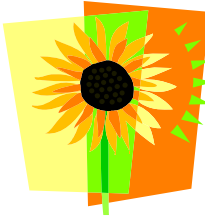




**THE FIG TREE** — *Exodus 3:1-8, 13-15; Psalm 103: 1-4, 6-8, 11 ; 1Corinthians 10: 1-6, 10-12; Luke 13: 1-9*

## ***If you do not repent, you will perish***



Some people told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with the blood of their sacrifices. Jesus said to them in reply, “Do you think that because these Galileans suffered in this way they were greater sinners than all other Galileans? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did! Or those eighteen people who were killed when the tower at Siloam fell on them - do you think they were more guilty than everyone else who lived in Jerusalem? By no means! But I tell you, if you do not repent, you will all perish as they did!”

And he told them this parable: “There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit on it but found none, he said to the gardener, ‘For three years now I have come in search of fruit

on this fig tree but have found none. So cut it down.

Why should it exhaust the soil? He said to him in reply, ‘Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not you can cut it down.’”

**REFLECTION:** *When God called Moses from the burning bush, he launched him on one of the longest, most significant journeys in history—and began by telling him: “Remove the sandals from your feet” (Exodus 3:5). Why would God say that?*

The second half of the verse offers a reason: “The place where you stand is holy ground.” Imagine how fast Moses obeyed! In Egypt, where he grew up, people were required to go barefoot before Pharaoh or any other superior. It was both an expression of respect and an admission of a lower-status position. Standing before the greatest Lord of all, whose glory shimmered out like an invisible force field,

Moses must have felt awed and humble indeed.

What does this tell us about our approach to prayer? Without any burning bushes to jolt us, it’s easy to relate to God casually, even as if it’s something of a chore. The image of Moses removing his sandals reminds us that our loving Father is an awesome God whose holiness we cannot even begin to comprehend. It tells us to approach him with reverence, humility, and an awareness of our sin and frailty. But the scene speaks to us in other ways as well.

Shoes and sandals get dirty, and still today in many cultures and homes, people take them off before entering the house. In a way, that’s what we’re called to do when we come before God. Grimy footwear can also symbolize the distractions that pop up when we pray. If this happens, we can follow the advice of St. Alphonsus Liguori and try our best to leave all extraneous thoughts at the door of our prayer time. We can also say, along with St. Bernard: “O my thoughts, wait here. After prayer we shall speak about other matters.”

So as you go to pray today, take off your sandals! The One who called Moses is calling you!

**“Father, who am I that you should love me so much? Help me to set aside everything that separates me from you and to return your love as fully as I can.”**



*The Fig Tree and the Gardener  
by James Tissot*



**Monday, Mar 8**

2 Kings 5:1-15; Psalm 42:2-3;  
43:3-4; Luke 4:24-30

What did Jesus say to get his townsfolk so angry? Perhaps the answer is found in the people Jesus used as examples here: the widow of Zarepath, visited by Elijah, and Naaman the Syrian, whom Elisha healed of leprosy. Neither was from Israel, and that surely must have hit a nerve. Was Jesus insulting them? What did this carpenter's son have against his own people? The idea that they were being lectured to by one of their own might well have been enough to set them off.

Let's take a look at the story of Naaman to see what Jesus was getting at. Like the people, Naaman had heard from a prophet, and like them, he didn't take well to it. Instead of having him dip in a river seven times, couldn't Elisha heal him instantly? And why should he go all the way to Israel when Syria had rivers galore? (2 Kings 5:10-12). Naaman had his own ideas of how God should work, and it wasn't until he left his comfort zone that he found what he was looking for.

It's true that to receive what God wants for us, we usually need to make a step of faith—sometimes a literal step. The Israelites had to walk through the Red Sea. Joshua's army had to march around the walls of Jericho. Often we need to do something concrete to see God's promises fulfilled in our lives. We may question his instructions, as Naaman did. But we can also try to overcome our doubts and finally take that step to a place where his provision awaits us.

Wherever you are on your

faith journey, know that God wants to bring you even further. In your prayer today, sit quietly before the Lord and listen for the ways he might be calling you to grow in faith. Accept that although your plans seem pretty good, his plans are even better, even if they are nothing like what you expected. When you make a habit of trusting God's wisdom instead of your own, you'll find that you have more peace, joy, and inner strength. So let him lead you.

