

Topic: Human Origins in Genesis—  
Original Goodness and Original Sin

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IHM

Rite of Christian Initiation of Adults (RCIA)

# Opening Prayer

In the name of the Father, and  
the Son, and the Holy Spirit,  
Amen.

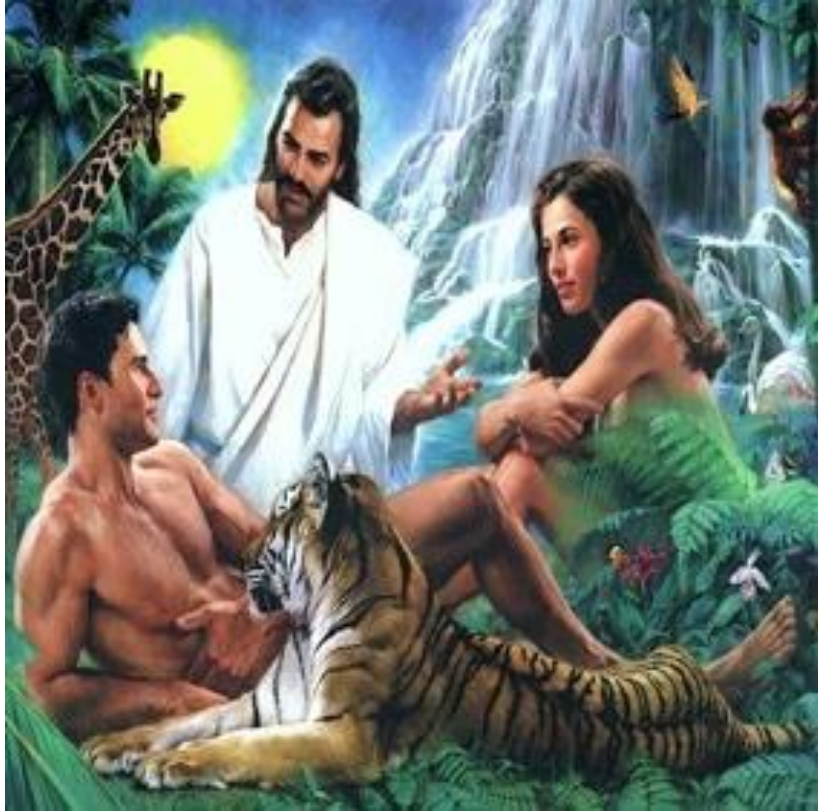
“Bless us, O Lord, and these thy  
gifts, which we are about to  
receive. From thy bounty, through  
Christ our Lord, Amen.”

## Human Nature: Created Good

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- Genesis 1:26-27—Humanity is created in the image & likeness of God (*imago Dei*); thus all people have *inherent* dignity. (It can't be taken away.)
- Being created in God's image means that we are all **someone**, not just something.
- Genesis 1:31—Humanity is created as the culmination of all God's creatures, and the one thing God calls "very good" after creating.





