



*Sermon on the Sunday of Invokavit Genesis 3, 1-24 Two cardinal questions that determine the destiny of our world.*

*1 Now the serpent was more crafty than any of the wild animals the LORD God had made. He said to the woman, "Did God really say, 'You must not eat from any tree in the garden'?" 2 The woman said to the serpent, "We may eat fruit from the trees in the garden, 3 but God did say, 'You must not eat fruit from the tree that is in the middle of the garden, and you must not touch it, or you will die.' " 4 "You will not certainly die," the serpent said to the woman. 5 "For God knows that when you eat from it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." 6 When the woman saw that the fruit of the tree was good for food and pleasing to the eye, and also desirable for gaining wisdom, she took some and ate it. She also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate it. 7 Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they realized they were naked; so they sewed fig leaves together and made coverings for themselves. 8 Then the man and his wife heard the sound of the LORD God as he was walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and they hid from the LORD God among the trees of the garden. 9 But the LORD God called to the man, "Where are you?" 10 He answered, "I heard you in the garden, and I was afraid because I was naked; so I hid." 11 And he said, "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" 12 The man said, "The woman you put here with me—she gave me some fruit from the tree, and I ate it." 13 Then the LORD God said to the woman, "What is this you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." 14 So the LORD God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, "Cursed are you above all livestock and all wild animals! You will crawl on your belly and you will eat dust all the days of your life. 15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel." 16 To the woman he said, "I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you." 17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat from it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. 18 It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. 19 By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return." 20 Adam named his wife Eve, because she would become the mother of all the living. 21 The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them. 22 And the LORD God said, "The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil. He must not be allowed to reach out his hand and take also from the tree of life and eat, and live forever." 23 So the LORD God banished him from the Garden of Eden to work the ground from which he had been taken. 24 After he drove the man out, he placed on the east side of the Garden of Eden cherubim and a flaming sword flashing back and forth to guard the way to the tree of life.*

During children's ministry, I asked the question: "What happened at the Fall?" And the spontaneous answer came: "They stole the apple and thus committed sin!" That answer could just as easily have come from an adult. And yet, in doing so, the Fall is made to

seem petty, incomprehensible, and irrelevant — leaving people to wonder: "There are far worse things in the world than stealing an apple!" By the way, it wasn't even an apple.

With the story of the Fall, more than with any other scripture, we must search for the underlying principle. What is this really about? And it quickly becomes clear that it is not about the wicked Eve. Nor about the wavering Adam. Otherwise, we would have to blame those two for all the terrible things we see in the world today. It is about more! It is about us! And it is about our relationship between God and Satan.

That it concerns us — caught between God and Satan — becomes clear in the fact that the very first question in the world comes from Satan and is extremely relevant to each one of us. And the second question comes from God. Satan's question comes straight from hell and seeks to sow mistrust and sever the relationship between humanity and God. Satan's question was not asked out of genuine curiosity — it was asked to throw into confusion what is perfectly clear. Another name for Satan is "The Confuser." And that is precisely what his question is designed to do. Through his questioning, he does not seek to enlighten, but to throw all of God's creation into disorder through a single question, so that the other party can no longer distinguish between what is false and what is true. Satan's question is by no means from the filthy depths of hell. Quite the opposite. He quotes God himself and sounds decidedly pious and religious. He claims that God had said: "You shall not eat from any tree in the garden." Satan takes one of God's statements and distorts it, so that it now carries an entirely different meaning. In his generosity, God had permitted Adam and Eve to eat from all the trees... with only one exception. Satan twists the statement so that it now sounds as though Adam and Eve were forbidden from eating from any tree at all. In doing so, God's generosity is transformed into pettiness and legalism. From Satan's mouth, God has done something cruel by forbidding Adam and Eve from eating from any tree whatsoever. Sadly, one can observe that Satan continues to use this very same trick to this day. And so God's good commandments — which were meant to set us free — are twisted into a straitjacket. People are not liberated; they are enslaved. In this very first sentence, we can already see how relevant the story of the Fall is. Because what happened to Adam and Eve is still happening today. When people think of God, their thoughts are filled with mistrust or even fear. People are manipulated in God's name, even oppressed and killed, so that Satan's message and question rings out loudly into the world: "God wants to use his commandments to oppress people and keep them from true joy and happiness."

How the story of the first lie unfolds, we know all too well. Eve and Adam — who was surely standing right there and heard everything — were deceived by Satan. First, Satan sowed mistrust by exaggerating God's commandment. Then he painted a picture before them that was genuinely attractive. If they were to eat the one fruit God had forbidden, they would not die. On the contrary, they would become wise. They would be even better than they already were. They would be like God. Satan's temptations do not usually wear an ugly face — they appear beautiful. We are drawn to temptation precisely because it is attractive and makes promises to us. Who would not want to be wiser, better, more beautiful? The misery is not felt immediately. Only afterward. And so it was with Adam and Eve. Suddenly they became wise. But this new intelligence brought not happiness, but shame. They discovered that they were naked. Much has been said about the nakedness of Adam and Eve. But we have misunderstood the story if we interpret their nakedness as purely physical. What is meant, rather, is that they became aware of how thin their skin was, how vulnerable they were, and that in this state they could no longer draw near to God. Trust had been broken, and the relationship with God was broken. If

God were to approach, all of this would be laid bare. And so they fashioned themselves a clean slate by sewing garments from fig leaves.

