

“Behold, the Man”

Matthew 6:1-6, 16-21

Lent is upon us, or as the German's call it “Fastenzeit” – the fasting time. This Lenten Season, we are turning our attention to the words of Pontius Pilate, “Behold, the man.” Ecce homo in Latin. There is the Ecce Homo arch on the Via Delarosa (The Way of Soros) which is the journey Jesus took carrying His cross. The Ecce Homo arch is built into some of the original stones which were from Pilate's courtyard where he brought out Jesus, having been beaten by the Roman soldiers, wearing a crown of thorns – Pilate offers up an unintentional, yet profound sermon, “Behold, the man.”

In Jesus, God is man. The Word has become flesh – like you and me. God is your Brother. The One begotten of the Father from all eternity is now the One born of the Virgin Mary – who is your Lord. Behold the man! Just like you, He has skin and bones, blood vessels and lymph nodes, teeth and hair, heart and lungs, blood and saliva, hands, feet, eyes, lips, tongue, stomach, spleen, and epiglottis (not to be confused with the uvula). Behold the man! He eats. He breathes. He walks. He sleeps. He prays. He weeps. He laughs. He bleeds. He dies. He rises. He ascends. He sits. And He will come. He is completely human and completely divine, two perfect natures in one indivisible person. He has fingerprints and DNA. Behold the man, Jesus, your Brother.

Unlike you, though, He has no sin. His human nature is perfect, unspoiled by Adam's rebellion. Oh, He was tempted in every way, just as we are, yet He is without sin, as Scripture says. His desires were never distorted into lust, greed, coveting, or idolatry. Behold the man! Like unblemished Adam at the close of the sixth day of creation, when God declared His handiwork "very good," Jesus is as human as human can be, and He is righteous, as Your Father now sees you, clothed in His righteousness, and as righteous as He intends to make you in the resurrection.

So why fasting in the season of Lent? Behold the man! Jesus fasted. The Gospel for this coming Sunday places Jesus in the wilderness, following His Baptism, fasting for forty days, being tempted by the devil. This is not the fake fasting done among us feasting on fried fish or giving up some pet vice for the season. For forty days, Jesus ate nothing. Matthew and Luke understatedly report that He was hungry. You don't say!

Behold the man, the incarnate God, with lips, teeth, tongue, and taste buds that have not savored a morsel for forty days. With an esophagus, stomach, and intestines that have been empty and aching for forty days. Behold the man who fasts for you. The First Adam was tempted and sinned by eating. The Second Adam will fast before enduring an onslaught of temptation, withstanding every one.

Lent, like fasting, is also oddly physical. As I said, the Germans call this penitential season before Easter *Fastenzeit*, literally "fasting time." The disciplines of Lent—prayer, fasting, and almsgiving—are designed to guard you against that age-old temptation of being too spiritual. The temptation is as old as creation. When the serpent seduced Adam and his wife to give in

to the spiritual desire to be like God, knowing good and evil, over the physical prohibition against eating from that one tree, they set the pattern for the rest of us, who want to prefer the spiritual over the material.

So once God settled the Israelites in the Promised Land, they quickly abandoned the very physical worship of Yahweh alone by means of the sacrifices offered only at the Tabernacle for the more spiritual, less-precise worship of the Baals and the Asherah, as the book of Judges repeatedly calls them out saying, “In those days everyone did as he saw fit.”

And Nicodemus cracked a joke that true religion could never be so physical as to involve rebirth. And the Sadducees concocted their ridiculous story about the woman who married one of seven brothers to prove the physical resurrection is impossible. And it is popular today to say that “I am spiritual but not religious.” This is simply the ancient heresy of Gnosticism revisiting upon modern man. We have all heard someone say, “You don’t have to go to church to be a Christian.” All of that is an attempt to substitute safer, spiritual platitudes for real physical, fleshly realities. And it’s all sin.

Our world loves pious-sounding, hyper-spiritual pretensions. God isn’t like that. The incarnation – the taking on of flesh has been in His mind from before the first words of creation. Behold the man! In Jesus, in whom the fullness of God dwells bodily, you who have both a body and the complete inability to use it properly, as your Creator intended – you now have hope. Hope in a man who is also God and your Brother. Behold the man!

Jesus fasted. For you. He is a God who can eat—who needs to eat as He is human. Yet He abstains from eating, enduring the pains of hunger to deny His flesh what it desires. For you. We will hear this on Sunday. It will not be the last time this season we hear of Jesus suffering for you.

If you fast, there is no Law, fast freely as a reminder of the humanity and suffering of the Son of God. Fasting serves a multitude of purposes: to discipline and chasten your flesh; learn to control the cravings of your belly, it may give you discipline to control the other parts of your flesh as well. Fasting lets the rumbling of hunger teach you that your belly is not your God. Pray until you realize that your schedule is not your God, your time is not your own, and your daily bread does not come from the work of your own hands. Give alms, tithe, give offerings, and give money until you know down in your gut that money is not the source of your security or happiness. Behold the man – who fasted, prayed, and gave alms perfectly for you. His rumbling stomach, His hunger pangs, are your comfort in temptation. His flesh is your hope. He succeeded where you have failed. Behold the man!

And then break the fast. Eat. Drink. At His altar, veiled in bread and wine for His disciples to eat and drink for the forgiveness of their sins, with His flesh as true food and His blood as true drink, behold the man! Let the growling of your belly in Lent and anytime lead you here, to the place where the Lord bids you to fast and hunger no more. Here is food that endures to eternal life, drink that slakes your deepest thirst. Here at His altar is the man who gives Himself to you to eat and to drink for the forgiveness of your sins, for the strengthening of your faith, for the enabling of your fervent love for one another, for the salvation of your flesh. In bread, in wine, behold the man! Amen.