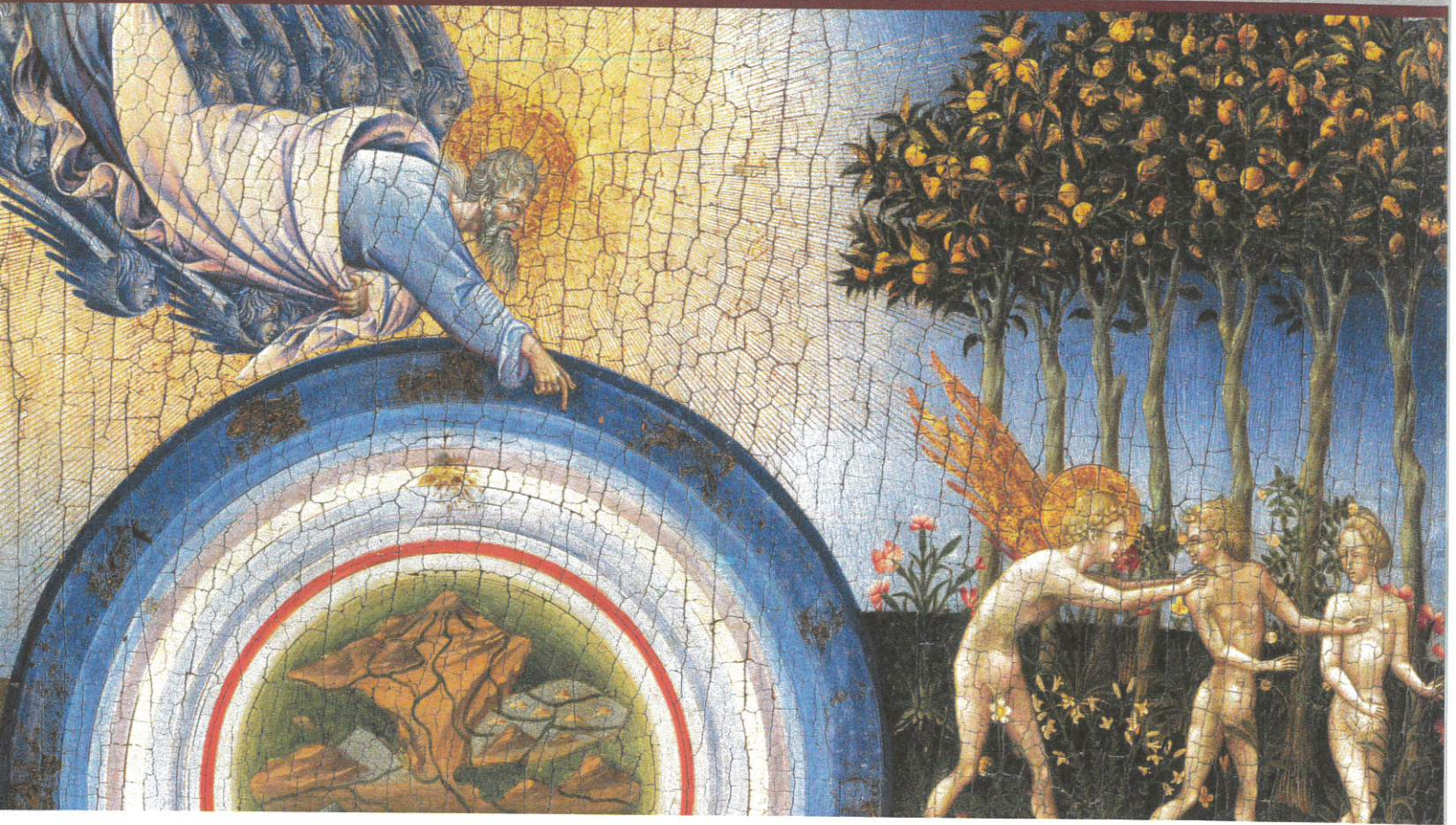




SESSION 3

Creator of Heaven and Earth



SESSION OBJECTIVES

The Creation of the World and the Expulsion from Paradise, Giovanni di Paolo

- To explain the unique place of the human person in creation, especially as expressed in Scripture
- To examine the original state of innocence of holiness
- To distinguish Adam and Eve's first sin from the state of Original Sin we have all inherited from them
- To identify the effects of Original Sin in our own lives
- To see the connection between the sickness of Original Sin and the cure of redemption

STEP 1: Begin

OPENING PRAYER

Glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, as it was in the beginning, is now, and ever shall be, world without end. Amen.

