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The First Sunday of Lent (A)
Adapted from Saint Anthony of Padua's
Sermons for the First Sunday of Lent¹

Jesus came to restore a world that had been disordered by sin, like a physician to heal the sick. It was therefore fitting for him to "cure opposites by opposites," as the saying is, just as by medical skills chills are cured by warmth, and fevers by cooling.

Does something seem disordered in your life? Is something "out of whack," as we say? Consider your relationship with your family, with your friends and co-workers, with your neighbors, with God himself. Consider the decisions you have made throughout your life, both large and small. Consider the priorities that you set for your life.

Do any of these thoughts leave you feeling a bit uncomfortable, uneasy? If so, know that something in your life is disordered, something is not as it should be. know that your life is marked by sin and is need of reconciliation.

Know, too, that you are not alone in this regard. Every one of our lives is marked by sin - both our own and the sins of

¹ In Saint Anthony of Padua, *Sermons for Sundays and Festivals*, Vol. I., Paul Spilsbury, ed. and trans., (Padua, Italy: Edizioni Messaggero Padova, 2007), 70-75.

others - and we are all in need reconciliation, but how did our lives come to be so disordered, so disjointed?

The sin of Adam was the destruction and the weakening of the human race. It consisted of three things: greed, vainglory and avarice.

Greed is an excessive desire for money, for food, for drink, for sex, for anything carnal, physical and worldly. Vainglory is an excessive pride, an excessive view of one's own dignity and importance and relationship to others. Avarice is an insatiable greed, a desire for the things of this world that cannot be satisfied. We see each of these three temptations in the account from Genesis proclaimed today.

With the hand of a lying promise [the serpent] took three spears, so to speak - greed, vainglory and avarice - and thrust them into man's heart, the very source of his warmth and life.. In this way he extinguished the fire of divine love, and took life away altogether from the heart of Adam who was placed in the garden of peace and delight to keep forever the peace of the Father by obeying him. But after Adam refused to obey God, he lost this peace and the devil thrust those three lances into his heart, and took away all his life altogether.

Whereas we so often go back on our word, God never does. Before Adam and Eve - and with them each of us - were expelled from the Garden, God said to the serpent: "I will put enmity

between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; He will strike at your head, while you strike at his heel" (Genesis 3:15). Already Divine Love planned the redemption of man. In these words is the promise and hope of reconciliation in Jesus Christ, who, coming as the Divine Healer, will give back to man the joy of salvation lost by his disobedience (cf. Psalm 51:14).

The Son of God came at the acceptable time, and being obedient to the Father he restored what was lost, curing opposites by opposites. Adam was placed in Paradise, and there, seeking pleasure, he fell. Jesus was led into the desert, and there, by constant fasting, he overcame the devil. Jesus broke the spears of the devil and as the heart of man was pierced with the serpent's spears of greed, vainglory and avarice, the heart of Christ was pierced with the spear of his great love.

Each of us still bears the wounds of the injury dealt us by the devil. We see it in our sin, in our disordered and unsatisfactory lives, in our emptiness and searching. Christ, too, still bears the wounds he received in love for us. His Divine Mercy still flows from this wound, from his open side through which we have access to his Sacred Heart.

Being a liar, the serpent told a lie, a lie believed by Adam and Eve and by each of us. Wisdom - Christ Jesus -

overcame the three-fold temptation of the devil by the three-fold authority of Deuteronomy.

When the devil tempted him to greed, Jesus replied: "Man does not live on bread alone" (Matthew 4:4; cf. Deuteronomy 8:3), as if to say, just as the outward man lives on material bread, so the inward man lives on heavenly bread, the word God.

The Son of God is the Word of God, the Wisdom "that comes forth from the mouth of the LORD" (Deuteronomy 8:3). Wisdom is kind of savoring or taste, and so the bread of the soul is the taste for wisdom, the savoring of the good things of the Lord, to taste and see how good the Lord is (cf. Psalm 34:8). The Book of Wisdom says of this bread: You have given them bread from heaven, having all sweetness within it (cf. Wisdom 16:20-21). Because Adam refused this bread, he fell into the temptation of greed.

When the devil tempted him to vainglory, Jesus answered: "You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test" (Matthew 4:7; cf. Deuteronomy 6:16). Adam, too, tempted the Lord God, when he disobeyed the command of his Lord and God - as has each of us, and too easily believed the false promise: "You will be as gods" (Genesis 3:5). What vainglory, to think that one could become God! What a wretched man! Because of your foolishness in setting yourself above your proper state, you fell below it

in miserable ruin. Do we not find ourselves, too, in this state?

When the devil tempted Jesus to avarice, he replied: "The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve" (Matthew 4:10; cf. Deuteronomy 6:13, 10:20).

All those who love money or worldly glory are bowing down to worship the devil. For our sakes, Jesus entered the womb of the Virgin and bore the shame of the Cross. Taught by his example, let us go into the desert of penitence.

With his help, let us resist the wind of vainglory and the fire of avarice. With him, we must battle against the temptation to greed with the weapon of fasting, seeking to detach ourselves from the things of this world. We must battle against the temptation to vainglory with the weapon of prayer, being obedient to the will of the Father. We must battle against the temptation to avarice with the weapon of almsgiving, seeking satisfaction and fulfillment in God alone.

Let us adore him whom the archangels adore. Let us serve him whom the angels serve, who is blessed, glorious and to be praised, most high for ever and ever. And let every creature say: Amen!