

Admonition II

In this admonition, St. Francis takes us back to the beginning of human history in the Garden of Eden. As we read in the Book of Genesis, God created Adam and Eve in a state of perfect harmony with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation. Adam and Eve walked with God in the humble recognition that they were creatures of God and not self-made individuals. They were naked and felt no shame in the presence of each other which means that they instinctively respected the dignity of each other and experienced no need to protect themselves from the selfish desires of the other. They accepted their role as stewards of creation and saw other creatures as their brothers and sisters created by God.

To maintain that harmony, God taught Adam and Eve that they could eat of the fruit of all trees in the garden except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. What does this command mean? It means that Adam and Eve did not establish the moral order, did not establish moral truth. God established the moral order when he created Adam and Eve. We can say that the moral order came built into the human nature of Adam and Eve. It was not an arbitrary law imposed by God from the outside. It was a truth built into their human nature from the moment when God created them. It came inscribed on the hearts of Adam and Eve. The essential and most important element of this moral truth was love—love of God above all and love of neighbor as themselves. This love consisted in making a gift of themselves to God first of all and to their neighbor. As long as Adam and Eve lived according to this moral truth inscribed in their human nature, they lived in happiness. To live in selfless love was to live in happiness.

We read in Genesis chapter three that the devil in the form of a serpent tempted Adam and Eve by suggesting to them that the reason God forbade them to eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was that they would be become like gods and become rivals to God. When Eve first

and then Adam ate of the fruit of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, they chose to make themselves the creators of the moral order. From now on, they would decide what is right and wrong independently of God. The standard for moral truth would no longer be the objective truth inscribed on their hearts by God but rather the subjective choices they would make, even if contrary to the moral truth inscribed on their hearts. This sin of disobedience was a sin of pride. Adam and Eve decided that they could live their lives without God. This sin was not only an offense against God their loving Creator but also an offense against themselves in the sense that they acted contrary to the way God had created them.

This sin seriously damaged the original harmony that Adam and Eve had enjoyed with God, with each other, and with the rest of creation. They now covered themselves with clothes in order to protect themselves from being used by each other to satisfy selfish desires. Adam now experienced that the earth no longer cooperated effortlessly and peacefully in sowing and reaping. Eve would now bear children in pain.

We also see in Genesis chapter three that God responded in love to this sad and tragic situation by promising a redeemer who would be born of the woman and conquer the devil, sin, and death. This redeemer would re-establish the covenant with God and hereby make it possible once again to live in harmony with others and with creation. This harmony was brought about by the life, suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Jesus becomes the way, truth, and the life. He becomes the way to renewed communion with the Father. Jesus reveals the truth about God that He is an infinitely loving and merciful God Who in the person of His divine Son takes upon Himself all the sins of mankind and breaks the power of sin and death through His Son's loving acceptance of suffering and death on our behalf. Jesus rose from the dead, victorious over the devil, sin, and death on behalf of all mankind past, present, and future. Jesus also reveals the truth about the human

person. Just as Jesus is truly God and truly man, so each human being is meant to find fulfillment in communion with God as adopted sons and daughters of God through our union with Jesus.

The men and women of our contemporary culture experience the same temptation to make moral decisions apart from God. The temptation is to make moral choices based upon how one feels. Faced with the same situation, several people will have different feelings and make different choices which may even be contradictory. And it is considered politically incorrect and judgmental to say that either of these choices is right or wrong. Two contradictory choices can both be considered good, relative to the individual's feelings. This situation has been called moral relativism in which there is no objective moral norm that transcends subjective feelings. Our contemporary culture is back in the Garden of Eden, eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.

St. Francis is a living example of how each of us can live a fully human life and find happiness by making moral choices based upon God's plan for us and not based upon our own plan for our lives. In his early life Francis was living his life according to his own plan. His conversion consisted in living his life according to God's plan. At that point he found joy in all his endeavors. Remember how he now felt joy when he encountered the leper, and instead of running away from the leper he embraced the leper. Francis became a peacemaker. Francis loved all of God's creatures and saw in them a reflection of God's goodness and beauty. *The Canticle of the Creatures* is the prayer of a saint who now was living in harmony with God, his neighbors and all of creation. St. Francis, like all the saints, became a real life example of the kind of life that God intends for all of us. He is like a window through which we can catch a glimpse of the Garden of Eden before the Fall. Vatican Council II reminds that we are all called to holiness. The path to holiness is the path to joy already in this life. Holiness consists in becoming fully human according to God's plan for all of us. "*Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is heaven*