

## Problems in the Garden

The Bible is usually printed as one book, but it is really a collection of books, written and put together over a long period of time. The various books make up a kind of library with different sections.

Some of the books are written in an historical style, telling the story of the people of Israel through the centuries. We might group these in a “history” section. Other books, such as the Book of Psalms and the Song of Songs, would be at home in a “poetry” section. Others, such as the writings of St Paul, would fit into a “letters” category. However, whatever the form of writing, each of the books of the Bible has a message that can be helpful to us in our lives.

In the Mass today, the first reading is from the very first book of the Bible – the Book of Genesis – which opens with two stories about the creation of the world. Today’s text is from the second story, which presents a picture of God planting a garden in Eden as a home for a man called “Adam” and a woman called “Eve”. The verses selected for this First Sunday of Lent tell how things went wrong in the garden. It is a story that addresses the sad reality that we all experience – that human life is often messed up.

In the beginning, the garden of Eden is pure bliss. Relationships are happy and harmonious. Adam and Eve, created in God’s image, share with God a relationship of trust and familiarity. But this paradise does not last.

By disobeying God’s word and eating the forbidden fruit, Adam and Eve break their relationship with God. They seek to become like God and enjoy the knowledge and wisdom of God. Following their disobedience, Adam and Eve become concerned that they are naked. Ashamed and afraid, they sew fig-leaves together to make themselves loin-cloths. They want to hide themselves from each other and from God.

When the relationship with God has been broken, strains also develop between Adam and Eve and their children. Cain eventually kills his brother Abel and, as a result of his sin, becomes a wanderer over the earth, isolated from the relationships that once sustained him.

For us today, the story conveys a deep truth about sin and its effects. Sin is an empty promise, an illusion, a betrayal of our true freedom, a lust for power.

Because of sin, there is fracturing and dislocation in our relationships with God, ourselves, each other and our world. Things go astray and become bent and twisted; nothing is as it was planned.

But there is hope in the promise of our salvation in the new Adam – Jesus. Jesus comes in God’s name to seek out and save what is lost, to bring healing and wholeness to what is broken, to bring peace to our relationships.

As the season of Lent begins, the liturgy of Ash Wednesday calls us to turn away from sin and believe the Good News. May this call prompt us to seek out life-giving relationships. May this season of penance help us to be faithful to God’s word.