Spirituality

Pencil Preaching





by Pat Marrin

View Author Profile

patrickjmarrin@gmail.com.

Join the Conversation

Send your thoughts to *Letters to the Editor*. Learn more

February 9, 2021

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint



“Hear me, all of you, and understand” (Mark 7:14).

Gen 2:4b-9, 15-17; Mark 7:14-23

Author Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn reminded us that “the line separating good and evil passes not through states, nor between classes, nor between political parties either -- but right through every human heart -- and through all human hearts.”

As we engage the powerful imagery of the Book of Genesis, we should realize that the Garden of Eden was not a geographic location but a place in the human heart. It is here that the drama of Original Sin took place as humanity chose to partake of the forbidden fruit of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil.

Jesus emphasized this when he answered the scribes and Pharisees and their narrow focus on clean and unclean foods. Purity was not about the digestive system but the more mysterious human conscience and the hidden intricacies of motive and meaning underlying all our choices and actions. It is not what goes into a person that defiles them, but what originates in the heart and comes out as evil. “From within a person’s heart come evil thoughts, unchastity, theft, murder, adultery, greed, malice, deceit, licentiousness, envy, blasphemy, arrogance and folly. All these evils come from within and they defile.”

The famous scene in the garden was not about eating an apple but about the temptation to claim divine authority to decide what is good and evil. This is the ultimate hubris, Satan’s promise to Adam and Eve that if they reject God’s sovereignty, they will be gods. Creatures dare to usurp their Creator, setting in motion the alienation of humanity from the Source of Life and ushering the world into the chaos of sin and death.

Jesus affirms that all foods are clean, but he also challenged the dualism that divided God’s “very good” Creation into clean and unclean. The scribes and Pharisees had in fact made themselves arbiters of what is good or evil, sacred or profane. Instead of celebrating Creation and teaching people to rejoice in the goodness of all things, they created an arbitrary system in which they functioned as “gods” over ordinary people.

Far from being models of holiness, these religious leaders were hypocrites, harboring lust, envy, pride and hostility in their hearts. They were the forerunners of subsequent puritanical leaders eager to censure and control people, especially women, and every aspect of life according to their own rigid standards that rejected all human pleasure as sinful. Jesus’ joyful approach to life and openness to everyone made him the target of rigorists who called him a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and prostitutes.

We are first called to purity of heart. Those who find order, justice and love in their hearts will live balanced lives of natural moderation and find joy in celebrating life with others. This is the original blessing God wants for us.

Advertisement