

2015 Advent Retreat in Daily Living
Session 1: Creation and Fall

Suggested prayer for the week:

Spent several days praying with the story of creation. (I've divided it by chapter here; you may want to divide the days of praying with it that way as well.)

Then spend a day with the Joseph Tetlow account of the sin of Adam and Eve.

Finally so an Ignatian contemplation of the Incarnation.

Take a day before our next session to review what went on in your prayer during the week.

The Story of Creation
Genesis 1-3, 4:1-16

1

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth and the earth was without form or shape, with darkness over the abyss and a mighty wind sweeping over the waters. Then God said: Let there be light, and there was light. God saw that the light was good. God then separated the light from the darkness. God called the light "day," and the darkness he called "night." Evening came, and morning followed—the first day.

Then God said: Let there be a dome in the middle of the waters, to separate one body of water from the other. God made the dome, and it separated the water below the dome from the water above the dome. And so it happened. God called the dome "sky." Evening came, and morning followed—the second day.

Then God said: Let the water under the sky be gathered into a single basin, so that the dry land may appear. And so it happened: the water under the sky was gathered into its basin, and the dry land appeared. God called the dry land "earth," and the basin of water he called "sea." God saw that it was good. Then God said: Let the earth bring forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree on earth that bears fruit with its seed in it. And so it happened: the earth brought forth vegetation: every kind of plant that bears seed and every kind of fruit tree that bears fruit with its seed in it. God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning followed—the third day.

Then God said: Let there be lights in the dome of the sky, to separate day from night. Let them mark the seasons, the days and the years, and serve as lights in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth. And so it happened: God made the two great lights, the greater one to govern the day, and the lesser one to govern the night, and the stars. God set them in the dome of the sky, to illuminate the earth, to govern the day and the night, and to separate the light from the darkness. God saw that it was good. Evening came, and morning followed—the fourth day.

Then God said: Let the water teem with an abundance of living creatures, and on the earth let birds fly beneath the dome of the sky. God created the great sea monsters and all kinds of crawling living creatures with which the water teems, and all kinds of winged birds. God saw that it was good, and God blessed them, saying: Be fertile, multiply, and fill the water of the seas; and let the birds multiply on the earth. Evening came, and morning followed—the fifth day.

Then God said: Let the earth bring forth every kind of living creature: tame animals, crawling things, and every kind of wild animal. And so it happened: God made every kind of wild animal, every kind of tame animal, and every kind of thing that crawls on the ground. God saw that it was good. Then God said: Let us make human beings in our image, after our likeness. Let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the tame animals, all the wild animals, and all the creatures that crawl on the earth. God created mankind in his image; in the image of God he created them; male and female* he created them. God blessed them and God said to them: Be fertile and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it. Have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, and all the living things that crawl on the earth. God also said: See, I give you every seed-bearing plant on all the earth and every tree that has seed-bearing fruit on it to be your food; and to all the wild animals, all the birds of the air, and all the living creatures that crawl on the earth, I give all the green plants for food. And so it happened. God looked at everything he had made, and found it very good. Evening came, and morning followed—the sixth day.

Thus the heavens and the earth and all their array were completed. On the seventh day God completed the work he had been doing; he rested on the seventh day from all the work he had undertaken. God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work he had done in creation.

2

This is the story of the heavens and the earth at their creation. When the Lord God made the earth and the heavens there was no field shrub on earth and no grass of the field had sprouted, for the Lord God had sent no rain upon the earth and there was no man to till the ground, but a stream* was welling up out of the earth and watering all the surface of the ground. Then the Lord God formed the man out of the dust of the ground and blew into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being.

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and placed there the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made grow every tree that was delightful to look at and good for food, with the tree of life in the middle of the garden and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil....

The Lord God then took the man and settled him in the garden of Eden, to cultivate and care for it. The Lord God gave the man this order: You are free to eat from any of the trees of the garden except the tree of knowledge of good and evil. From that tree you shall not eat; when you eat from it you shall die.

The Lord God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him. So the Lord God formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each living creature was then its name. The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be a helper suited to the man.

So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. The Lord God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. When he brought her to the man, the man said: "This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called 'woman,' for out of man this one has been taken." That is why a man leaves his father and mother and clings to his wife, and the two of them become one body. The man and his wife were both naked, yet they felt no shame.

3

Now the snake was the most cunning of all the wild animals that the Lord God had made. He asked the woman, "Did God really say, 'You shall not eat from any of the trees in the garden'?" The woman answered the snake: "We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden; it is only about the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden that God said, 'You shall not eat it or even touch it, or else you will die.'" But the snake said to the woman: "You certainly will not die! God knows well that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, who know * good and evil." The woman saw that the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eyes, and the tree was desirable for gaining wisdom. So she took some of its fruit and ate it; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made loincloths for themselves.

