

I believe in God the Father Almighty, the Creator of heaven and earth. God created heaven to be the abode of the angels, and the earth to be inhabited by men. Man was created to love and serve his Creator in this life, and to possess Him eternally in the next. Such is the purpose of man, his future and present end for which he was made.

To attain his end, and to fulfil his great destiny, he was adorned with the most precious gifts. In addition to sanctifying grace, man received the happiness of God and immortality of the body. But Adam committed a sin. God had forbidden him, under the penalty of death, to eat of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil: notwithstanding this prohibition, at the request of Eve and the serpent he ate of the forbidden fruit. By this sin Adam incurred the anger of God, and lost sanctifying grace with all the other gifts which he possessed. Such were the consequences of his sin.

This sin of Adam is imputed to all his descendants, who are born heirs of his guilt and his punishment. In other words, all men are born in the guilt and taint of the sin of their first father. This is the dogma of original sin. The Virgin Mary is alone an exception to this universal curse, she not at all contracting original sin. This is the dogma of the Immaculate Conception, declared in the salutation which the Angel Gabriel in the name of God addressed to Mary: Hail, full of grace!

This doctrine of original sin is an unquestionable truth revealed to us by God, and also an unfathomable mystery. Our reason cannot explain it; but neither can it discover anything in it impossible, unjust, or contrary to the divine perfections.

The following parable will in a measure aid us to understand it: A traveller journeying across a desert unexpectedly discovers an isolated city, whose inhabitants only by the greatest toil obtain sufficient to support life. Entering a dwelling, he is told by an aged man that the whole colony is descended from one ancestor, who came there two centuries before. This ancestor had been the favourite at the court of a king, whose prime minister he had been, and who had loaded him with honours; but falling into disgrace, he had been banished and sent into this desert, where he died, leaving his children the heirs of his unhappy condition.

“I pity you,” said the traveller; “and I censure the king who was so cruel as to send into exile his prime minister, and to inflict this misery on him and his descendants.”

“It is true,” replied the aged man, “our lot is sad but we have no reason to reproach the king. Our ancestor was guilty of high treason, and merited death; and if the king, instead of sentencing him to death, condemned him to exile, it was an act of mercy rather than of injustice; and we cannot reprimand a prince who had it in his power, by executing our ancestor, to deprive us all of existence.”

Let us thank God, my brethren, for having given us existence and life; let us thank Him, above all, for having delivered us from original sin by Baptism.