

Jesus triumphs over our embarrassment at being human.

Well here it is...we're into Lent up to our eyeballs. 'Tis the season of inviting the invasion of God...even our failures at fasting, prayer, and works of kindness...our failures named and claimed invite God to be God to us and we his children.

The plain truth is, we just can't stand to be creatures...we prefer to be gods. Our Eden story, Genesis chapters 2 and 3, is a drama woven of pretense and cover up - born of embarrassment at our creature-hood. Adam and Eve were the first to bite on the big lie: the denial of our creaturely dependence.

We do seem to master the art of denial at an early age. Witness the clever words of the "innocent" toddler accusing someone on the other side of the room as the milk is spilled, "See what you made me do?" Soon after infancy we invent playmates to blame for our own blunders. "Jimmy did it."

As teenagers we imagine some pretense, some "aura" which will make up for the terrible inadequacy we feel. A few put on the pose of the outsider, some play it hot, others stay cool...often taking refuge in clothes and things - the "stuff" of growing up. Even facing marriage, some are hounded by the thought that

a future spouse might find out what they are really like and then reject them.

We so much want to look good, to seem more intelligent or composed or virtuous than we are. We take on roles: "Fr. Joe Relevant," "Sr. Mary Renewal," "The Perfect Couple," "The Success Story," "The Saint," "The Picture of Health."

"Looking good is everything," a chorus of consumer hucksters screams. Oh, we so try to deny and disguise our creature-hood. Pretense marks the "real world" of school corridors, unfriendly streets, and political platforms. Cover-ups not only bring down presidencies, they haunt everyday life. Sigmund Freud once said, "The major barrier to healing is the wounded person who asks for help but is secretly unwilling to face the truth that healing requires."

Do we have to live like this? Denying our humanity? Is it bred in our bones? Is it the fatal flaw of every human - to hate our own humanness?

Adam and Eve, we are told, had almost everything. The only drawback was the fact that they were creatures of limit. They were good but not God. They could have the fruit of every tree except the tree of limits. The tree of creatureliness. It was their creature-hood that made them susceptible to the Lie...that they could be God.

Enter the serpent, that cunning beast, that lord of lies, who taunted their obedience and reliance on God. "Not any of the trees?" (No, they could have all the trees but one.) "Do you want to live forever?" (But they already could eat of the tree of life.)

Ah, but the attraction of having no limits. To be God. To be self-sufficient; self-made. The pretense was attractive, desirable. The loose looked so wise.

Thus sin entered the world, St. Paul writes in Romans chapter 5. Through one act: the lie of self-sufficiency. That was the offense. And it would be righted by one act as well: a life of utter truth. That was the gift we call Jesus Christ – who knew and lived the fact that he was not God the Creator, but God's Son. Jesus is the only one we know of who was successful at being God's Son.

The temptations the devil fed to Jesus were nothing other than delusions we all dream of in our longing for radical independence.

"Become your own food. Be self-sufficient. Display your power." But Jesus refuses. God alone will be his food.

"Show your stuff; muster your magic. Leap from the temple with full assurance." But Jesus will live by the word and power of God alone.

"Look out from the highest mountain and all will be given you, if you only give yourself to the lie of self-sufficiency." But Jesus declines the self-adoration, reserving glory for the Lord our God alone.

The sin of the first humans was to reject the condition of humanness: splendid creatures, yet none the less dependent on God.

The gift of the new Adam was a total acceptance of humanness, and entering so deeply into our limits and even into the effects of our sin, that there would

be no other reality to his consciousness than abandonment to the will of the one who sent him.

So what's left for us, we who are neither God nor Savior? Well, to receive the truth is a great and difficult thing. That is why true confession is such a marvelous sacrament and so rare. In a few weeks time we'll be celebrating our communal reconciliation service - an opportunity to name and claim not only our unloving choices, but our struggles wherein we feel compelled to be God. If we just acknowledge the simple truth of our limits and our sins before God and Christ's people we reverse the offense of Eden and enter the gift of Calvary. In acknowledging the lies of our own egos, of the great injustices of the world, of the excesses in appetite, of the woundings in relationship, of all the mean divisions in the Church, we drop once again the heavy mask of deception. It falls from our faces, revealing our need.

We are sinners, my friends. If we do not know that, we suffer a poverty of self-knowledge. But if we yield to the truth, not only that we are creatures, but that we are in sore need of redemption, we are newly free, open to love and we invite the invasion of God.

So just come to this holy table and savor the food of everlasting life – the bread of heaven. Feast on one another because we truly become Christ present in our world as we take our leave and go forth giving praise to the Father for the gift which sets us free to be God's children.

I think it was the poet W. H. Auden who once wrote: "Each of us shall be dragged, kicking and screaming, into the kingdom of God."

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