



## The lie of the serpent finds life in modern pride

February 9, 2001  
Naples, FL

*This homily was offered Feb. 9, 2001, during a Mass for the Legatus national convention in Naples, Florida.*

*The day's readings were:*

First reading: Genesis 3: 1-8  
Responsorial Psalm: Psalm 32  
Gospel: Mark 7: 31-37

*"But the serpent said . . . 'You certainly will not die. God knows that the moment you eat of it, you will be like gods who know what is good and what is bad' (Gen 3:4-5).*

Some time within the next two years, and probably within the next 12 months, scientists will clone the first human child. A decade ago, a preacher might have said that to shock or frighten you into staying awake for his homily. Today I'm just informing you of a *fact*. We're barely a month into the new millennium, and within the past 10 days, both *Wired* magazine and *The New York Times Sunday Magazine* have reported what scientists have known for months — that replicating a human being is not only possible, but imminent. Many believe it's already been done.

The task of a homilist is to help us reflect on our Scripture readings. But of course, the Word of God speaks to the soul of man, and one of the windows on the human soul is the daily diary of our species that we call the news. So I want to dwell on this story for a few moments, because it leaves us with choices about what it means to be human and what it means to be believers.

*Wired* magazine quotes one scientist saying, "[Cloning] will be the biggest leap for mankind. It's the central core of Christianity, the resurrection of Jesus, the promise of eternal life!"

Another scientist says, "[Cloning] is the easiest thing you can do. Just get the damn nucleus, and put this damn nucleus into this enucleated oocyte, and pray to God something happens, and put it back into the surrogate mother, and wait. The easiest thing we could do right now, believe me, is clone a damn human being."

Another scientist admits, "If you had a good cell biologist, you could [clone a human child] with two people in a small closet" for about \$50,000.

Sitting here at Mass today, this may sound like bad science fiction. But of course it isn't. Since the 1930s, we've been learning to see human beings as objects and as accidents. For 70 years, we've been teaching ourselves to believe that the ends justify the means. In the past, we saw the unborn baby as a child of God. We used a vocabulary grounded in love. Language is revealing, and today our language has changed. Now the unborn child is a "damn nucleus" carried by a woman who may or may not have anything to do with the child's conception.

None of us should be surprised. The techniques we use for in vitro fertilization *already* come very close to those used for cloning. Animal cloning is *already* routine. And grieving parents have *already* begun to line up with cell samples of their deceased sons or daughters, hoping to bring them back from the dead.

The Feb. 4 *New York Times* reported on a pro-cloning group with at least 50 female volunteers eager to donate their eggs and serve as surrogate mothers. In fact, one of the volunteers said that “nothing else . . . is a higher priority in my life than this . . . .” The women hope to act as a kind of assembly line, so that defective cloned embryos can be aborted without slowing down the experiment. If a pregnancy fails, a new surrogate will step in right away to carry a new cloned embryo, until a healthy child is finally born.

Now, what’s the point of this story?

It’s this. The Book of Genesis was written 4,000 years ago. St. Mark wrote his Gospel nearly 2,000 years ago. But both books speak to us directly, and intimately, today. *The serpent is a liar*. Jesus called Satan the “father of lies” for a reason: He misleads us to destroy us, and the reading from Genesis today is only the first of many examples. The sin of our first parents was pride: an avarice for the power that knowledge might bring; a desire to be the Creator instead of creatures; an unwillingness to accept the role of children of a loving Father. Our sin today is exactly the same.

Pride is a kind of mental illness. It’s an inability to see and accept reality as it really is. *We are not gods*. We’ve been given the gifts of intelligence and free will, and we’ve accomplished many, many wonderful things with these gifts. And that’s what God intended. He put us in the world to be His stewards, His cooperators; to ennoble Creation with our ingenuity. But our lives were made to reflect God’s glory — not our own. We’re here to serve God and each other, not to worship our own power. The core of the Gospel has nothing to do with the search for power. Redemption, resurrection, eternal life — these things can never be reduced to a kind of lab technology. We’re more than “damn nuclei.” We were made for joy and heaven. *And we don’t own life. God does*. When we forget that, suffering always follows. Surely we can learn *at least* that much from the experience of the last century.

Today’s Responsorial Psalm says:

*“Happy the man to whom the Lord imputes not guilt,  
in whose spirit there is no guile.  
Then I acknowledged my sin to you  
My guilt I covered not . . . .  
You are my shelter; from distress you will preserve me;  
With glad cries of freedom you will ring me round . . . .”*

Humility is sanity. It’s the gift of understanding things as they really are — and seeing our rightful and holy place in them. And this is why the humility of a repentant heart is the beginning of happiness and freedom . . . because we can only be happy with God; and we can only be free when we let go of the burden of our own selfishness.

In the Gospel today, Jesus touched the ears and the tongue of a deaf-mute. He said, “Be opened,” and the man heard and spoke. *Only God is God*. Only Jesus Christ is humanity’s refuge and strength. It’s no accident that in Hebrew the name of Jesus is *Yeshua* — which means “God saves.”

God has blessed each one of us here today with tremendous talents and resources. That’s a great privilege. It’s also a great responsibility. *What we do matters*. In the days and years ahead, each of us, by our actions, will choose the kind of future — and the kind of humanity — our children will inherit. The world needs Jesus Christ today more than ever. May God grant us the courage to be His agents in the world, so that the deaf hear the truth about the sanctity of the human person, and the mute preach the glory of God’s name.