You won't regret it!  
***"Father, help me to trust you. Give me the grace to surrender my will to yours, even if it means doing something I'm afraid of."***

**Tues, Mar 9**

Daniel 3:25,34-43; Psalm 25:4-9; Matthew 18:21-35

Speaking in parables was one of Jesus' most effective methods of teaching.

A master storyteller, he had the ability to gain his listeners' interest and involve them in the story's drama. But Jesus' parables weren't simply engaging stories—they reveal to us the love of God and the values of his kingdom. They call us to deeper conversion. To bring a lesson home forcefully, Jesus often used exaggeration—a common Semitic practice—or contrasted opposites like wisdom and foolishness, generosity and stinginess. Surely there's no clearer instance of exaggeration than today's Gospel reading about the unforgiving servant. A

man who was forgiven an enormous debt—the equivalent of 150,000 years' wages—refused to cancel another man's debt that equaled a hundred days' wages—a

debt that was only 1/20,000 of one per cent as great as his own. Although the servant acknowledged his own need for mercy, he didn't allow that mercy to soften his heart. And the consequence for him was devastating.

The blunt ending of this story is a direct challenge for us to be just as forgiving to others as God has been to us. It also underscores something Jesus told his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount: "If you forgive others their transgressions, your heavenly Father will forgive you. But if you do not forgive others, neither will your Father forgive your transgressions" (Matthew 6:14-15). If we are not trying our best to be merciful, compassionate, and forgiving, we will find it very hard to pray or to know God's own love and mercy in our lives.

This season of Lent offers us a special time to come to grips with our need for mercy and to let God's mercy soften our hearts so that we can change the way we relate to the people in our lives. God doesn't want us to hold a grudge or treat anyone unkindly who is "in debt" to us. He doesn't want to see our hearts darkened by bitterness or resentment. Rather, he wants his peace to rule us—and through us, to touch everyone around us. Don't you want that too?

***"Thank you, Jesus, for the countless times you've forgiven my sins. Deliver me from any hardness of heart that I harbor toward others, and teach me mercy from your own immeasurable mercy."***

***The Almighty!  
Just and Righteous  
is He. (Job 37:23)***

**Wed, Mar 10**

Deuteronomy 4:1, 5-9; Psalm 147:12-13,15-16,19-20, Matthew 5:17-19

Moses recounted all that God had done for his people: He led them out of Egypt and made a covenant with them. He gave them his Ten Commandments and promised to be with them forever. Now they were getting ready to cross the Jordan River and enter the land he had set apart for them. So Moses reminded them how important it was that they not forget the great works of the Lord in their past. He warned them not to let these things "slip from your memory as long as you live, but teach them to your children and to your children's children" (Deuteronomy 4:9).

Isn't it amazing how easy it can be to forget, in the day-to-day grind, all that God has done for us? That's why it's helpful to step back from time to time and review both our personal history and the sweep of salvation history. Why not start today? Pick up a pen and list some of your favorite stories from the Bible. For each story, try to identify how God was at work saving his people and preparing them for Jesus. Look for common patterns—elements that tell you about God's goodness, his mercy, and his power to save.

Don't stop there. After taking this panoramic view, fix your attention on your own life. Make a list of the times when you knew without a doubt that God was working. It may be a time when you didn't know which path you should take, but then suddenly it all made sense. It may be a time when you felt God help you

address a wounded relationship. It may be a time of prayer or at Mass when you felt especially close to the Lord.

If you set these blessings firm in your memory, you will be able to draw on them in times of challenge. When you find yourself questioning God's love, you can recall them to help you dispel the doubt. When you are burdened by a trial, you can still know that God is with you, guiding you by his unseen hand. Never let his blessings "slip from your memory"!

***"Jesus, Burn into my memory the great things you have done, and are doing, in my life. May I never forget them."***

### Thurs, Mar 11

*Jeremiah 7:23-28; Psalm 95:1-2, 6-9; Luke 11:14-23*

His very name, Satan, means "Adversary," yet it seems quite easy for us to minimize his danger. Even if we accept the devil's existence, we still find it hard to comprehend his active malevolence. At most we think of him as a sort of ugly extra, not a principal player in the drama of salvation. But Jesus didn't see the devil as negligible.

Since Satan cannot create anything, he seeks instead to distort and pervert what is already around. For example, we've never enjoyed so much freedom in the world yet seen so many strongholds of sin. We've never been so self-reliant yet seen so much fear and anxiety. Our world has never seemed so small, yet so many live in isolation and loneliness.

