "I will be your God and you will be my people."

God wanted Israel to provide the leadership and teaching that would introduce God (Yahweh) to the world and to teach God's love and will to all the world.

The Israelites were unfaithful to the covenant, they worshipped false gods.

Story of the golden calf. Most people in 2020 are not interested in "worshipping" golden calves, but we can still worship false idols.

- Money
- Power
- Honor
- Pleasure
- Any others?

Jesus, the "Word of God" incarnate

It was part of God's original plan to send Jesus "in the flesh", not only to teach us about love for the Father and love for our neighbors, but to die and rise again that we might be saved from Sin. Jesus proclaimed the "good news" of a loving God who wants to see us live forever in a state of glory, i.e., salvation, in fulfillment of his covenant with humanity.

It is important to understand that, because Jesus is part of the Trinity, he was in agreement with this plan. He was not some poor guy who God wanted to torture to satisfy some base need for retribution for the individual sins of mankind. God does not need anything from us.

God's covenant with us is to freely offer salvation to those who ask for it by loving God and keeping his commandments. Jesus is God *incarnate*, the "word made flesh" (Jn 1:1-4 FCYB p. 1137, Jn 3:16 p. 1141).

Jesus is sometimes described as "*logos*," (Greek) which means word, but also means reason or plan, perfect, eternal, unchanging, and immutable; the *logos* can be perceived

by humans, even though it is incomprehensible in its fullness. Jesus is literally the personification of God's love for humanity and His creation.

The Church and Confirmation – why it is important

The Church, instigated by Jesus' blessing upon Peter and continued through history via apostolic succession, provides support, not only through the Sacraments, but as a community of faith.

All of us, not just priests, are called to be witnesses to God's love, but we need the support of our faith community, the Church, to overcome our natural weaknesses, much as drug addicts or alcoholics rely on fellow AA (or similar 12-step programs) members to support the constant temptation to give in to weakness.

Through Confirmation, we are strengthened by the power of the Holy Spirit to love God and neighbor: (Acts 1:8, FCYB p. 1170) "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth."

At the conclusion of the Mass, as part of the dismissal, the priest tells us to "Go..." There are several options, and they all begin with the word Go, clearly indicating that we are being sent out into the world:

- Go forth the Mass is ended.
- Go and announce the Gospel of the Lord.
- Go in peace, glorifying the Lord by your life.
- Go in peace.

The word "Mass" is derived from a Latin phrase, *missa est* – "you are sent." In the Sign of the Cross, we dedicate our lives, all our actions, to glorifying the Lord.

We are able to show love for God through our actions, especially through our treatment of our neighbors, whether family, friend or foe: (Mt 5:43-48, FCYB p. 1016) "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, love your enemies, and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your heavenly Father, for he makes his sun rise on the bad and the good, and causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust. For if you love those who love you, what recompense will you have? Do not the tax collectors* do the same? And if you greet your brothers only, what is unusual about that? Do not the pagans do the same?"

Confirmation is not a requirement; it is a gift that enables us to rise above our weaknesses, to love and serve God as he intends, and to love our neighbor as ourselves, even when a neighbor acts in a way that is hostile.