INTRODUCTION

Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead. (CCC 357)

When the *Catechism* discusses the whole sweep of creation, the central place is occupied by the human person—you. You are not just something; you are someone. You have a story, and like all good stories, it has a beginning, a middle, and an end. The details of this story are your own. They are unique and special. But the overall arc of the story is shared by everyone who has lived and will ever live.

This session begins where every good story begins: *in the beginning*. The book of Genesis opens with these very words to teach us about our origins and place in the universe. By considering the Creation of man, we will explore the mystery of our beginnings and then examine what those beginnings mean for us and our story. As we might expect, the beginning has a profound meaning and relevance for the entirety of our story but, most importantly, for its end.

STEP 2: Learn

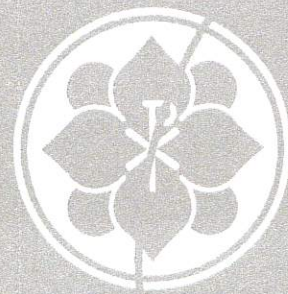
SETTING THE STAGE

Rome, the heart of the Church, is filled with churches—no surprise. But it's also filled with institutions of higher learning supported by the pope. These pontifical colleges and universities make plain the Church's great appreciation for the pursuit of knowledge and the formation of the heart and mind.

The Angelicum—known officially as the Pontifical University of Saint Thomas Aquinas—is one of the most venerable of these institutions. Over the centuries, the Dominicans here have been reflecting on the mysteries of the faith, including those questions that every person asks: Who am I? Why am I here? Some of the Church's greatest minds have studied here, including Pope Saint John Paul II, who discovered answers to these questions in Scripture and the Church's reflection on it.

With unimaginable love you looked upon your creatures within your very self, and you fell in love with us. So it was love that made you create us and give us being just so that we might taste your supreme eternal good.

— Saint Catherine of Siena, *The Dialogue*, 13



Where do we come from? Where are we going? What challenges will we face along the way? Seeking answers to these fundamental questions, we turn in this session to Scripture and the Church's reflection on it. We will discover that within the whole of visible creation, only one creature is capable of entering into communion with God: man, created in God's image and established in friendship with him. But in man's first sin, this invitation and gift was squandered, bringing with it consequences for all.

I. The human person is special among all the visible creatures

II. Salvation History: Creation teaches us about God and about man

- A. God is intelligent and loving, and he enjoys a sovereign freedom
- B. Man, created in God's image, is also intelligent, loving, and free
- C. Sin distorts each of these characteristics of man
- D. Man and woman were created to be in relationship with God, each other, and the creation around them

III. Pilgrimage: Made in the image of God (see Gen 1:27)

- A. We imagine God through our spiritual capacities: intellect and will
 - 1. We are made for truth and for love—to love and to be loved
 - 2. We are rational animals, endowed with a special dignity
- B. Man has a special dignity
 - 1. Man is a rational animal from conception until death
 - 2. Man's spiritual soul sets him apart from other animals
- C. The image of God after Original Sin
 - 1. Adam and Eve retained the image of God after the Original Sin
 - 2. The original friendship and harmony was lost, but not the image of God
- D. The image of God originates in man's spiritual soul
 - 1. Man's capacity for truth and love is rooted in an immaterial soul, not in the brain or other material explanation
 - 2. Each human soul is made from nothing by God
 - 3. The soul is the seat of our personal identity
- E. Genesis informs how to live our daily lives
 - 1. Understanding the human soul reveals the dignity of the human person
 - 2. We need to consider what our mind is for, what our heart is for, and our ultimate purpose
 - 3. We are made in the image of God and that should affect our daily actions

