

Temptation

Genesis 2:15-17

I saw a photograph earlier in the week of the American Vice President Mike Pence visiting NASA's Kennedy Space Centre in Florida. Standing beside a valuable exhibition clearly labelled, 'Do not touch', we see Mike Pence reaching out, and touching it.

How often in life, whether as children or as adults, are we told not to do something, and yet go ahead and do it anyway? How many plots of horror films would have been ruined if people had heeded the advice, 'don't go beyond this door'? If only Pandora, in Greek mythology, had not opened the box releasing all the evils of the world.

And here, in part of the stories about how the world came to be, if only Adam had heeded God's advice in the Garden of Eden not to eat from the tree of knowledge. It's well-worth noting that in these stories God first of all calls the human creature to care for and tend the garden. God entrusts the garden to this special creature – humanity. We are called, and expected to share in God's work. Second God permits everything but one in the world. Humanity is given free rein in God's world. Finally, there is one prohibition. Nothing is explained, the story has no interest in the characteristics of the tree of knowledge. Simply it is God's authority that is important and God's expectation of obedience.

It is interesting and ironic in the popular understanding of the story little attention is given to the call God gives to humans to work along with God in the garden, or the divine gift of freedom. These are lost. All that people focus on is that God prohibits one thing. What a loss to the understanding of the nature of God.

I wonder why we focus on this aspect of God and not the others, why we need to stress the God Who says 'no' rather than the God Who invites us to work alongside and Who gives freedom? Is it guilt? Guilt that we know that we are always tempted to do the wrong thing, and give in to that temptation too often and too easily? Temptation is a distraction from the invitation to share God's work and the acceptance of God's freedom, and the relationship these offer with a God Who says yes and no.

We are in the Christian season of Lent – for some an introspective and slightly gloomy time. The ancient philosopher Socrates is reputed to have said that an unexamined life is not worth living. It is good to look inward and review how we live and why we live in the way that we do and if there are things that we need to give up, or change. What are the temptations that come too easily to us and to which we often succumb.

But equally, this season is also one where we ‘take up’. God invites us, beyond the temptation, to work alongside and God and others in the world to make a difference, and to remember the freedom that God has also given us to do this. It is too easy to think of the God Who says ‘no’; when in fact that is more than balanced by the God Who says ‘yes’ to us, again and again.

May that be something each one of us considers in the season ahead.

In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Amen