

## LENT: A TIME TO FOLLOW JESUS TO THE CROSS

**First Sunday in Lent**

**March 13, 2011**

**Genesis 2:15-17; 3:1-7**

**Psalm 32**

**Romans 5:12-19**

**Matthew 4:1-11**

### **They Were Naked**

Have you ever had one of those dreams where you find yourself in school, or on a busy street, or in the middle of the mall and realize you're not wearing any clothes?

In the case of Adam and Eve, however, theirs was not a dream but a living nightmare, the consequence of straying from God's word. Put aside for a moment the question of sin, and pay attention to their emotional experience. When they realized they were naked, they knew how exposed, how vulnerable they were.

They were as naked as an addict who has hit rock bottom. As naked as a politician whose lies are no longer believed. As naked as an ordinary family whose credit has collapsed, and whose home is in foreclosure. As naked as truth being confronted by deception and evil.

One usually thinks of Lent as a time of repentance for sin. That is most certainly true. Sin and evil is something we all confront. But when the consequence of sin lands upon us, it is perhaps no longer important how we got into the mess.

Many times, in fact, we deceive ourselves, or are deceived into believing that the harmful things we do actually make sense. We think surely the serpent has a point, and it will be a good thing to know the difference between right and wrong. Surely that Bible-quoting presence in the desert is offering a great opportunity for personal gain. Why wouldn't the world be better off if *we* were on top?

Going down that road, there always comes a moment when such reasoning falls apart. The craftiness of the snake, the smooth talk of the devil, the new-found knowledge of the man and woman, none of this is any help. "They saw what they had done, and they realized they were naked" (Genesis 3:7a, *CEV*). And our attempts to cover it up, to fix it up, usually work about as well as sewing fig leaves together.

Believe it or not, this is a moment of grace. It feels awful to be exposed as a fraud, a failure, a fool. It is frightening to be faced with truth, to dangle on the precipice between ruin and rescue. Yet, it is the first step back toward the garden. Not back to that long-lost idyllic place, but to a place that cultivates new life – without fig leaves.

This week's Reflection was prepared by Paul Bellan-Boyer who lives in Jersey City, New Jersey. To see Paul's reflections throughout the year, visit his blog at [citycalledheaven.blogspot.com](http://citycalledheaven.blogspot.com).

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**This week we remember to pray for the work of the Bible Societies in: Cameroon** – with thanks to God for the launch of the Guiziga Bible, for the renovation of the Bible House and for the impact of Scriptures distributed to orphans; and with prayers that the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations will go well and encourage more support from the authorities and the churches; pray also for more donors, for the Bible to change the nation, and for God's blessing on Bible work in Equatorial Guinea and São Tomé and Príncipe; **Central African Republic** – with thanks to God for good relations with churches and Christian organizations, and for resumption of literacy work; and with prayers for the printing and launch of the new Sango Bible, for settlement of legal issues relating to the premises, and for the general elections scheduled to take place this year; **Gabon** – with thanks to God for translation work in Nzébi, Fang and Ghetshogho, for the *HIV and AIDS project*, for the production of a *Jubilee Bible project*, and for new board members; and with prayers for the *Jubilee Bible project*, for increased support from churches, for translation and HIV and AIDS work, for the Bible Marathon, for the training of Sunday School teachers, for the *FCBH Program*, for fundraising efforts, and for plans to build a new Bible House.

**Activity Corner:** “Spiritual Nourishment” Calendars

Supplies needed: photocopies of 8-1/2 x 11 calendar pages (with boxes for each date) for the months of February and March 2011; pens or pencils.

The Old Testament lesson from Genesis focuses on a choice made by Adam and Eve. The New Testament lesson from Matthew's Gospel focuses on Jesus' response to the devil's temptations. The season of Lent offers us a disciplined time to reflect on choices we make each day in light of how those choices may or may not nourish our spiritual life.

People often talk about things they plan to “give up” for Lent; i.e., sweets, watching television, etc. Invite members of your household to think about ways they plan to choose to expand their opportunities for spiritual nourishment. Instead of thinking about things to “give up,” encourage them to think of things to “add on;” i.e., spending more time in daily Bible reading and prayer; attending additional opportunities for Bible study and worship; reading devotional books; reading Bible stories to younger children; volunteering one's time for community service, etc. Throughout the days in Lent, ask each member of your household to write down their choices (what they plan to do each day) on copies of their calendars, beginning with February 10 through March 22. At the end of each week, discuss as a family your reflections on your activity choices and their impact on spiritual nourishment. Consider keeping a family journal of these thoughts and reflections.