

## **FIRST SUNDAY OF LENT:**

**Feb. 22, 2026**

Saint Irenaeus was a second century Christian who came from Asia Minor and became Bishop of Lyons in today's France. His writings on theology and scripture are unique for his age, very positive and not centered on sin as others stressed at his time. One of his sayings is "The glory of God is a human being fully alive". Another saying is that God became human so that humans might become God.

On this first Sunday of Lent I believe the Word of God challenges us to become fully human, to be humanly alive. The story in the Book of Genesis is a story of the first humans, Adam and Eve, living in relationship. They walk with God. They are naked and open to each other without shame. They live in harmony with the animal world. Could this way of life have lasted? I do not know. The story portrays them wanting to be like God on their own. They needed to taste sin in order to know grace. This is a story to explain the beginnings. All the details may not bear sense. But the ideal of humans living in relationship in harmony, in unity, in love and beauty portrays the image of God in whom they have been made.

The Hebrew scriptures show us the struggles of human beings to be the human beings that they truly are. There are times of glory, of harmony, of goodness. And there are times of rebellion and the prime sin of choosing other gods. There are saints, there are prophets, there are tales of heroism and devotion to God, to each other, to the earth.

Through an act of God's love, there is a new Adam and a new Eve. They are not separate from the Jewish story but part of it. This second Adam must experience that God's people have felt in all these years. God has always been with people but now, in some way, God takes on the human story from within.

God's people were tempted in the forty year trial of wandering through the desert. The new Adam begins his mission to preach the reign of God on earth by a time of forty days in the desert. God will experience this journey through Adam but it is as a human being, Jesus Christ, who must learn what it is to be fully human in order to lead humans to God. Mark says that the Spirit drives Jesus into the wilderness. It is not what he would choose. He endures and is hungry. Note that the evil spirit, the tempter, recognizes that God is present to this human. This will happen often in the gospel where evil spirits recognize who Jesus is while

those close to him often miss the reality that is happening before them.

Jesus, hungry and alone, is challenged to change stones into bread; then to deny gravity and jump off the parapet of the temple; then to take the easy way of acquiring the people of the earth by accepting the ways of the evil One. He wards it off each time by proclaiming God's Word in scripture. The evil spirit leaves for now but will return during the time of Jesus' mission to his fellow human beings.

This was Jesus' story. And it is our story. We are human beings, physical creatures of the earth, but want safer and more secure ways to live fully as God himself. We struggle and are tempted to go the easy way. We are embodied. Our body grows and changes, is subject to illness and accident. It ages, and parts of us no longer function as they did in our youth. We employ all sort of medical and pharmaceutical ways to keep our bodies strong and healthy - at least for a while. Suffering, accepted by Jesus, is unacceptable, to be avoided. Euthanasia is becoming more prevalent in our day. And some humans abuse the gift of their body in how they eat, drink, over stimulate.

We are soulful creatures. Our senses open us to beauty, to delight, to pleasure. We interact with other creatures to find joy and company. Or we may take the easy way out through drugs and other destructive ways of avoidance. Some humans misuse their minds, their senses; they fail to respect their eyes, ears, sexual drives and hearts.

We are also creatures who are spirit-filled. Deep within each of us is a force, an energy, the very spirit of God, that we cannot control or manage but that is there for us to discover. Times in the desert may be the way to let it touch us. But some never develop their interior lives, are afraid of silence, listening.

Lent is an invitation to face our real humanity in the desert. What do we need to add to our lives to be really human? What do we have to let go of to uncover our real selves? It is a gifted time when we join with countless others in taking the time to be our truest selves which God has created and as Jesus has shown us in his body, soul, and spirit.

On Ash Wednesday we creatures of the earth had ashes placed on our heads. We were reminded that we were creatures of the material, physical, spiritual world. We will end our Lenten journey on Holy Thursday when we wash each other's feet. The journey is a call to live the truth. We embrace solidarity and compassion

with other humans from head to feet. To follow Christ is to walk with those whose feet are tired and wounded. Let us accept ourselves as good and loved human beings, flawed as we may be, and also respect our oneness with all of our creator's fellow human beings.

The glory of God is a human being fully alive!

**Timothy J. Joyce, S.T.L., O.S.B.**