IV. Catechesis: Original Sin and its consequences

- A. We all experience the effects of the Fall
 - 1. We are not responsible for the first sin, but we have inherited a wounded human nature because of it
 - 2. We see very clearly that something is wrong with the world and within ourselves
- B. We have threefold "concupiscence," disordered or wrongly directed desire
 - 1. We struggle against the desire of the flesh, the desire of the eyes, the pride of life (see 1 John 2:16)

2. We are subject to ignorance, suffering, and death
- C. The point: to understand our disease so that we can see and appreciate the cure offered by Christ

V. *Lectio divina*: Genesis 3:1–7

- A. Adam and Eve's temptation is to be like God...but they are not God
- B. Their sin disfigures, but doesn't destroy, the image of God within them
- C. In and through Jesus Christ, we heal and strengthen the image of God within us
- D. Prayer restores our "likeness" to God, understood as his life and glory in our souls

WORD MEANING:

Original Justice

The condition in which Adam and Eve were created; they enjoyed a state of friendship with God, of holiness and justice, and of harmony with their Creator, themselves, and the world around them. This original gift was lost through Adam and Eve's subsequent sin.



Detail from *The Expulsion from Paradise*, Giovanni di Paolo

Adam sinned and earned all sorrows,
And the world, following his lead, all guilt.
And it took no thought of how it might be restored,
But only of how its fall might be made more pleasant for it.
Glory to Him Who came and restored it!

— Saint Ephraim, *Hymns of the Epiphany*, no. 10

STEP 3: Engage

- 1) What do we humans have in common with the other creatures in the natural world, and what sets us apart from them? What significance might lie within in the similarities and differences?

Some answers to expect on commonalities might include the following: having bodies and instincts; needing to eat, to sleep, and to reproduce; being able to move and to perceive according to our five senses; sharing the natural world; etc. On what sets us apart, expect answers such as: knowing, loving, worshipping; having freedom, being creative, and the like. The central significance to emphasize is that

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humans are neither completely separate from the rest of creation nor are they to be simply equated with it. We live within creation, can learn from it, and yet we also surpass the created world through knowing, loving, and seeking God.

- 2) Original justice or holiness can be hard to wrap our minds around, because this gift was lost a long time ago. But we can catch a reflection of it if we consider a moment with a good friend when time seemed to stand still, we were engaged in wholesome and joyful conversation, and all seemed right with the world. Have you had such a moment? What might this moment teach us about our original state of holiness and harmony?

This question will likely elicit memories of good times, enjoyable conversations, and fulfilling work. Within these limited scenarios, we can catch sight of what we were created for: loving communion with others and wholesome, rewarding work. The joy and fulfillment of these memories can help us overcome false notions of boredom, both in the garden of Eden and in heaven. The lack of evil, contention, and a certain kind of challenge does not mean that boredom or aimlessness follows. Instead, the beauty, intensity, and fullness of these remembered special moments point to what it will be like when our human nature is superabundantly fulfilled in Christ.

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- 3) Think back over your day, or perhaps the past week, and reflect on a time when you fell short, gave in to a temptation, and did something that you later regretted. What led you to this mistake? If we consider the matter closely, we will become aware of our fallen nature and of the concupiscence that involves wrongly directed desires. How can this awareness guide our future actions? How can it help us appreciate the tremendous gift of salvation that Jesus Christ offers us?

