

First Sunday in Lent – 2026

Genesis 3:1-21

Romans 5:12-19

Matthew 4:1-11

Satan is the father of lies and a murderer from the beginning. Satan is pride personified. Satan is real and formidable. The prince of darkness traffics in death. His currency is corruption, fraud, and deceit. But perhaps the most telling aspect of our enemy is that he masquerades as an angel of light (2 Corinthians 11:14). Masquerade; it's a pretense, a false front, an illusion. Are you familiar with lures? A lure is not a passive tactic to attract prey. A lure is intentionally designed to pull in an unsuspecting victim. The lure promises something that it will not deliver. A lure is a shiv hiding beneath a pretty bow. It's marvelously descriptive line – Satan masquerades as an angel of light. Abortion masquerades as a compassionate problem solver. Street drugs masquerade as a harmless escape from everyday stress. The purveyors of pornography are selling lies, luring victims like a spider to his web, preying on addiction, and the devil is behind it. All of us have been affected by the devil's craft. None of us are impervious. We need the armor of God (Ephesians 6:10-18). We need discernment (Psalm 119:125). We need to enlarge our fidelity, enlarge our courage, enlarge our spiritual vigor. We will never reach perfection in this broken world, in this carnal flesh. Failure will come. But we step out boldly to follow our Lord, knowing that He leads us into the battle.

Adam and Eve were tempted. It was a masquerade. Satan lured the woman with a half-truth. You will not die but you will be like God, knowing good from evil (Genesis 3:4-5). Bigger, better, faster – Eve wanted more. More seemed good. More meant defying God. Eat and become like God. What a lie! Eve reached out her sinless hand and gripped death's fruit. Forbidden! God had protected her with His word of prohibition, and she tossed that word aside and sank her teeth into a lure. Death was unleashed. Satan won for himself a race of slaves. Humanity was defeated. Have you ever felt shame? It originated on the day that man fell. Have you ever wept over a grave? It originated on that day, the day that man fell. God comes looking for the crown of His creation. "The LORD God called to the man and said to him, 'Where are you?'" (Genesis 3:9). Where were the man and the woman? Not where they had been. They had been in harmony with God, walking with Him in the cool of the day. They had been holy, made in God's image, perfect in mind, body and soul. They weren't there anymore. They were under a bush, hiding in fear, attempting to cover their shame with ridiculous fig leaves.

No one takes responsibility. The man blames the woman (Genesis 3:12). The woman blames the serpent (Genesis 3:13). To be sure, the serpent is to blame. But couldn't the man have intervened? Couldn't the man have protected his wife? Couldn't the woman have said, 'get thee behind me *snake*, get thee behind me *serpent*, get thee behind me *Satan*, for you do not speak the words of God but words of rebellion!?' Ultimately, Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden. Before they were cast out, a brutal word of mortality pierced their ears: "By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return" (Genesis 3:19). In between those two events, in between God pronouncing the curse of death and their expulsion from Paradise, the Lord did the most marvelous thing: "And the LORD God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skin and clothed them" (Genesis 3:21). Where, pray tell, did God get garments of skin? He killed an

innocent substitute so that Adam and Eve's shame would be covered. Though it is not written, I suspect that Adam and Eve saw it. An innocent creature gave its life. Blood was spilled. Shame was covered. I suspect that they saw it. I suspect that they processed it.

And do you know what else they heard? They heard about the Seed of the Woman. God would send a champion, a redeemer, a product of their line who would confront the serpent in mortal combat. Adam and Eve heard the curse pronounced on the serpent: "And I will put enmity Between you and the woman, And between your seed and her Seed; He shall bruise your head, And you shall bruise His heel" (Genesis 3:15 NKJV). The Seed of the Woman; Satan heard that this champion would be his demise. Adam and Eve heard that their champion would prevail. God gave our first parents the Gospel and then He demonstrated the Gospel by clothing them in garments of skin. Can you hear the first notes of the saving melody of Word and Sacrament? Great hope was sown on a day of great loss. Adam and Eve had the promise of a Deliverer and they had a divinely constructed garment that covered their shame.

Immediately after Jesus begins His public ministry, immediately after He is baptized, Jesus is driven by the Holy Spirit into the desert. He is there to confront the devil. He is there to be tempted. Jesus is true man. Satan had every reason to be confident. Man had proven himself to be an easy target. Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob all failed. Saul, David, Solomon all failed. The women were no better. Sarah, Rebekah, and Delilah all failed. And Jesus fasts. As true man, Jesus must eat. Physically, He is weak. And Satan launches a lure. If you are the Son of God, prove it. Your Father is not watching out for you. You have the freedom to eat, use it! You have the power to serve yourself, use it! You are alone. No one will know. Eat. "Command these stones to become loaves of bread" (Matthew 4:3).

Imagine all the power of the evil one distilled into one verbal thrust, one ferocious assault. Satan used everything at his disposal against the Seed of the Woman. No weapon was left unused. No attack was left undeployed. Adam's failure is recapitulated. It was combat. It was a spiritual battle. Jesus is armed with God's Word. Jesus is armed with a radical fidelity. "It is written, 'Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God'" (Matthew 4:4). The Seed of the Woman had not come to negotiate or compromise or extend an olive branch. God was made man to destroy the works of the devil (1 John 3:8). God was made man to crush the head of the serpent. Victory! Do you know what it looks like? It looks like a hungry Savior who won't bend from His devotion to His Father. It looks like a humble rabbi who breaks bread with tax collectors and sinners. Victory looks like a shameful cross, it looks like a bloody defeat, like a limp body that has been pierced with nails. Victory is a corpse in a tomb. Victory is an innocent substitute who renders up His life to cover your shame. Jesus reached out His sinless hand and gripped a spike to save us from temptation. THAT is victory!

We sin, it's true. We love God and we still sin. Temptation rages and our flesh is weak. We marshal our strength and we pray and we pray and we pray. And some crosses God chooses to leave on us. We fail, and we repent. We repent and we confess. We confess and we kneel at His altar. We kneel at His altar and we are forgiven, loved. We are loved and forgiven and we follow our Lord.

Christ's victory over Satan is your victory over Satan. The tomb is empty; that will never change. All of you who have been baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ (Galatians 3:27). The serpent's head is crushed beneath the nail pierced foot of the Messianic King and you have been clothed with the garment of salvation, your robe has been washed in the blood of the Lamb. That is the power in you. That is the power which God provides against temptation. Alise helps me and I help her. Brothers help brothers and sisters help sisters. We lean on each other. We assist our fellow believers. We know that struggle is part of this life. We use the law to encourage others to hold to God's commands. We use grace. We point to Christ. We live by the Gospel. Today, it is in rich supply. Our Lord meets the enemy and triumphs in spectacular fashion. That triumph saturates this Divine Service. We feast at His altar. The fruit that dangled from the tree of life is extended to you in the Sacrament of Christ's body and blood. We are liberated from sin and death. We grow strong in this place. We grow strong in Christ's company. It is the Victor over temptation who leads us through this life. We follow Him.