One of Satan's most frequent

and effective strategies is to sow seeds of doubt in our minds. He wants us to doubt God's love so that we might look for love in other relationships. But how many people have been trapped by love's counterfeit of sexual promiscuity? Satan wants us to doubt God's provision so that we force ourselves into an unhealthy sense of self-reliance. Just think of those who have reached the pinnacle of financial success but paid the great price of bankrupt relationships. Satan wants us to doubt the mercy and forgiveness of God so that we remain trapped in guilt.

So what should we do? Put your hope in God's promises. Whenever you are tempted to doubt God's love, remind yourself that nothing can separate you from the love of God (Romans 8:35-39). Whenever you are tempted to doubt God's provision, remind yourself that God, who cares for the flowers of the field and the birds of the air, takes even greater pleasure in providing you with all that you need (Luke 12:22-34).

Whenever you doubt God's forgiveness, remind yourself that God is rich in mercy and slow to anger (Ephesians 2:4; Psalm 103:8). These are all truths that you can stake your life upon! Remember: He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.

***"Lord Jesus, you have defeated the power of the devil, and through baptism you have given me a share in your victory. I believe that nothing can separate me from your love. Holy Spirit, fill me with a deep faith and trust in God's promises."***

### Friday, Mar 12

*Hosea 14:2-10; Psalm 81:6-11, 14, 17; Mark 12:28-34*

You are not far from the kingdom of God. (Mark 12:34)

At Jesus' words, a hush fell on the crowd. No one dared ask him any more questions. He often used these questions as an opportunity to respond with a parable or teaching that challenged his questioners' assumptions or uncovered their hypocrisy. But this time, Jesus said something completely unexpected. Jesus saw that this man already had some understanding of what he was teaching. Even though we don't know much about this scribe, he must have had some personal experience of the uselessness of empty sacrifice. It's

possible that he had experienced what Hosea described in the first reading: healing and love from a God who forgives sins. As a result, he understood that loving God and neighbor was his highest goal and actually fulfilled the Mosaic Law.

Jesus wants to see a similar understanding in us. He wants to get to the heart of the matter and call us to love in ways that fulfill the spirit of the Law.

But that doesn't mean we reject religious practices! This scribe was not casting off the observances of the Mosaic Law; instead, he came to see them in the way God intended.

His pious practices flowed from his love for God, and this brought life and manifested God's love to others.

As we begin to see the external practices of our faith for what they are meant to be—manifestations of our love for God and his grace at work in us—everything we do appears in a different light. We are not just going to Mass; we are offering ourselves in love to God



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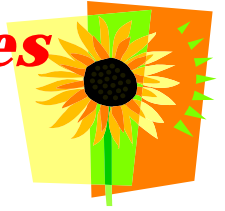
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# Looking for Rest Amid Life's Pressures



**IN EXILE**

**BY RON ROLHEISER**

*“Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the*

*future. If not you can cut it down”* (Lk 13:8b-9).

## Saturday, March 13

*Hosea 6:1-6; Psalm 51:3-4,18-21; Luke 18:9-14*

Doesn't this reading sound confusing? The Israelites urge each other to return to the Lord, but God rejects their offer—and quite firmly. What would provoke God to such an angry, even bitter, response?

“It is love that I desire, not sacrifice” (Hosea 6:6). That was the whole problem. God looked past the Israelites' words and found that their hearts hadn't changed. Their words were lofty, but there was nothing behind them. He knew that fine rhetoric

like this was “like the dew that early passes away” (Hosea 6:4). God didn't want empty piety. He wanted a people who would treat one another with justice and mercy. He wanted a people who would care for the poor and not exploit them. He wanted a people who would live his covenant seven days a week, not only on the Sabbath.

God hasn't changed since the days of Hosea. He still wants his church to be a people set apart for him. He still wants to see us live in holiness, purity, justice, and obedience. And he still disapproves of any ways in which we try to get a “quick fix” of religion on Sundays only to spend the rest

of the week doing whatever we want.

So what should we do about this, especially if today's reading strikes a chord in us? For one thing, we can repent. God loves it when we turn back to him and admit our failings—not because he likes to see us humiliated but because he knows how much more powerfully he can work when we are repentant instead of self-satisfied. The whole point of Confession is healing and restoration, not

an exercise in crime and punishment.