When they heard the sound of the Lord God walking about in the garden at the breezy time of the day, the man and his wife hid themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden. The Lord God then called to the man and asked him: Where are you? He answered, "I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid." Then God asked: Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree of which I had forbidden you to eat? The man replied, "The woman whom you put here with me—she gave me fruit from the tree, so I ate it." The Lord God then asked the woman: What is this you have done? The woman answered, "The snake tricked me, so I ate it."

Then the Lord God said to the snake: Because you have done this, cursed are you among all the animals, tame or wild; On your belly you shall crawl, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; They will strike at your head, while you strike at their heel.

To the woman he said: I will intensify your toil in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Yet your urge shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. To the man he said: Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, You shall not eat from it, Cursed is the ground because of you! In toil you shall eat its yield all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bear for you, and you shall eat the grass of the field. By the sweat of your brow you shall eat bread, Until you return to the ground, from which you were taken; For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

The man gave his wife the name “Eve,” because she was the mother of all the living. The Lord God made for the man and his wife garments of skin, with which he clothed them. Then the Lord God said: See! The man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil! Now, what if he also reaches out his hand to take fruit from the tree of life, and eats of it and lives forever? The Lord God therefore banished him from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he had been taken. He expelled the man, stationing the cherubim and the fiery revolving sword east of the garden of Eden, to guard the way to the tree of life.

4

The man had intercourse with his wife Eve, and she conceived and gave birth to Cain, saying, “I have produced a male child with the help of the Lord.” Next she gave birth to his brother Abel. Abel became a herder of flocks, and Cain a tiller of the ground. In the course of time Cain brought an offering to the Lord from the fruit of the ground, while Abel, for his part, brought the fatty portion of the firstlings of his flock. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, but on Cain and his offering he did not look with favor. So Cain was very angry and dejected. Then the Lord said to Cain: Why are you angry? Why are you dejected? If you act rightly, you will be accepted; but if not, sin lies in wait at the door: its urge is for you, yet you can rule over it.

Cain said to his brother Abel, “Let us go out in the field.”* When they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him. Then the Lord asked Cain, Where is your brother Abel? He answered, “I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?” God then said: What have you done? Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the ground! Now you are banned from the ground that opened its mouth to receive your brother’s blood from your hand. If you till the ground, it shall no longer give you its produce. You shall become a constant wanderer on the earth. Cain said to the Lord: “My punishment is too great to bear. Look, you have now banished me from the ground. I must avoid you and be a constant wanderer on the earth. Anyone may kill me at sight.” Not so! the Lord said to him. If anyone kills Cain, Cain shall be avenged seven times. So the Lord put a mark on Cain, so that no one would kill him at sight. Cain then left the Lord’s presence and settled in the land of Nod, east of Eden.

The Sin of Adam and Eve
[Excerpted from Joseph Tetlow, *Choosing Christ in the World*]

I recall what St. Paul said to the Romans: “Well then, sin entered the world through one man, and through sin death, and thus death has spread through the whole human race because everyone has sinned.” (Rom. 5:12)

Then I think about this: Even though I may believe that God brought humankind onto the face of the earth through evolution, I have to believe that at some point in time and on some spot on the globe, the earliest humans came into life. They grew intellectually aware of right and wrong, and some among them – the Church has always believed it was the very first – chose to do evil. They abused what was given them. Then chose to use what was forbidden by their consciences. They decided willfully to make their own value system instead of letting the Spirit of God instruct them. From that sin came others, more and more. From that sin came death. So, from this earliest sin came flooding down all of the misery, wretchedness, evildoing, and death-dealing in the world today.

Ignatian Contemplation on the Incarnation

The second “week” of the Spiritual Exercises of St. Ignatius begins with a contemplation of the Incarnation. There are three points to the contemplation, which Ignatius asks us to cover “in some way or other – by fantasy, meditation, or contemplation – and after I have worked through them, I consider what it all means to me, to my life world, and to the whole of the human race.” That is your prayer for today. (The following points are a paraphrase of Ignatius’ three points.)

First, I look at all the people on the earth – different races and ethnic groups; some people single, some living in families; some working in offices, others in the field; some countries at peace, others at war. I see infants being born, growing, dying. I watch God watching all of this, and I wonder what God feels.

Second, I see the realities of the world around me – war, famine, crime, pollution. I watch the Trinity looking down on this. Ignatius says “They look down upon the whole surface of the earth, and behold all nations in great blindness, going down to death and descending into hell.” I consider: what goes on in the heart of the Trinity as they look at the darkness of the world? I feel the Trinity’s love for humanity and their pain as humanity suffers. And I listen to the thoughts of the Trinity: Let us save all these people.” And I see and hear their plan as they send the angel to Mary.

Third, I move in my imagination back to the frantic activities of the world in which I live. I see the good – and the bad. And I see God working busily, initiating the Incarnation, laboring among humankind. And I see the angel announce God’s message and I see Mary acquiesce.

Ignatius invites us, after we consider these three points, to engage in colloquy with the Father, Jesus or Mary.