Take care to ensure that responses avoid becoming overly personal or detailed. Instead, although each person's reflection might be quite specific, the answers should remain more general. Common motivations behind sin include fear, immoderate desire, self-preservation, envy, the desire to preserve or increase reputation or esteem, etc. Becoming aware of these temptations or "triggers" can help us to grow and to overcome them. Participants might identify various psychological tools they've encountered, such as self-awareness, reframing, etc. These tools can indeed be helpful, and they provide an analogy for the central concern here, which goes beyond mere psychological technique: at heart, it is a matter of knowing who we were created to be and the ways that our nature is weakened after the Fall, the effects of which continue to lead us astray. In this realm, self-knowledge, especially when paired with prayer and—for the fully initiated—sacramental confession, can help us to see how desperately we need Christ's redemption and then to give thanks for this gift and for his help overcoming our sin.

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STEP 4: Conclude

Man's beginnings are surrounded by both glory and tragedy. Since we are made in God's image and can know, love, and act freely, we enjoy friendship with God and are constantly called to strengthen that communion with our Creator. Although the first sin shattered these beautiful beginnings, it cannot erase the image of God within us.

We each have our own unique stories; but, as children of Adam, our stories share the same opening chapter, with all of its nobility and shame. Knowing this beginning helps us make sense of where we currently stand in our stories, and understand their tainted nature. But ours is ultimately a story of hope: that God will restore us to wholeness and holiness, and our story will end in joyful abundance.

MEMORY VERSE

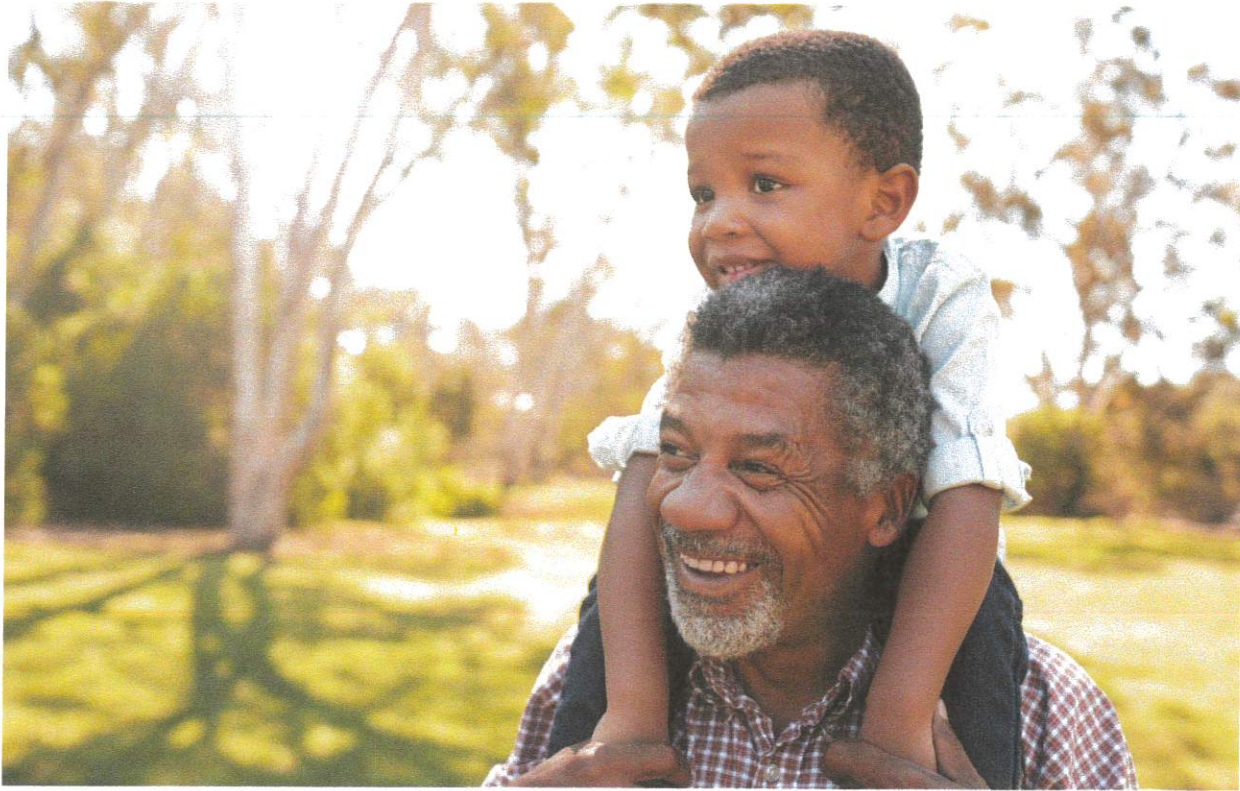
If, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ.

