

"What Ever Happened to Original Sin?"

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by Father Brian Joyce

Whatever happened to Original Sin? When I was in the fourth grade, I knew all about "Original Sin." Adam and Eve had disobeyed and that really irritated God (Whom, I was told, gets very easily upset.) God immediately threw them out of the Garden of Eden and made the rest of us pay the price by locking the gates of heaven and leaving the stain of "Original Sin" on each one of us. The gates could only be unlocked by Christ and the stain could only be removed by Baptism.

Original Sin is quite real, but it is also something really very different from that fourth grade version. At one level, you don't even need the Church, the Bible, or faith to know about Original Sin. Just read the daily newspaper. This world is a dangerous place, not very safe to grow up in, and with more than enough evil to go around. Add to that, every one of us has a dark side. Left to our own devices, there is a serious question whether we can be fully trusted. We seem to be quite prone to sin. (Some would attribute that to the whole evolutionary process where it was survival of the fittest, me-first, natural selection, and self-survival that got us this far in the first place.) Whatever the source, the kind of compassion and selfless love needed to fulfill God's gracious promise of lasting life doesn't seem to come easily to any of us. On the other hand, Christ invites us to a new way of life. The Bible, which talks about Original Sin, not in Genesis with Adam and Eve, but in the New Testament with Christ, tells us that, just as sin has entered the human race and is universal, so the reconciling victory of Jesus is even more powerful and universal.

The significance of Baptism is that if we are plunged (baptized) into a community of brothers and sisters who work at proclaiming God's love and living by Christ's gospel and Spirit, then the world becomes a safer place for us, and we ourselves can be transformed. Now the upside-down, backwards way of saying that is "Baptism takes away Original Sin."

One other thing that was not so clear to me back in the fourth grade is that, while life in a community of baptized believers may promise a safer world and a better "Brian," the struggle doesn't end there. Original Sin still has a way of hanging around. Our universe, the human condition, and our personal journey is still unfinished. We still have a good ways to go! Wherever the in-dwelling of God's Holy Spirit is absent from our lives, Original Sin still casts its shadow. We are born falling short of God's promise into a world where the accumulation of evil limits our freedom and threatens our future.

What happened to Original Sin? It's still very much alive and well. (Just read the papers!) But, at the same time, Christ has brought God's saving wisdom and life-giving

Spirit to our world. In fact, St. Paul says, "to our entire universe." And Christ is not just alive and well, but His risen Spirit is much more powerful by far than Original Sin. And that's good news.... good news indeed!