

Freedom to choose the banquet  
By Bishop Milan Lach, SJ

In my personal experience, when I have invited someone to a celebration and it was clear that he was available to come and yet started making excuses, I was sad. But, I had to respect his decision, because everyone has freedom.

Freedom is the biggest gift we receive from God, and this freedom was violated in paradise by Adam and Eve.

True freedom is not simply choice, but our ability to choose the good. In choosing against God's commandment, Adam and Eve injured our freedom, disposing humanity to serial bad choices.

When God went looking for Adam, he asked, "Adam where are you?" Adam hid out of fear and gave a strange answer for eating the forbidden fruit. He was not able to say, "I am guilty." Instead, he blamed his wife.

This perfectly describes our practice when we sin. We are not able to stand before God and say, "Father, I am sorry."

Rather, we list the sins of others: our spouse, our boss, our priest, our bishop. We refuse to admit that we are guilty. We follow our first forefather, Adam.

Despite this expulsion from paradise, God does not give up on humanity. The Old Testament is filled with holy men and women who received promises from God. We call them the Holy Forefathers and celebrate them in the liturgical life of the church before Christmas. A shining example is that of Abraham. God promises him descendants more numerous than the stars.

The curious thing about these forefathers was their faithfulness to the voice of God and his promises, without the reassurances that might have come from seeing him. They didn't see Jesus. Yet, we as Christians have it as our fortune to know the true God. None of us can say that we don't know about Jesus. We know him from the Gospels, from the Apostles, from tradition, from liturgy, from our parents, from priests and from bishops.

But why do we need Jesus Christ? Why do we need him in our life? Because we suffer the consequences of Original Sin in paradise.

God wants to offer us the best; he has given us his face and invites us to life with him, but we refuse. This is sad because God loves us all. Our Heavenly Father sent his Son, Jesus Christ, for us, to be born and to die for us — freely. We don't need to pay for this gift. And what is our reaction? We have no time for God. We say, "Sorry, I am busy. I have no time to go to church, to go to confession, to share with another, because I am busy."

We need to come to the banquet. We need to come to confession and change our life. We cannot be like Adam, who found excuses and blamed his wife.

Let us admit our wrongs and re-enter paradise once more, walking in fellowship with God and in the intimacy of his friendship.

+Bishop Milan

*Excerpt from the homily Bishop Lach delivered at the Cathedral of St. John the Baptist Dec. 16.*