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Putting the pieces of our faith together

St. Mary Faith Enrichment Evenings
November 11-14, 2007

The Four Basic Questions



- Who is God?
- If God is good, why is there evil in the world?
- If God is good and there is evil in the world, what has God done about it?
- If God is good and there is evil in the world and God is doing something about it, how do we get with the program?



Basic Question #3:
If God is good and there is
evil in the world, what has God
done about it?
Tuesday evening

Quick recap



- God created the world out of love
- God created the world with internal harmony
- Sin has weakened that harmony, leading to evil and suffering
- But it is still God's plan to dwell in his creation as in a temple – he has not abandoned it!
- He has inaugurated a new “creation within creation” – the Kingdom of God, which is both coming but is already present

Key concept: proportionality



- Proportionality relates to the capacity of interaction (e.g. ear to sound, eye to light)
- Recall: our first parents were “proportioned” to receive the Word of God without flaw
- Recall: through original sin, this capacity to receive God’s revelation is now subject to lots of earthly distractions
- God’s mode of self-revelation therefore must now begin slowly, according to our proportional capacity to receive it, and increasing as we grow in that proportionality (whether as individuals or as a culture)

Human pre-history



- Even after the Fall, our first parents still had faith, thanks to the memory of the experience of knowing God personally
- The members of the first human family were thus “well proportioned” to receiving God’s revelation
- This personal memory eventually became a cultural one, and so a shift took place: from very early on human beings “called upon the name of the Lord” (Genesis 4: 26b)
- As the generations passed, paganism set in – a confusion between the beautiful works God created, and the God who created them (Wisdom 13: 1-9)

Human pre-history



- Paganism eventually led to idolatry, wherein the experience of artistic beauty leads to the worship of idols (Wisdom 13:10 – 14:31)
- All this movement, particularly idolatry & sorcery, becomes easily manipulated into bondage to the Evil One (1 Corinthians 10: 20-21)
- Typical proto-religion: a belief in spirits, in powerful cosmic forces capable of good or evil, a sense that such forces should have been controllable, in the need for worship and sacrifice, etc.

The earliest human civilization



- The Sumerian civilization arose around 4000 – 3500 B.C.
- The historical period begins with the invention of writing in clay tablets (cuneiform)
- A true civilization, with organized government, religion, education, etc.
- A key city of this civilization was Ur
- And the most famous citizen of Ur was...

Abraham



- According to the Bible, Abraham's father was Terah, who was a polytheist (Joshua 24: 2)
- The Bible also states that Terah and his family was originally from "Ur of the Chaldees" (Genesis 11: 28)
- Abraham, Terah's son, had a unique combination of personal and cultural gifts that meant he was "proportioned" to receive a proposal from God – to be the founder of a new people, in a new land (Genesis 12+)

Abraham



- Abraham worships only God, and teaches his family to do the same
- A mysterious figure in the story of Abraham: Melchizedek (Genesis 14: 18-20)

Ishmael and Isaac



- According to the Bible, Abraham had two sons, Ishmael (by Hagar) and Isaac (by Sarah) – see Genesis 16 & 21
- The covenant with God was passed through Isaac, but Ishmael was promised to become a “great nation” as well (Genesis 17: 20)
- According to St. Jerome, the 12 tribes of Ishmael lived in Arabia –their descendents are therefore called “Arabs”
- According to an ancient Arab oral tradition, Ishmael eventually settled in a town called Mecca, where he built the foundations of a temple dedicated to the One God

Jacob/Israel and his 12 sons



- Isaac had a son, Jacob, who later received the name Israel
- Jacob had 12 sons, one of whom (Joseph) ended up in Egypt – first as a slave, then as a magistrate (Genesis 37-50)
- Through Joseph, Jacob and his family were welcomed into Goshen (Egypt), where over several generations they became very numerous (Genesis 47:4; Exodus 1: 7)

Moses the law-giver



- The episode of Moses is the next great phase in the “proportioning” of the world
- The covenant with Abraham, an individual, has now become a covenant with a people – but one that is disorganized
- The persecution by the Egyptians builds in the Hebrews a sense of belonging to one people, despite the 12 tribes
- Moses is sent to this people to lead them to worship God and to amplify the covenant between them and God

Moses the law-giver



- The people are saved from Egypt in the event of Passover
- The people pledge loyalty to God; they receive the Law, and promise to keep it
- This combination of worship and law gives the people their first real social tools to be a “nation”
- A mystery: the promise of another prophet “like Moses” (Deuteronomy 18: 15)

A new concept: Judgement



- After Moses and Joshua the people are living in the Promised Land, but they often participate in the idolatry of the local inhabitants
- This division within the people leads to their oppression by the Philistines
- The Judges were charismatic leaders who interpreted the Law for the people; they also rescued the people from oppression
- The Biblical concept of “Judgement” is therefore fundamentally positive – it is a call to repentance but also a promise of rescue from oppression

David, the Messiah



- The third great phase in the “proportioning” of the people came with King David, who acted as a central point of reference for the people
- Tired of the era of Judges, the people eventually clamour for a more stable system, and ask for a King
- Hebrew kings were anointed, to show that their authority came from another
- To David, the second king, God promised a dynasty that would last forever
- The Hebrew word for “anointed one”? *Messiah*, or in Greek, *Christ*.