But more than repentance, we should also make a plan to change. It may include a specific commitment to daily prayer. It may involve a regular examination of our consciences and taking practical steps to help us avoid sin. It may also involve a decision to share more fully in the work of the church, either for evangelization or for social justice.

God wants to change our lives, but to do this, he needs our cooperation. So repent, and make a plan that involves not only sacrifice but love.

***“Jesus, I surrender my heart to you so that you can give me a new one. Make me more like you, Lord!”***

The poet, Rumi, once wrote: “What I want is to leap out of this personality/ And then sit apart from that leaping/ I've lived too long where I can be reached.”

In a day of instant and constant communication, cell phones and emails, I suspect that we all fit that description. Certainly I do. I've lived too long where I can be reached.

It seems that we're almost always over-stretched with too much to do. We come to the end of each day tired, yet conscious of what we've left undone. There's always someone else we should have phoned, emailed, or attended to in some way. Our lives often seem like overpacked suitcases, crammed to the brim, and still unable to hold all we need to carry along. What's wrong here?

Whenever we feel that way, it's a sure sign that we've lost the proper sense of time. Life is meant to be busy, but we're also meant, at regular times, to have sabbatical, sabbath time, to rest and enjoy.

When we look at scripture we see that God established a certain rhythm to time.

Biblically, this is the pattern: We're meant to work for six days, then have a one-day sabbatical; work for seven years and have a one year sabbatical; work for seven times seven years (forty-nine years) and have a Jubilee year; and finally work for a lifetime and have an eternity of sabbatical. The idea is that our pressured, hurried, working days should be regularly punctured by times of rest, celebration, enjoyment, non-work, non-pressure, and that ultimately all work will cease and we will have nothing to do except to luxuriate in life itself.

And what's supposed to happen on a sabbath? What constitutes sabbath time? First, a sabbath is meant to be unordinary time, a time when our normal work and the everyday pressures of life are stopped. Partly this is meant to free us up for deeper things, but mainly it is meant to remind us that we do not live to work, but rather work in order to live and love.

Next a sabbath is meant to be a time for enjoyment, for high celebration. And this isn't abstract: On a sabbath we're meant to eat our best meal of the week, wear our best clothing, rest, enjoy the earth and each other, and (if you're really an Orthodox believer) to make love. On a sabbath we're meant to drink in life in all its fullness, including its sensuality. Our language still carries some remnants of this when, for example, we speak of wearing our Sunday best and having our Sunday dinner.

Finally, sabbath is meant to be a time for reconciliation, for forgiving debts, for giving up grudges, for making peace with our enemies. The cessation of work, the rest, the celebration, the drinking in of enjoyment, and the making love are all partly ends in themselves. The sabbath was made for us. However they're also in function of something else, namely, reconciliation, forgiveness. We only truly celebrate the sabbath, have a genuine holiday, if we forgive someone and it's because we don't do this that, so often, our vacations don't relax us for long. We're tired, go on vacation, get a good rest, get away from the pressures of our work, enjoy some unpressured time, perhaps even get some sun and a tan, but then come home and very soon, within hours

## Accepting his message of God's kingdom

### Reading I: Exodus 3:1-8a, 13-15

A single thread runs through today's readings. It is indicated by the name of God as revealed to Moses: "I am who I am," or, as many contemporary exegetes interpret it, "He causes to be what comes into existence."

Our God is the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, not the God of the philosophers (Pascal) – that is to say, not an abstract, impersonal reality, but the transcendent One who intervenes powerfully in human history.

God calls Moses and sends him to lead his people out of Egypt through the wilderness (second reading), refreshing them with water from the rock and bringing them into the Promised Land.

Then finally he sends his Son, offering his people one last chance to repent and accept his salvation (gospel).

Once again the Exodus story functions in the liturgy as a type of the saving act of God in Christ. God sees the affliction of his people. He "comes down," that is, intervenes in history out of his tran-

or days, are just a tired as we were before we went on vacation. Why? Because we didn't forgive anybody and our hurts and bitterness are the deep roots of our tiredness. There's a statute of limitations to all debts, including our personal hurts.

A couple of years ago, Wayne Muller wrote a little book entitled, *Sabbath: Finding Rest, Renewal, and Delight in our Busy Lives*. I leave you with some of his wisdom:

- Sabbath need not be a year or even a day. It can also be an afternoon, an hour, a walk, a dinner. Sabbath is a time when we drink, if only for a few moments, from the fountain of rest and delight. It is a time to listen to what is most deeply beautiful, nourishing, and true.

