

Theme: **A WORLD TURNED UPSIDE DOWN!**

1ST SUNDAY OF LENT!

22 February 2026

A story is told about a potter named Jesse, who lived in a quiet garden at the edge of a small village. Every morning, he shaped clay with his hands, breathing gently on it to soften and form it. ***“Life begins with breath,”*** he often said, remembering how God formed humanity from the dust of the earth and breathed life into them.

One day, Jesse planted two special trees in the center of his garden. One bore fruit that gave strength and peace, and the other bore fruits that shimmered with mystery. He warned his young apprentice, Mara, ***“You may enjoy all the fruits here, but do not touch the shimmering one. Trust is more precious than curiosity.”***

For many days, Mara obeyed. But one afternoon, a smooth-voiced traveler passed by and whispered, ***“Why should you deny yourself knowledge? Surely, tasting it will make you wiser and more like the Creator.”*** Doubt grew in Mara’s heart. She looked at the fruit, saw its beauty, and reached for it. She tasted it, then offered it to another apprentice.

At once, their joy changed into uneasiness. They became aware of their fear, their pride and their disobedience. They hid from Jesse, ashamed and uncertain, just as Adam and Eve hid after eating the forbidden fruit.

That evening, Eli called them gently and said, ***“You were made from dust and given breath to live in trust and love. Knowledge without obedience leads to sorrow. But remember, even after a fall, there is always a path back to the garden.”***

The story reminds us of Genesis 2:7-9, and 3:1-7: We are created lovingly by God, given life by His breath, placed in a garden of blessing, and called to trust Him. When we choose pride over obedience, harmony is broken – but God still seeks us, offering mercy and restoration.

My dear brothers and sisters, all great cultures and religions have a sacred story that describes the beginning of the world. The recurring theme in these stories is that in the beginning everything was good, but then it got bad. For us Christians, Genesis gives us the definitive story of how good the world was until the entry of sin with the fall of our first parents after they were tempted by the devil (Gn 2:7-9, 3:1-7). Their temptations and fall consist of three rounds.

FIRST ROUND. The devil, being the master of deceit, knows human psychology only too well. His first task was to get the attention of Eve. Thus, his question, ***“Did God really tell you not to eat from any of the trees in the garden?”*** Eve right away saw the half-truth in the question so she corrected him saying that they could eat the fruit of all the trees except that of the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Bad. And on this last, God’s command was clear, ***“YOU SHALL NOT EAT IT OR EVEN TOUCH IT, LEST YOU DIE.”*** We see here how Eve, by arguing with the devil, got hooked.

SECOND ROUND. The devil took immediate advantage of his gain. He told Eve they would not die; instead, ***“Your eyes will be opened, and you will be like good who know what is good and what is bad.”*** Her curiosity arose, Eve saw that the fruit was good for food, pleasing to the eye, and desirable for gaining wisdom.

THIRD ROUND. Eve then took a fruit and ate it. She gave one to her husband Adam who likewise ate it. All of a sudden both of them realized that they were naked. Ashamed of their nakedness in front of each other, they covered parts of themselves and afraid of God, they went into hiding. They had fallen and sin had entered the world!

However, not everything was lost. God went searching for them in the garden. Not seeing them, God called out to Adam, "Where are you? Adam answered, ***"I heard you in the garden; but I was afraid, because I was naked, so I hid myself."*** On hearing this, God told him, ***"You have eaten, then, from the tree!"*** He pleaded guilty as charged and the finger pointing began. But before punishing them by driving them out of the garden and barring them from the Tree of Life, God promised them a future Savior.

This sacred story teaches us that salvation has become a matter of being sought and found by God. Since then, God has been constantly asking each one of us **"Where are you?"** so he can save us.

Sin brings about dislocation in our relationships. Instead of openness, hiding or covering up has become our way of relating to God and to each other. And we justify our weaknesses and sins with all kinds of rationalizations. This has been the story of our life ever since.

St. Paul tells us of the fulfillment of God's promise of a Savior with the coming of His Son and Anointed, Jesus, ***"If by the transgression of one person, death came to reign through that one, how much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and of the gift of justification come to reign in life through of grace and Jesus Christ"*** (Rom 5:17). We too will triumph over sin and death in, with and through Jesus Christ if we but let him find us.

Jesus' mission is to seek us out, ***"For the Son of Man has come to seek and to save what was lost"*** (Lk 19:10). And in this regard, his question has always been, **"Where are you?"** but to save us, he, like our first parents and us, must also undergo trials and suffering. We see the first of these in his three-fold temptation (Mt 4:1-11). Our first parents fell because of their disobedience to God's Word; Jesus triumphed because of His complete openness and obedience to the Word of God.

Thus, to Satan's, Command that these stones become loaves, Jesus answered, it is written, ***"One does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes forth from the mouth of God."*** To Satan's offer of all the world's kingdoms along with the power and glory that go with them, Jesus answered, it is written, ***"The Lord, your God, shall you worship and him alone shall you serve."*** And to Satan's throw yourself down from the parapet of the temple, Jesus answered, it also says, ***"You shall not put the Lord, your God, to the test."***

It was also because of Jesus' complete openness and obedience to God's Word that he was able to overcome his other trials and sufferings, including and finally the cross, the great sign of our promised salvation. Jesus was the complete opposite of our first parents' and our own inclination to hide things, to cover up our misdeeds, from others and from God.

DURING LENT, OUR PRIMARY TASK IS TO DISCOVER WHERE WE ARE VIS-À-VIS OUR RELATIONSHIP WITH GOD AND NEIGHBOR AND THEN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT SO THAT WE MAY BE ABLE TO ANSWER WITHOUT FEAR GOD'S SAVING "WHERE ARE YOU?" QUESTION.