

In the Name of the Living God: Father Creator, Son Redeemer and Holy Spirit Sustainer. Amen.

We are talking about winning the Lotto. Becoming an instant millionaire.

Be honest. Have you ever found yourself daydreaming about winning it this week? Mine goes something like this: pay-off our the mortgage and car loan, sock away some for retirement, and then invest the rest, and give away the earned interest. In any case, it feels nice to dream about such financial security, and to think about myself as a generous person. I congratulate myself that, given the chance, I would know how to put such money to good use.

Well, that seems harmless enough, right? Harmless until you read today's gospel lesson. The regular announcements of Central New York people winning with large NY lottery millionaire tickets is interesting timing around when we are confronted with Jesus sharing the parable of the rich fool. Talk about a spoil sport. Still, do you notice a similarity between my daydream and the rich fool in the parable? I can fool myself by thinking that I am different from the rich fool by telling myself that I am not greedy...after all, I would give away a pile of it, I tell myself. But this is fooling myself, playing myself as the fool. And I am the same as that rich fool in one very important respect: I was talking to myself about that dream. I was talking to myself.

So it is in the parable. The rich man is quite a conversationalist...but all to himself. He even addresses himself. "Soul," he calls himself. The only other voice to enter into this parable is finally that of God, and then it is too late to have a dialogue. God simply tells this man the facts...that he has built up all these possessions, but now it is his time to die. So whose are they now?

The point? This man has lived a life in monologue, talking with himself, rather than living a life in dialogue, talking to God.

So this, then, brings us to our proper suggestion about Paradise...which really means having the right dialogue partner. The world of the rich fool may have looked like Paradise to him...big new barns, plenty of possessions to be able to eat, drink, and be merry to his heart's content. And we may fool ourselves about winning the lottery, what a Paradise life would be, how well we could make use of that money. But that is not it. Paradise is living a life with God as our numero uno dialogue partner...and paradise lost means choosing someone else as a dialogue partner before God, even if it is our self.

Another is the parable of Adam and Eve, in the garden called Eden. We generally consider Eden to have been lost forever, physically located somewhere in the river plain between the Tigris and

Euphrates Rivers, in modern Iraq....obviously no longer a paradise by our general image. But what happened...how was it lost?

It is a parable about having the right dialogue partner, similar to the one Jesus tells, but more basic. Adam and Eve live in a land that has brought forth plenty, but their paradise really exists because they also, at the outset, have the right partner in God, the one who created them. God placed only one restriction on their desires, represented by only one tree at the center from which they are not to eat...which is really a command warning that everything will be fine as long as God their Creator remains their main dialogue partner, the one from whom they gain their desires...the one who had created them in perfect love.

But, of course, we know the story. Paradise is lost. The serpent is only the symbol of a different partner. It does not really matter who or what it was....anybody or anything else is not perfect love, and becomes a rival to God that leads to death...described in the next parable of Cain and Abel, their sons, and the end result of death. Violent death, the kind of violence that humankind has lived with since the beginning of time. It is the same kind of stuff that our world, and culture, and media spews over and over...born of desire that turns into envy and rivalry....born of having the wrong primary dialogue partner. In the story, they chose to listen to the serpent rather than listening to God, their creator....and become convinced that they will know what God knows...which means what? It means that they think that they can be in control of their own lives. They can talk to themselves like the rich fool, in other words, since they are in charge of their own lives....and paradise is long gone.

We are Adam and Eve and the Rich Fool. We can listen to Madison Avenue. Watch the Joneses down the street. Get caught up in lotto-mania. Judge others just as we are encouraged to do on television shows. I cannot watch stuff like that. In other words, we can follow the desires of someone or something other than God, our creator.

Or we can make the choice of that criminal next to Jesus on the cross...and choose to follow him. ..the criminal that Jesus promised that very night he would be in paradise. Why is that? How does Jesus make the connection? After all, he was just a regular guy...a poor Jew, living on the run from place to place. A man whose only marketable skill was to work on wood with his hands and simple tools. So who in the world is this Jesus that can make that promise...and really, who cares about any of it after all?

This dynamic is at the core of our faith. When we, as the church and particularly as individuals, proclaim faith in a Trinitarian God, we are...in part...proclaiming faith in that perfect relationship between Jesus and His Father as Source of all life and creation. Jesus lived his life completely in open dialogue with God.

Jesus got right what every person since Adam and Eve has gotten wrong...as he lived his life in Paradise even in the midst of a sinful world., and he brought it back into this world for all those who choose to follow him because he lived his life in perfect dialogue with his heavenly Father.

Through the Holy Spirit, that relationship is now available to us. It is promised to us in baptism when we die to the old way of living and rise to the new way of living...when we rise to a life of dialogue with God. Taking off old clothes and putting on new clothes says Paul to put on a "new self, which is being renewed in knowledge according to the image of its creator."

Living into the image of the creator...to again imitate God's desire, God's Love...and that is what being a disciple of Jesus does for us. The promise of being one again with the one by whom we were made. Removed from the shadows of isolation...and into the very heart of the never-ending, eternal presence of God whose love remains revealed to us within the very nature of who God is, as revealed to us in the Father, and in the Son, and in the Holy Spirit.

Amen.