Dear Friends,

One of the foundational stories in our religion is that of the Fall, recounted in chapter 3 of the book of Genesis, the beginning of Scripture. Adam and Eve, the first human beings, are there in the Garden of Eden, living an idyllic existence. They are completely at one with themselves, with the world around them, with God. All is harmony and unity. But then temptation enters in the guise of the serpent. God has told them that they can eat the fruit of any tree in the garden, except the tree of the knowledge of good and evil - for if they had that knowledge, they would not be creatures of God, but would *be* God. It seems a small enough condition, but if you tell human beings they can do everything *except* this one thing ... what is the one thing they will most want to do? The serpent tempts them to do that one thing and disobey God, and so they fall. It is, so to speak, hardwired into our make-up that this should be.

The moment of realisation of what they have done is the birth of self-consciousness, becoming aware that they are human beings, rather than some other creature, and learning to be afraid. The primeval harmony is broken. This is a curse for Adam and Eve and for the human race generally, but in another way it is a blessing. When people are able to look at and think about themselves and the world around them, they begin to develop many kinds of knowledge. This is the origin of science, which depends upon cool clear looking at the world and drawing conclusions from what we see. With science comes technology, and the enormous benefits that we derive today from our ability to control and exploit the world for our own uses. We see now that this power can wreak devastation on our environment, so it is by no means an unmixed blessing, but we cannot deny the great advantages that technology brings. Who would want to live in a mud hut scrabbling for the next meal, when we could live in a modern house with TV and Ipads, warmth and plenty of food, foreign travel easily available?

Science analyses and categorises the world, it entails the making of *distinctions* - looking at things and seeing that they are this rather than that - long or short, big or little, cold or hot. There is nothing wrong with this in itself, but in a spiritual sense it is what disrupts our original harmony and union with God. God's ways are not our ways, Isaiah says, he sees things differently from us, to him all things are one. If we are to see as God sees and live as he lives, then we must go beyond the scientific way of thinking. As the letter of St James puts it, in the second reading of this Sunday's Mass,

*Do not try to combine faith in Jesus Christ, our glorified Lord, with the making of distinctions between classes of people.*

If someone comes into the synagogue beautifully dressed with a gold ring on his finger, and someone else comes in, a poor man in shabby clothes, it would be natural human behaviour to be drawn to the rich man and ignore the poor one, but if this leads you to treat them differently, the letter goes on to say,

*Can you not see that you have used two different standards in your mind, and turned yourselves into judges, and corriupt judges at that?*

We need to look below the surface of things, to where we see that everyone is equally dear to and loved by God, everyone is valued by him in the same way and to the same extent - not because they are rich, or clever, or powerful, or have a lot of possessions, not for any qualities they have or do not have, but simply because they are children of God, created and loved by him.

The purpose of religion is to reconnect us with God and with these truths (the Latin word from which we get religion means 're-binding'). The links have been broken with our self-conscious awareness and ability to make distinctions, but however valuable  and beneficial these things are, they are what separates us from God, from each other, from the world. If we could feel that we are part of the world, rather than set over against it, then we would know that we should not pollute the environment or squanders its resources, but care for it as wise stewards, since it is God's gift to us.

So many of the stories of Jesus in the Gospels, as on this Sunday, are about the healing of illnesses and impediments. He restores speech to the man who has been struck dumb, he makes the deaf hear again and the blind see. In these acts of healing Jesus is restoring people to their true selves, reconnecting them with their God-given human life, and giving us the model of how we can live, not as people divided against each other, but all as one in the love of God which feeds, nurtures, heals and forgives.

It is a great task given to the Church and to God's people to carry on this restoring work of Christ. It may seem like too great a task, but with God all things are possible - if only we can trust ourselves to him, live in him and allow him to live in us.

Our Scriptures so often look forward to the kingdom of God as a future promise. Isaiah says that in that kingdom the eyes of the blind will be opened, the lame will leap like a deer, the tongues of the dumb will sing for joy. The desert places will abound in water, the scorched earth will become a lake.

But the kingdom of God is not only a future promise, it can be a present reality. Whenever we rebind ourselves and others to God, there is the kingdom:

*Where there are love and charity, there is God.*

Wishing you every blessing, Fr. Robin.