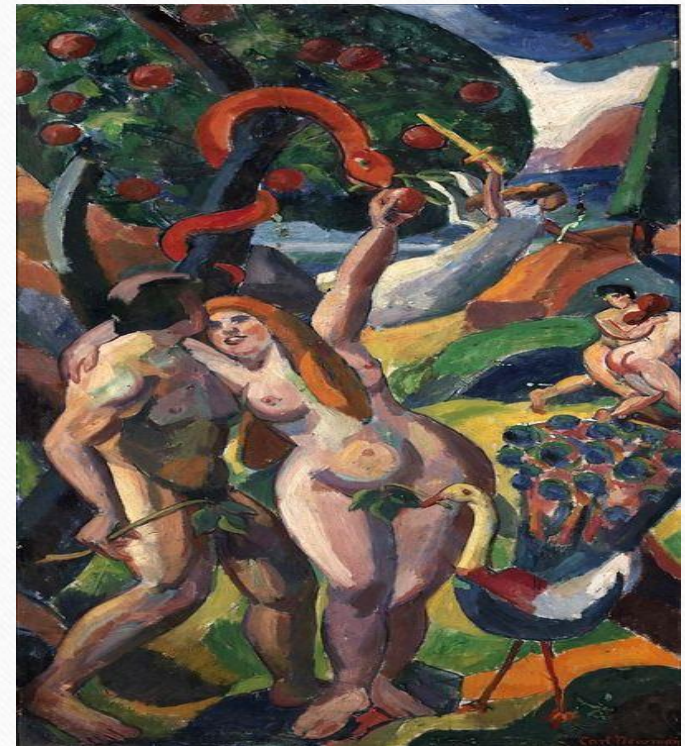
# Original Goodness

- Humans and animals were vegetarians; man and woman were naked but unashamed; God walked and talked with them in the Garden of Eden; they ate freely from the tree of Life.
- Humanity was created and existed with God, one another, and the rest of creation in “an original ‘state of holiness and justice.’” (CCC, 375)
- This original state of holiness and justice is what is lost in “the Fall.”

# Original Sin

## “The Fall:”

- Genesis 3: Tells us of the “Fall” of humanity through the “original sin” of our human forbearers.
- This story tells us that though we are created good, with inherent dignity, our human nature has been “wounded” and this wounded nature affects all of humanity by transmitting a “fallen state” of human nature that is now “inclined to sin.”
- This is not some biological “stain,” on humanity, but a spiritual condition as a result of being born into a “fallen” world marred by the consequences of sin.



# 'The Fall' and Ensuing Sin (Gen. 3-6)

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- Sin: *hamartia* (Greek)
  - 'Missing the mark'
- Adam and Eve eat the forbidden fruit (Original Sin)
  - Isolated from creation (the snake; no longer strict vegetarians; difficulty in tilling the earth/childbirth); themselves (naked and felt ashamed); from each other (blamed each other for eating the fruit); and from God (hid from God)
  - Exiled from Eden; but hope (God clothes & blesses)
- From individuals to a family: Cain kills Abel and sin spreads
  - Cain exiled from his family, but protected by God
- Missing the mark continues
  - Increasingly shorter life span; spread of sin=death (physical/spiritual)

# Noah and the Flood (Gen. 6-10)

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- Cycle of sin continues:
  - Exile & hope for a remnant
- Things have gotten so bad that God wants to 'restart' creation.
- Noah builds an ark to save his family and the animals.
- God establishes a covenant with Noah.
  - God will never again destroy the earth.
- Noah's descendants multiply and grow.





## Tower of Babel (Gen. 11)

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- Humanity reaching up to God, to storm heaven and become gods themselves (much like the lie the serpent told Adam & Eve).
- Origins of languages; massive human exile; sin causes separation.
- Story of Pentecost—reversal of Babel; Babel leads to confusion, Pentecost to unification



# Original Goodness & Original Sin: Augustine VS. Pelagius

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## Augustine:

- Emphasized our permanently wounded human nature and helped to develop the theology of original sin (What point is Baptism, or washing up, if it didn't imply a need to clean, because we were in some way "dirty?")
- Emphasis is on God's grace & God's initiative
- Only through God's grace, can we do good (Just as original sin inclined us away from God, Baptism and God's grace inclines us toward God—we still have the free will to choose to accept or reject that grace)