- Sabbath is different kind of fertility; it honours the wisdom of dormancy. If certain plant species do not lie dormant for winter, they will not bear fruit in spring. A period of rest, within which our roots quietly take in nourishment, is the key to health. Like plants, we too must have periods in which we lie fallow and silently nourish our roots.

- We are almost always running, trying to catch the things that will make us happy when, in fact, those very things are trying to catch us!

- God said: "Remember to rest." This is not a lifestyle suggestion, but a commandment, as important as not stealing, not murdering, or not lying.

We need sabbath. We've all lived too long where we can be reached.

scendence, to deliver them from the slavery of sin and to bring them into the land "flowing with milk and honey," the kingdom of God.

### Responsorial Psalm: 103: 1-4, 6-8, 11

In this psalm we praise God for showing his ways to Moses, and his works to the people of Israel, as these ways and works are spoken of in the first reading.

### Reading II: 1 Cor 10:1-6, 10-12

The situation confronting Paul at Corinth is that the Christians there are supposing that the sacraments automatically confer the fullness of salvation here and now. Probably the Corinthians were under the influence of early Gnostic enthusiasm.

Paul therefore has to stress the "not yet" aspect of the sacraments. They anticipate symbolically the fullness of salvation, but effectively they initiate and foster a process that looks to its final completion at the end.

To illustrate his point, Paul draws an analogy with Israel in the wilderness and finds in the Exodus story types of the two major Christian sacraments of baptism and the Eucharist: the children of Israel were baptized when they passed through the cloud and through the Red Sea, and they were nourished with spiritual food and drink by the manna and the water from the rock in the wilderness.

It is probable that Paul did not invent this typology but took it over from earliest Christianity.

It may well have had its origin in Jewish speculation about the messianic banquet and may have been taken up in pre-Pauline Christianity to interpret the eschatological banquets of the early community, such as those alluded to in Acts 2:42, 46.

Certainly there is rabbinic influence present in the idea that the Rock followed the Israelites, an inference from the fact that it is mentioned twice in the Pentateuch (Exodus 17 and Numbers 20; a modern commentator would regard these as doublets of the same tradition).

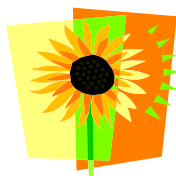
More extraordinary is Paul's claim that "the Rock was Christ." Probably the basis for this identification is the equation of Christ with the divine "wisdom," the personified agent both of creation and of all God's acts in salvation history.

"Wisdom" stands for God's going out of himself in self-communication and activity. For Paul, as for the New Testament as a whole, God's going out of himself culminates in his redemptive act in Jesus.

### Gospel: Luke 13:1-9

Jesus here refers to two recent disasters, otherwise unknown to historians. One was the outrage of a tyrant, the other an accident involving construction workers in Siloam. From both events he draws a warning for Israel. Unless the nation repents, it too will perish. For Jesus, repentance means accepting his message of God's kingdom.

The parable of the fig tree reinforces the challenge to repent. This provides a link with the second reading: "Let any one who thinks that he stands take heed lest he fall." Neither the old Israel nor the new dare presume upon a false sense of security.



### SCRIPTURE IN DEPTH

BY REGINALD  
H. FULLER

# Holy Ground of Being



## Questions for Bible Study

BY ANNE OSDIECK, SAINT LOUIS CENTER FOR LITURGY

“I AM sent me to you.”

Today’s reading from Exodus was a favorite of my favorite philosopher, St. Thomas Aquinas. The story reads simply enough, but for Aquinas the implications were momentous.

Moses is tending the flocks. He sees a burning bush which is not consumed, and he hears his name called out from the blaze. When Moses responds, “Here I am,” he is warned to “come no nearer.” The spot on which he stands is holy ground. He encounters the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, the God who has come to rescue his people. Yet Moses is hesitant: “If they ask me ‘what is his name?’ what am I to tell them?” God says, “I am who am. This is what you shall tell the Israelites: I AM sent me to you. This is my name forever. This is my title for all generations.”

### THE WORD ENGAGED BY JOHN KAVANAUGH

This section of Exodus begins an account of the relationship between God and the Israelites. Their God will be a God of free covenant, a God who personally intervenes to save them. “I AM will always be with them.”

