

2006: Adam Was But Human

“Adam was but human. That explains it all. He did not want the apple for the apple’s sake. He wanted it only because it was forbidden. The mistake was in not forbidding the serpent. Then he would have eaten the serpent.” – Mark Twain

If Twain was alive today, he’d probably blush at the sexual innuendo I read into his statement. Like all gay men, I’m quite *fond* of forbidden serpent; I’ve been eating it for years. But Twain’s comment looks at the inability of humans to *resist* temptation. *Eating serpents* is his idea to eradicate evil *with the help* of temptation. And who would be better suited for that task than gay men who are the self-proclaimed connoisseurs of serpent, a community that seems to *love* temptation.

In the good old days, forbidden fruit was sinful, but now that we’ve come out of the closet to live lives so unabashedly honest, we’ve changed all that. For us Twain’s quote is timely. The Catholic Church, when looking at its shrinking coffers, ought to confess that their hypocritical views on our gay diet have cost them dearly. And in the political arena, there are excellent examples on both sides of the aisle to suggest that there’s a correlation between eating serpent secretly and losing popularity in civil service. Ah yes, Adam was but human...

Personally, I’ve been candid about my own *diet* since the age of eighteen, and I didn’t think then, nor do I now, that anyone should have the right to tell me what to eat or to punish me for not achieving *their* nutritional objectives. It’s no *sin* in my *good book* to eat serpents. In Hebrew, the word *sin* means to *miss the mark*. I haven’t missed any mark.

I happen to think gay men are God’s little mysterious way of teaching all men to learn to *love* mankind. Of course, I’m using the word *love* in the sense of brotherhood - devotion and tenderness toward *all* people. We gay men may not be perfect, but we’re a gentle folk. We’ve succeeded in modeling for the world how a community of men can live together peacefully. That’s something to be proud of. How many apple eaters can make that claim?

And yet society still penalizes us for being undesirable *consumers*. If they could only stop looking at *what* we eat, and start to see how beautifully we *sit with one another* at the table. There’s something quite impressive about how we try to *break bread* peacefully with everyone. If there’s some spiritual message we bring to the world, it seems to be that *taste* is a personal matter.

But, would that it was so simple. The AIDS epidemic has been passing through our gay *system* like a tapeworm, a serpent we swallowed that’s been hard to digest. Have we missed the mark in some way? Emily-Post-Of-Sexual-Protocol that I am, I believe the problem doesn’t lie in our diet, but in our table manners. I am referring to sexual modesty.

The AIDS epidemic *forced* me to become more modest in my eating habits, even though I then thought modesty unmanly. I started my sexual diet as a young gourmand, more interested in quantity than quality. I didn’t become a seasoned gourmet for quite some time

to come. For years I prided myself on having a big appetite, always hungry, always willing to scarf down another snake like me. But I think the real *sin* (missing the mark) was not in eating forbidden serpent, but in my uncivil table manners.

But I'm not a prude. In the biblical sense, I don't identify with the Adams. I see myself as an Adam with his Eve's unfolding *within*, and am only interested in other Adams who have a well-developed feminine side unfolding in them, to balance their male tendencies. Unlike the first Adam, I'm not ashamed of what I look like; I love being naked; I pluck fig leaves of pretense to conceal myself only when protocol requires it. Unlike Adam, I don't mind playing hide-and-go-seek with God. In fact, as a younger man, I loved concealing myself in bushes, hoping to get caught by some special someone with my pants down. Unlike Adam, I'm inured to accusations of disobedience; I won't allow anyone to point a finger of guilt at me to tell me how or where I should aim; I *missed the mark* on purpose and am proud of it. Unlike my biblical counterpart in Eden, I admit my truth without embarrassment or shame; I love forbidden serpent and, God willing, am not going to change my diet, period, full stop.

But what about *the way* I eat? I do think my table manners could tolerate a little improvement. True, I've been expelled from the [perfectly tedious] paradise of straights without just cause. But lucky for me, I neither had to worry about the pain of childbirth nor tilling the soil of the world. [It's already been tilled to death...] But I'll bet I could get back in good graces with *myself* if I just ate a little more civilly. Wouldn't a modicum of modesty help *my* cause?

This issue of modesty obviously concerns me. I learned my table manners from my mother and father, forbidden fruit eaters, to be sure. But they were Jewish Holocaust survivors. My father [a concentration camp survivor] wasn't around much in my life because my parents divorced when I was quite young, so I didn't have a male role model. And my mother, who survived by running in Germany during the War as a *closeted* Jewess, never talked about her sex life with me. If she had had to use her body to survive those murderers, could I throw stones at her? My checkered sexual history doesn't lend itself to prudery. Besides, I've been through my own war *within*; I've had to face starvation too, a terrible, gnawing hunger for love that I've suffered with for years. So, I could never blame my mother for what she may have had to eat to stay alive.

But when I look at my own life, I wonder what I can do to *improve my manners* since I'm certainly not going to *improve my diet*. The white bedspread I bought for my bed; my urge to change underwear twice a day; my tenacious preference for monogamy in a community that doesn't much care about that sort of thing – tells me something about the roots of my own sense of good and evil. I still wonder what, if anything, I'm doing wrong. Although I'm not ashamed of myself, I still yearn for a sense of spiritual cleanliness, a desire for grace at the dinner table. As I've grown older, I've become more concerned about my modesty vis a vis this wonderful *culinary treat* I indulge in with such passion and pleasure. If the plague taught me anything, it taught me to eat more slowly; not gulp; to chew my food with relish; to remember those who died of hunger; and those in other places still starving to death.

But I think I'd be much happier with my expulsion from Eden if I had one special serpent all to myself to munch on, some little snake to share the joys of dining with, hoping and praying together in each other's arms that no one out there is going hungry.