Then came the second question of the Bible. This time not from Satan, but from God: "Adam, where are you?" As Adam and Eve stood there naked before God, the blame game began. Adam accused God himself for his actions, saying: "It was the woman — the one you gave me, God." And Eve passed it on to the serpent. The blame game is thoroughly modern. We know it all too well. We cannot bear to carry the guilt ourselves. So first we try, like Adam and Eve, to cover everything up, hoping no one will notice. But when we are caught red-handed, it becomes unbearable to admit our own guilt. Instead, we pass it on to a scapegoat. God refuses to play along. First he turned to the serpent, and he spoke a word of curse. Only twice in the Old Testament does God say: "You are cursed!" And the first instance is here, where God curses the serpent. The serpent itself is not the target — it is Satan, who stands behind the serpent. Through cunning, Satan had set himself against God and humanity. Now he was to be cast into the depths. Into enmity. God thus made it clear that Satan was not the friend who was going to lead Adam and Eve to greater happiness, but the enemy who leads to death. As we gaze into the abyss where the serpent crawls, we see not only that serpent, but all the evil that has ever existed and ever will exist. Everything that stands against goodness, against truth, against mercy, and against love is embodied in this Satan. All wars and all bitter suffering as well. All dictators and all torture chambers are found there, where Satan crawls in the depths below. Satan is the true enemy behind all human evil! It is Satan who stands behind your own personal nightmare as well. There, where your thinking has been thrown into complete confusion. There, where you feel hatred toward others. And also there, where love within you has grown cold. All of this comes from Satan. He is the origin and the source of evil. Yet as we cast our gaze into the abyss and see Satan there, we also glimpse a small light — a glimmer of hope. For God says that one will come from Eve's offspring who will be with the serpent down there. But he will be there not like the serpent, to deceive us, but to set us free. For he will crush the serpent's head. That is Jesus. Jesus destroys the origin and the source of evil! Jesus becomes a blessing by being cursed in our place.

After cursing the serpent, God turned to Adam and Eve. Their sin did not remain without consequence. The beauty of life was now broken by sin. The joy of new life would henceforth be accompanied by pain. And the excitement of work and vocation would now be accompanied by toil and stress. But God did not leave Adam and Eve out in the cold. After everything was over, a deeply significant symbolic act took place. After the Fall, the first sacrifice is an animal. And God himself kills it, so that he might cover the nakedness of Adam and Eve. Their shame could not be removed by fig leaves. But a sacrifice that God himself brought covered their shame. The New Testament cannot be understood at all without this story in the Garden of Eden. I want to illustrate this with an episode from the Passion narrative. On the way to Jerusalem, Jesus encounters a fig tree, which he then appears to curse without reason. In the Old Testament, the fig tree was a symbol for the Law. But the Law cannot truly set people free — just as fig leaves could not conceal the nakedness of Adam and Eve. And after Jesus cursed the fig tree, he drove the money changers out of the Temple. Afterward, he spoke the well-known words: "Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up again."

The Temple was the place where animals were sacrificed. The very first animal sacrifice was offered by God himself, when he made clothing for Adam and Eve to cover their shame. All the sacrifices of the Old Testament served this same function. But even all the sacrifices in the world cannot truly remove sin. Jesus demonstrated powerfully that he

himself is the ultimate sacrifice. The fig tree — representing the Law — and the Temple — representing sacrifice — were both replaced by Jesus. "May no fruit ever come from you again!" Jesus says to the fig tree.

What follows, we know from the story of the Gospel. Once again a tree is mentioned. This time the tree of the cross. And this time Jesus himself became a curse upon that tree. We look down into the depths and see the serpent crawling there below... it is cursed. But something of the serpent's curse also fell upon Adam and Eve. And not only upon them — we too share in the serpent's curse. And all of creation with us! Yet as we gaze down into the depths, we see someone else there as well. It is Jesus! He is very close to the serpent. So close that it would transfer its venom to him. And he will crush its head once and for all. All of this happened at the cross of Golgotha. That is why we are free from the curse of the Law and from guilt! And that is why God's first curse is also simultaneously God's first blessing. Every person on earth knows the curse of sin and death. That is why this story from the Old Testament is deeply relevant today. Jesus' death on the cross is God's ultimate answer to that curse. That is why the message of the cross is deeply relevant today.

Amen.