

Original Solitude (5/23/2007)

What makes a person a person?

- Philosophical question – how do you know that you exist? What defines your existence?
 - We learn who we are as we grow
 - Born as a baby, and as we grow we catch stuff by what our families teach and experiences that we have
 - Also get to know God better as we grow, and that relationship helps define our existence
 - All this happens as a person grows in a family and in a community
- Imagine being in Adam's position
 - Created as a fully formed grown human being – no experiences to grow up with
 - Doesn't come from a "natural" human family – no family to teach
 - In Genesis 2, only being in creation – nothing to figure out what he is, let alone who
- God recognizes this and helps Adam recognize who he is and what he is
 - Gen 2:18 – "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him."
 - Important to note that this is the first time in the creation stories that God sees something and calls it "not good."
 - Gen 2:18 – God forms the animals from the ground and brings them to Adam to be named
 - God would know that none of these would be a "helper fit for him." So God is either inept, or has some other purpose.
 - Clearly another purpose – through naming the animals, Adam realizes he differs from them.
 - This experience confirms his solitude – it helps him define what he is not in relation to the animals.
 - Gen 2:15 – God tells man to care for and cultivate the garden
 - Both of these are actions that Adam can perform that the animals cannot.
 - "Caring for" implies a self-awareness, that the man is able to determine things around him.
 - Gen 2:16-17 – God tells man to eat the fruit of any tree except for one
 - Adam realizes that he has the ability to choose his actions.
 - He can choose to eat. He can choose to till and to care. He can determine his own actions
 - Extremely important consideration – since Adam was the first man, could he have understood what "you shall die" meant?
 - Death had never existed – Adam was the first living creature
 - The being that brought him into existence states that there is another state of "being" that would be the consequence of eating from the tree
 - He would have understood "death" as in contrast to his original experience of receiving his life as a gift from the Creator – existence at this point was living in complete communion with God

- “Death” would have been a contrast to his own life – liable to nonexistence
 - Adam’s experience of choice leads to the fact that he is created to exist in communion
- It’s easy to think that man’s knowledge of himself was simply emotional or spiritual
 - HOW did the self-knowledge that God led him through come about?
 - Difference from the animals
 - Subjectivity and determination as a person
 - Living in communion
 - Each of these points of who man is are revealed and experienced *through the body*
 - “*Human* personhood is always a materialized-spiritual reality. Man’s original solitude (the first realization of personhood) is revealed through the body: The body reveals that it is ‘not good for the man to be alone’ The body reveals man’s call to communion with ‘a helper fit for him...’ In naming the animals, Adam found many other ‘bodies.’ But none of these bodies revealed a person, as did his own body.” (Christopher West, *Theology of the Body Explained*, pg 73)
 - “Being in the image of God the human individual possesses the dignity of a person, who is not just something, but someone. He is capable of self-knowledge, of self-possession and of freely giving himself and entering into communion with other persons. And he is called by grace to a covenant with his Creator, to offer him a response of faith and love that no other creature can give in his stead.” (CCC # 357)