## Pelagius:

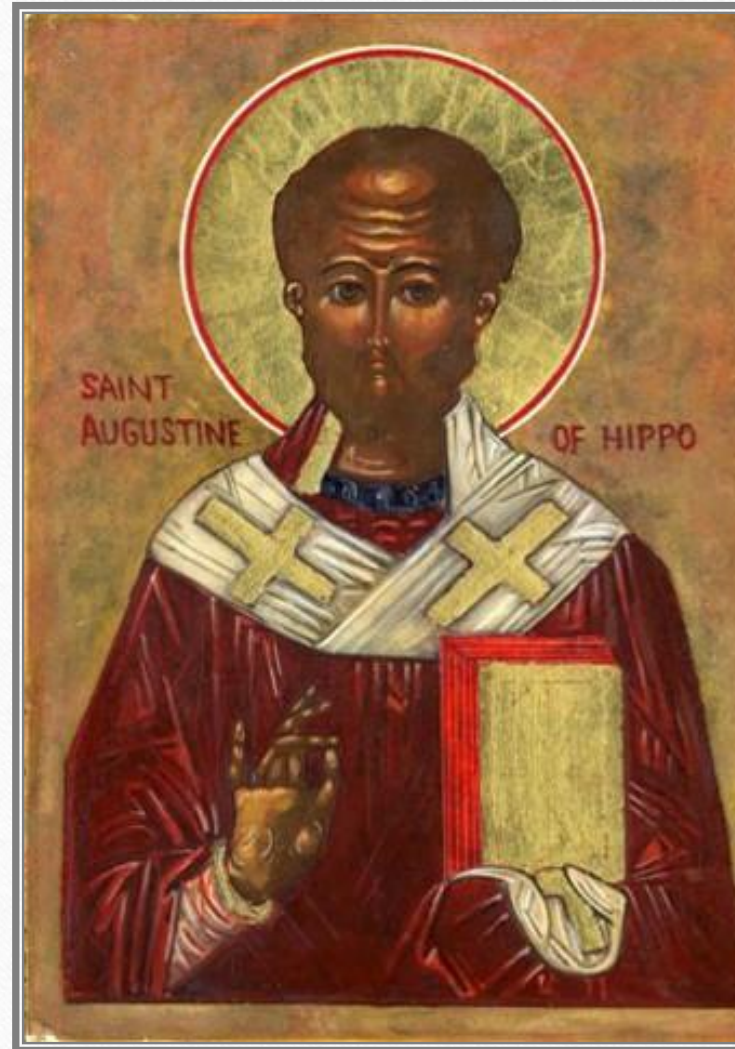
- Emphasized our created goodness to the point of denying a woundedness in human nature or need for grace (through our own goodness, free will, and actions, we could actually choose to be as sinless as Jesus; all that was needed was the Divine Law and our Freewill)
- Emphasis is on our goodness and human effort/initiative
- "Parents shall not be put to death for their children, nor shall children be put to death for their parents; only for one's own crime shall a person be put to death."—Dt 24:16
- Eventually the Church sides with Augustine's view, and declares Pelagius's ideas a heresy (incorrect belief)

# Human Nature=Good, Yet Wounded

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## The Heart of the Debate:

- What role does Jesus play in salvation?
- Do we need a savior and redeemer, or can we redeem ourselves?
- Augustine (and the Church) resoundingly made the claim that Jesus, as God Incarnate, is necessary for our redemption.
- Spectrum: Maintaining our inherent created goodness (not completely destroyed) while preserving God's initiative and our need for redemption because of a wounded nature (not completely perfect)



# Discussion Questions

- Please share:

- What struck you from today's Mass readings?
- In Genesis 1-11, we see both our human sinfulness, and God's continual love for us. How have you experienced this in your own life?
- St. Ignatius of Loyola reminds us that we are "loved sinners." How might that be a summation of what Genesis tells us about our original goodness and our original sin? Is there any difference between seeing ourselves as "loved sinners" vs. "sinners whom God loves?" Why or why not?
- If we truly believe that everyone is created in the image and likeness of God, how might that affect the way we live and relate to ourselves and others?
- What questions did this topic and readings raise in your heart or mind?

# Closing Prayer

## Psalm 139 (Adapted)

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LORD, you have probed me, you know me:  
you understand my thoughts from afar...  
with all my ways you are familiar.

Even before a word is on my tongue,  
LORD, you know it all.  
Behind and before you encircle me  
and rest your hand upon me.

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me,  
far too lofty for me to reach.  
Where can I go from your spirit?  
From your presence, where can I flee?

You formed my inmost being;  
you knit me in my mother's womb.  
I praise you, because I am wonderfully made;  
wonderful are your works!

My very self you know.  
My bones are not hidden from you,  
when I was being made in secret...

Your eyes saw me unformed;  
in your book all are written down;  
my days were shaped, before one came to be.  
How precious to me are your designs, O God;  
how vast the sum of them!  
Amen.