

From the Old Testament of the Day: **But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil. [Genesis 3.4-5]**

From the Holy Gospel: **If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down, for it is written, “He will command His angels concerning you,” and “On their hands they will bear you up, lest you strike your foot against a stone.” Jesus said to him, “Again it is written, ‘You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.’” [Matthew 4.6]**

Today, we meet together, drawn here by God the Holy Spirit, to consider ourselves and our Savior during the holy and humbly season of Lent. This is the first Sunday in, but not a part of, Lent, and God be thanked for that! For if you take seriously what the days of Lent are saying to you, without the Sunday perspective of the Word of God to sooth the spirit and the soul, Lent alone would drive you to despair.

Lent is about world-shattering realities, about suffering and death, about the true picture of our lives in this fallen world. And that is more than fallen humans can contemplate and bear. So, the six Sundays in the midst of Lent put the message of Lent into the context of the plan and will of God for

your salvation. So, today, you are introduced to the first interlude in Lent – to ponder the matter of temptation, and, thank God, to ponder the Temptation of Jesus in the wilderness and His victory over it.

I.

In the Garden, Eve falls into sin, there to stay throughout her sinful life. Likewise, in the Garden, Adam falls into sin, there to stay throughout his sinful life. Adam and Eve die that day, that moment! They die in their spirit, and from that day forward, they are living in this death: first during calendar days, and then, at their passing, perpetual dust-to-dust! And so it will be for all their offspring, including you and me!” Their sad temptation by the devil, when he succeeds, takes them out of life and into death. *“By one man, sin entered into the world, and death through sin, and thus death spread to all, because all sinned.”*

So, now, every child of Adam is born sinful, born dead in the spirit. Thus, the only way back to God and to life will require a resurrection.

Holy Lent leads you on the path that goes from death to life. It takes you along that path as Jesus walks it for you. It is the message of the Gospel found in the Word-Made-Flesh, your Savior. If you would travel that path, strangely enough, you must let Jesus follow it for you, and you simply follow after Him, along the sidelines, by His Holy Word. And so you have Holy Lent, and for your weak knees and stumbling feet, you have the interlude of the Sundays in Lent.

II.

On this first Sunday, you see the Temptation Jesus in the Wilderness, where His walk to the cross formally begins. It looks and sounds very much like Eve and Adam's temptation, and so it is meant to be. Eve, and Adam with her, and we with Adam, together all

face temptation. Eve, our first earthly mother, succumbs. Jesus overcomes – not for himself, but for Eve, for Adam, for you, in your stead! There is now the possibility of life after all – it follows death, replacing death with life in Christ.

And so it is for you and all who have been brought from death to life through the Holy Gospel! First, you are dead – that's the way you start out, right from the womb, right from conception! And then you are made alive – for which you have contributed nothing, except to be there, when God and God alone makes you alive through His Holy Spirit, which He does in Holy Baptism – as Jesus explains it to Nicodemus in the dark of night: “born from above by water and the Spirit.”

Meanwhile, within you and me there continues the on-going battle between the new Spirit, that we call the new man, and the old, dead Spirit, which we call the sinful nature, or the old

Adam. The battle continues because, while alive, Satan tempts you to step back into his wonderful packing of the life of the dead. He would kill your new spirit all over again.

The Ten commandments are given you by God so that you might recognize Satan's deadly temptations and flee from him back into the bosom of Christ's church. Then Ten commandments, and all the rest of God's Law, are not given to you to make you better. That they cannot do in this life. But God the Holy Spirit can and will make you actually be, from the inside out, the good and faithful child of God.

“Therefore we were buried with Him through baptism into death, that just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life [not to make ourselves new, but to walk in Christ's newness of life] For if we have been united together in the likeness of His death, certainly we shall be in the likeness of His resurrection.”

III.

And that is why we embrace Holy Lent as a precious gift of God and a precious annual time of life. The passion, suffering, crucifixion, and death is how you, in historical time, have been rescued by your God. And to carry you through the agonies of Christ in His Passion, the Sundays in Lent give you the bigger picture and the unquenchable perspective that this work of Jesus is for you – once, and for all – so that you come to Good Friday and Holy Saturday with a holy and profound awe of how much God does love you, how completely Christ does take your place, and how persistently the Holy Spirit pursues you, like the hound of heaven, to call you by the Gospel, enlighten you with His gift of trusting faith, sanctifies you with His tools of grace, and keep you with Christ in His holy body, the Church. In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost! Amen!