—ROMANS 5:17

CLOSING PRAYER

O happy fault, O necessary sin of Adam,
which gained for us so great a Redeemer!

— *The Exsultet, from the Easter Vigil*



CALL TO CONVERSION

The teaching on the Creation and the fall of man forces a radical reset of our expectations and standards. No longer can we see sin and death as normal—we were created for so much more! The Creator of heaven and earth intended us to love and to be loved, to live with a simplicity, authenticity, and generosity that all lead to harmony with God, with one another, and with the world. But this spiritual and material abundance is lost to us apart from Christ.

It's hard to imagine the fullness and splendor of what we have lost, but even a vague sense makes much of our world seem petty, superficial, and mean. We want something more. At the same time, such a lofty vision of creation can seem a mere fantasy—even faithful Christians struggle to live up to this standard. We don't want to be duped by the impossible.

We are invited to embrace this tension. We are made for more, and envisioning what that looks like can be helpful. We can see how much, and how often, we come up short. But God in his goodness wants to give us more, even though the path to fullness is a long and gradual one.

Think concretely about those you love, the things you do, the places you serve. Where does Original Sin become most apparent in your life? Are there common situations or frequent actions that reveal selfishness, brokenness, or disordered desire? How would your life—and the lives of those around you—change for the better if you were to grow toward generosity, wholeness, and peace? We cannot overcome sin on our own, so set aside time to talk to God about the areas you'd like to grow in. Then ask for his help to do just that.

DIGGING DEEPER

Since God intended to fashion man after His own image and likeness from the visible and invisible creation to be a sort of king and ruler over the whole earth and the things in it, He prepared a sort of kingdom for him, in which he might dwell and lead a blessed and blissful life. And this divine paradise prepared in Eden by the hands of God was a treasure house of every joy and pleasure. For “Eden” is interpreted as meaning “delight.” It was situated in the east and was higher than all the rest of the earth. It was temperate in climate and bright with the softest and purest of air. It was luxuriant with ever-blooming plants, filled with fragrance, flooded with light, and surpassing all conception of sensible fairness and beauty. In truth, it was a divine place and a worthy habitation for God in His image.

— Saint John of Damascus, *The Orthodox Faith*, book 2, chap. 11



Saint John of Damascus describes with beauty the original place and state of man. We know that the first sin dramatically altered the picture he paints. We find ourselves able to relate to the feeling of loss due to Original Sin, but we have no experience of what has been lost and, because of this, no way to fully imagine it.

When we consider what has been lost—the delight, the beauty, the abundance, the harmony—we now look to Heaven, where our longing for fullness, wholeness, and beauty will be brought to fulfillment in a way that surpasses everything that we could have imagined. The

saints find the contrast between the life we experience and the life we hope for to be a fruitful point of prayerful reflection leading to gratitude for God's promises, sorrow over sin and suffering, and hopeful expectation of Heaven.

But not everything is lost. It is important to remember that we remain forever created in God's image and are placed into this world with purpose. In this earthly realm, we are called to rule with loving wisdom and to find and encounter the Lord by contemplating the marvels of creation and, even more so, of his Church.

FOR FURTHER READING

Genesis 1–3

Catechism of the Catholic Church, nos. 279–409

Joseph Ratzinger, “*In the Beginning...*”: *A Catholic Understanding of the Story of Creation and the Fall*, chaps. 3–4

Frank Sheed, *Theology for Beginners*, chaps. 7–10

C.S. Lewis, *Out of the Silent Planet* and *Perelandra*