True, there were other formulations that referred to God, for example: “The Most High,” “The One Who Sees,” “The Eternal One.” And even this particular expression has been given various interpretations, ranging from “I will be who I will be” to “I will be what I was.”

But Aquinas saw in the burning bush a revelation of the deepest mystery of a God who could never adequately and accurately be named or conceptualized. There is no other way to talk about who and what God is other than to say that God is existence itself. Am-ness. God is the holy ground of being. At the bottom of the universe is not some mindless grinding machinery or evolutionary process. What moves everything, from stars to human hearts, is personal existence.

If you just think about it, the fact that there is anything at all is the most wondrous thing. Existence is the giver and gift of all gifts. Nothing could be known, if there were nothing to know. Nothing could be loved if there were nothing to love. There could be no fulfillment, no desire, no truth, if there were no “is.”

Thus, in Aquinas’s own great exodus—his theological and philosophical journey called the *Summa Theologica*—after offering his five ways to God, he centers on existence itself as the word that can most adequately be applied to God.

Existence is the primary value, the fundamental good, one with the very being of God. And since all other beings have their own existence by gift of God, our existence is our primary value and goodness. “Everything that exists is, as such, good, and has God as its cause.” If we exist, and we cannot give existence to ourselves, we must have been willed, loved into existence.

God not only creates and sustains every existing being; God also creates each kind of being there is. Every being participates in a hierarchy of goodness and intrinsic value. Each species is good, not only because it exists in the first place, but also because of what it is. Each species brings its own kind of goodness into the world; and each species lost would be a loss of goodness. All creation, in all its myriad forms, is existentially good.

Aquinas valued personal reality as the “most perfect grade of existence” because it images the “I am-ness” of God: life that

knows itself and gives itself to the other. This is not some glib speciesism, which degrades other kinds of life. It is just an acknowledgment that freedom, intelligence, and love introduce a new splendor of intrinsic goodness and value into the world which, without persons, would be bereft of such beauty.

### Exodus 3, Verses 1-8, 13-15

1. Did God call Moses for Moses’ sake or for the Israelite people? Does God call each of us for the same reason(s)? “Does I Am Who Am” intervene in our history as he did in the Israelites? Name some incidents that you think are/were God’s interventions.

2. Is God calling all of us all the time, either to conversion or to action? God told Moses he was standing on holy ground. What made it holy? What is holy ground for you?

### 1 Corinthians 10, Verses 1-6, 10-12

1. Do you have to work at keeping a friendship alive and healthy? Does your answer have any implications about your relationship with God?

2. Are there opportunities for deeper conversion (turning more toward God) and productivity you could take advantage of? Are there some for your parish too?

### Luke 13, Verses 1-9

1. In the book *Diary of a Country Priest* George Bernanos said, “Grace is everywhere.” Do you always cooperate with it? Could you cooperate to a greater degree? How?

2. Do you give people another chance after they make a mistake? Does God use people as “gardeners” to help cultivate and fertilize with grace? Does God use you? Has God used others to help you bear fruit?

knows itself and gives itself to the other. This is not some glib speciesism, which degrades other kinds of life. It is just an acknowledgment that freedom, intelligence, and love introduce a new splendor of intrinsic goodness and value into the world which, without persons, would be bereft of such beauty.

But the existence of personal creatures like human beings also introduces a host of problems to the world. Our peculiar goodness as humans is not only a function of the fact that we exist and that we exist as a special kind. We also present a moral goodness to the world, since we, with our capacities for intelligence and freedom, are able to know and possess ourselves and consequently choose to become the kind of persons we become.

Evil, for Aquinas, has no reality in itself. It occurs only as a parasite. Evil appears only because good things exist.

Physical evil is a deficiency or lack in the physical reality of various kinds of beings. Thus, a horse might not be fully good as a horse because it is lame. A fig tree is physically evil to the extent that it does not bear the fruit of what it is.

Moral evil, however, is a deficiency or lack in the kind of human being you or I have freely chosen to be. It is a negation of our truth. It is a rejection of our goodness. It is a radical lie about existence.

All too speculative, perhaps. But might not these philosophical ruminations unlock the mysteries with which Lent ends? That bright vigil will recall for us the holy ground of being: In God’s own image, male and female, God created us. And like the great cosmic march of species, we, humankind, were pronounced good by the one who gave us the gift of being. Seduced by the great deceiver, the liar of liars, we seem to have rejected it all. But by the bountiful grace of “I am with you,” even the fault itself became a happy one.