Solomon – glory and tragedy



- David's son Solomon built a great Temple in honour of God in Jerusalem – a wonder of the world
- But Solomon also engaged in idolatry
- As a consequence, the kingdom was divided: Israel in the north (capital: Samaria) and Judah in the south (capital: Jerusalem)
- The northern kingdom rejects the Temple in Jerusalem, and sets up other places of worship – quickly leading to idolatry

The Exile and after: a period of consolidation



- The Northern Kingdom is eventually conquered and scattered – the people are absorbed into the surrounding social fabric
- The Southern Kingdom is later conquered as well, and the people exiled to Babylon
- This Exile become a time of decision for the people – and they choose to remain faithful

The Exile and after: a period of consolidation



- The people become extremely zealous for the Law, and base their identity around it (idols begone!)
- The understanding of the Kingdom of God also emerges as not just an earthly kingdom, but one that would come through a great “day of judgement”
- The mysterious figure of the “son of man” (Daniel 7: 13)

Issues in the time of Jesus



- Does the Kingdom of God involve an earthly king and kingdom, or a heavenly one?
- What is the relation of the People of God to the Gentiles?
- Is the Second Temple legitimate, or is some other worship and law needed?
- How are the sayings of the Prophets to be read and interpreted?

The Word made flesh



- The greatest “phase” in the reception of the revelation of God by man is in the coming of that revelation as a man: Jesus, the Word made flesh
- Taking the Jewish worship of Passover, he universalizes it with the gestures of Melchizedek – a priest outside of Hebrew tradition
- As successor of David, Jesus is the King of the Jews, but one who opens up “citizenship” in the People of God to all who place their faith in him

The Word made flesh



- Jesus universalizes the Mosaic Law by particularizing it with the gift of the Holy Spirit
- Jesus seals all these actions by his death and resurrection, thereby ransoming for himself a new people from the dominion of the Evil One – a process which continues today
- "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit." (Acts 2: 38)

The Church



- Jesus founded the Church upon the 12 Apostles, representing the 12 tribes of Israel; of them, he named Simon as “the Rock”
- At Pentecost, he poured out the Holy Spirit on the 120 gathered together – the birth of a new humanity
- Christianity spread quickly throughout the Roman Empire and beyond, but despite bitter persecutions it continued to grow
- While Jesus and his Gospel constitute the fullness of God’s revelation, the Church continued to grow in its understanding and living of it

The Church



- The history of the Church needs to be read in this light: that while it shows much human imperfection, what is even more amazing is that it has also shown forth much holiness and goodness
- Catholic Christianity: All Christians have Christ, and with that much that is good, but only Catholicism has such doctrinal clarity, national universality, and the ministry of Peter – giving Catholics a special responsibility

Waiting in Joyful Hope



- While the Kingdom of God continues to grow in the world, we still await the final messianic triumph when the universe will be transfigured in the glory of God
- In Jesus, the new Adam, we have the opportunity to live in a renewed world of grace
- It is said that much of the world will continue to live as part of the first Adam

Waiting in Joyful Hope



- The mission of the Church: to bring the opportunity to join this new humanity to the world, and to follow God according to this new worship and law of love
- The final agony: in the final days of our current phase of history, the People of God will be persecuted for its message, worship, and acts of charity, but this period of great witness will be the final proportioning of the world to receive its full communion with God

History, summarized



For since death came through a human being, the resurrection of the dead came also through a human being. For just as in Adam all die, so too in Christ shall all be brought to life, but each one in proper order: Christ the firstfruits; then, at his coming, those who belong to Christ; then comes the end, when he hands over the kingdom to his God and Father, when he has destroyed every sovereignty and every authority and power. For he must reign until he has put all his enemies under his feet.

History, summarized



The last enemy to be destroyed is death, for "he subjected everything under his feet." But when it says that everything has been subjected, it is clear that it excludes the one who subjected everything to him. When everything is subjected to him, then the Son himself will (also) be subjected to the one who subjected everything to him, so that God may be all in all.

- 1 Corinthians 15: 21-28

Where do we fit in?



- To REPENT means, fundamentally, to declare our love and loyalty for Christ, the new Adam, who would rather see his coming judgement as one of salvation than condemnation
- To be BAPTIZED means, fundamentally, to ask God to pour forth his Holy Spirit into us, and to fully release the power of the Spirit in our lives
- To WORSHIP means, fundamentally, to engage in prayer to God within his new Temple, the Christian Church, around the table of the Lord's Supper, and to live that new covenant in the world in union with the Church's mission



Next evening:
**If God is good, and there is evil
in the world, and God has done
something about it, how do we
get with the program?**