



garratt  
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PROGRAM  
Year A

# light from within

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<p>Here, the invitation is to be attentive to each liturgical celebration, with the symbolic richness they hold and into which we are drawn. We bring to our local Church communities the fruit of our prayerful journey, hidden within ourselves, just below the surface, as we unite with the broader community of the faithful, the universal Church across the world.</p>	



## FIRST WEEK

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# FIRST WEEK

## ORIENTATION FOR GROUP LEADER

**A**s this is the first time you meet together, before sharing on the theme of the day, you might leave some time for people to speak about anything that emerged from reading and praying about Ash Wednesday.

### FIRST READING

#### GENESIS 2:7-9, 3:1-7

The Lord God fashioned man of dust from the soil. Then he breathed into his nostrils a breath of life, and thus man became a living being.

The Lord God planted a garden in Eden which is in the east, and there he put the man he had fashioned. The Lord God caused to spring up from the soil every kind of tree, enticing to look at and good to eat, with the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil in the middle of the garden.

The serpent was the most subtle of all the wild beasts that the Lord God had made. It asked the woman, 'Did God really say you were not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?' The woman answered the serpent, 'We may eat the fruit of the trees in the garden. But of the fruit of the tree in the middle of the garden God said, "You must not eat it, nor touch

it, under pain of death.'" Then the serpent said to the woman, 'No! You will not die! God knows in fact that on the day you eat it your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods, knowing good and evil.' The woman saw that the tree was good to eat and pleasing to the eye, and that it was desirable for the knowledge that it could give. So she took some of its fruit and ate it. She gave some also to her husband who was with her, and he ate it. Then the eyes of both of them were opened and they realised that they were naked. So they sewed fig-leaves together to make themselves loin-cloths.

### GOSPEL ACCLAMATION

#### MATTHEW 4:4

Praise to you, Lord Jesus Christ, king of endless glory!  
No one lives on bread alone,  
but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.

**T**he first reading is so well known to us that it can be hard to read afresh. And yet it is really important that we do, because this foundational piece of scripture holds many keys to our understanding of who God is and who we are. It also speaks into that deepest mystery of all: how we manage to distance ourselves from such a loving God, and how in doing so, our connection with each other becomes poisoned, as well as our very sense of ourselves. This week, you are invited to a careful reading of these



# FIRST WEEK

pages that seek to explain to us who we are and how we came to be.

Chapters One and Two of Genesis are not meant to be read literally. No one was there taking notes at that mysterious beginning of time and space that gave birth to the world we live in. Amongst other things, the way in which male and female are represented here can push against our understanding of ourselves in the current day, but if we move beyond these aspects of the text, the picture painted reveals much of the God of Israel, of Abraham, of Moses, of Jesus and through Jesus, of us all. And it is an eloquent picture.

We are a mixture of earth and God – ground and heaven, dust and eternity, matter and the very Spirit of God feeling our pulse in every breath we take. Every human life – without exception – is somehow the result of a loving God who breathes us into existence, and *wants us to live well*.

God plants a garden for us. The image is loving, caring, concrete: what do they need? Where shall we meet (remember that it is to this garden that God will come, every evening, to walk with them, as Chapter Three of Genesis tells the story). Our faith in a creative and provident God is not only about when and where things started but also, and perhaps more importantly, that this God does not inhabit some

distant past, but is close – the ground beneath our feet, sustaining us even when we cannot perceive it.

And then there is the fall, that unimaginable turn in the history of human life that lays the foundation for every subsequent story of love lost and found. A tempting voice, a hidden desire, an arrogant quest for more? What is the core of this story, which tries to help us understand the human reality that is ours?

For many years, and even to this day, the interpretation of this text has focused on explaining our original and originating sin as one of pride: ‘your eyes will be opened and you will be like gods’.

We could also name and reflect upon the fact that the picture painted is one in which the woman, apparently, fell first, dragging her companion with her. Much ink has been spilled over the origins and effects of this (and other) scriptural archetypes of women.

But there is more in the text. Italian theologian Pierangelo Sequeri, in a beautiful and as yet untranslated book called *Il Timore Di Dio* – The Fear of God, invites us to a different interpretation. What is the unspoken hook that drew them in, pointing to the real temptation and sin underlying every time we turn our back on God? The lies we believe, and there are two told in this story. The first is that God had forbidden them to eat of *all* the trees in the garden.

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# FIRST WEEK

The woman pushes back, but the conversation has started: why are their limits at all on what we can do? The second is more insidious: the serpent questioned God's intention, insinuating that God did not want them to have something that would be good for them! That God might have hidden motives. The seed of distrust is sown.

If we reflect upon our human experience – which is a source of comparison to help our understanding of God – all human love is based on trust, and all our betrayals initiate with a suspicion of distrust: 'She does not really love me'; 'Where does he go when he's not with me?' 'I am being sidelined here: why are they treating me like this ...?' And out of distrust comes insecurity, defensiveness and pride: the need to protect myself *against* those who do not love me.

We can react in a similar way with God, distrusting the One we struggle to grasp and projecting our own fears on that image we do not fully know. The One who lovingly creates and cares for us, making us free so as to be companion with us. Deep in our hearts, we do not always believe that God, radically, is *the One who is on our side*. Always. No matter what the consequences are.

So even when we are led into deserts, where life is not easy and the way forward unclear, do we walk with God into that place listening for the guidance of the Spirit beneath the noise of our fears?

There are challenges, and temptations – we know this. It is not only the mystics who know that we 'do not live on bread alone' but need to hear the voice of the One who loved us into life. In Lent, the invitation is to 'taste and see' that God is trustworthy, the Good Shepherd who never abandons the sheep.

## PRAYER TO CONCLUDE

Loving, Creator God, to you we owe the beauty of this world, our lives, and the love we experience when we remain in your light. Increase our trust that we may know you better. Touch and heal our wounds that we might love more fully. Transform our past failings into sources of wisdom through which your Spirit can love our broken world.

Amen.

## PERSONAL PRAYER INVITATION FOR THE WEEK

### Examen: praying our lives

At the end of each day, one of the most useful exercises we can take on is that of the *Examen*. Despite its name, this is not an inflation of the Catholic guilt the Irish generously left in our Christian DNA, but rather a gentle listening exercise for the voice of God in our lives, which shows up in surprising ways we may need to learn to hear. You could start as follows:

- ☉ Before you go to rest, *plan into your evening ritual* a short time of prayer. Sit gently with God and with an awareness of how much you are loved
- ☉ In that space, think through your day and identify:

- Where was I more at peace? Why?
- What was most difficult in my day? Why?
- Where did I sense God's presence and why?
- Where did I lose of that presence and why?
- ☉ The aim is to let God into the time we have lived, and in doing so, transform it
- ☉ Offer your day to God, no matter what you lived. Allow God's presence to touch and heal and give you light
- ☉ And give thanks. Always give thanks.