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EVE

IN THE BEGINNING, THERE WAS LOVE

At the very beginning there was Eve; despite her disobedience, she receives the promise of a posterity that will be victorious over the evil one, as well as the promise that she will be mother of all the living (cf. Gn 3:15, 20).

—*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 489

The LORD God said to the serpent, . . .
“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 3:14, 15

I have had faith in Christ for as long as I can remember. According to the Protestant tradition in which I was raised, I asked Jesus into my heart when I was small. I learned the books of the Bible along with the alphabet, memorized verses for Sunday school, argued theology with my brothers while doing the dishes. Except for several years while I was in middle school, we went regularly to church. I learned to read the Bible, pray, and turn my troubles over to God.

I went through some typical teenage faltering, but I never really rebelled.

In time, I got married. Mark and I were happy at first. We had good careers, our dream house, and no worries to speak of. But a year later, all of that changed. There was no job, no house, and we were sinking deep into debt. My grandfather died, my mother got cancer, and my world began falling apart. I remember curling up in a ball on the kitchen floor and crying out to God, “How could this happen? Why don’t you save us?”

If I ever needed to draw on the resources of faith, it was then. But ironically—or maybe it was by the grace of God—at the same time, I was going through a real internal crisis. After several years of attending my Presbyterian church, Mark had decided to revert to the Catholic faith of his childhood. I was terrified. The little I knew about Catholics had convinced me that the Catholic Church put barriers in the way of a personal relationship with Christ. How could I raise my children with that influence in their lives?!

I joined RCIA¹ to find reasons *not* to be Catholic, so I could dissuade Mark. My journey opened a rift with my family, who didn’t understand. Protestant friends drifted away. Worst of all, as I tried to sift through the theology and figure out what was true, what had once felt like a strong rock beneath me began to shift. I fell into a kind of limbo of nonbelonging, loneliness, and fear.

One day in prayer, I heard God ask me, *Who brought you here?* Well, I sure didn’t get there myself! I threw my hurt, fear, and anger at God until there was nothing left to throw. Then it was as if his hand stretched out to me. *I’m going this way*, he said. *Are you coming?* I felt no judgment from him, only love.

At the time, I took his question to mean I should pursue becoming Catholic. And when I did that, I found—to my surprise—I didn’t have to abandon my faith; rather, I found a richness and fullness within this new tradition that I didn’t expect.

Looking back, I realize that “going this way” was about more than Church membership. It also meant responding to God’s loving invitation and trusting his work in my life. I decided to take God’s

hand that day, even though the way wasn't clear and I was terrified. I felt like the disciples in John 6 after Jesus told them they had to eat his flesh and many of his followers left. Jesus asked if they were going to leave too. "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life; and we have believed, and have come to know, that you are the Holy One of God" (Jn 6:68–69).

That is faith in its essence, I think. The *Catechism* puts it this way: "Faith is first of all a personal adherence of man to God" (CCC, 150). Faith is entrusting ourselves wholly, completely, to the God who loves us. It's believing him absolutely—even if we don't yet sense the truth of what he says, even if we can't see the path ahead.

Pope Benedict XVI writes that "faith [is] the acceptance, filled with wonder and gratitude, of the unprecedented divine initiative that precedes us and summons us."²

Think about that—the Lord is seeking a relationship with you before you even think about him. Like the hand I saw extended to me all those years ago, God makes an offer of love to each one of us. How have you experienced that in your life? Is he calling to you now in some way? Faith is accepting that offer—even if it means holding his hand in the dark.

GETTING THE CONTEXT

There's a whole chapter in Hebrews devoted to the value of living by faith. It goes through the Old Testament, naming people who pleased God, or who were saved or blessed, or who endured persecution or martyrdom—all because of their unshakable faith.

Two names are strangely absent from that chapter: our first parents are not mentioned in that "roll call of the faithful," as Hebrews 11 is sometimes called. (It begins with their son Abel.) It's Adam and Eve who first lost their trust in the Father. They are the reason we were separated from God and even today find ourselves struggling to answer his call to love.

The story of Eve intrigues me. Her name comes from the Hebrew *hawwa*, "to live." By naming her Eve, Adam recognized

her as “the mother of all living” (Gn 3:20). She is the earthly mother of us all. From her comes a legacy of life that knows it’s made for more. She may have lost her trust initially, resulting in the Fall, but she also picked up afterward and moved forward on the strength of God’s promise. How did she do that? What can we learn from her?

Let’s go back to the Garden of Eden, to the beginning of time. The long line of women that leads us to Mary is anchored in the legacy of Eve.

EVE’S STORY

You can read about Eve in Genesis 1:1–5:5.

Eve woke up to love.

What must that have been like? Her experience was very different from that of Adam, who opened his eyes to work, to the God-given tasks of tilling and keeping the garden, to naming the animals and learning rules to live by. In the process, he discovered his need for another who couldn’t be found. Life was good, beautiful even, but Adam was alone. And that was the one, not-good thing about the good world God had created.

But Eve—created specially by God to solve that one, not-good thing—woke up to love. To completeness. *To relationship.*

I envision Eve opening her eyes for the very first time and seeing before her the loving face of her Creator. I see him smile with loving approval. She was a beauty! He held out his hand and took her to Adam (see Genesis 2:22).

Uniting the two seems to have been the first order of business. God and Eve didn’t detour through the garden to admire the roses; they didn’t stop to pet a passing fawn. Eve would receive her knowledge of paradise from the man she was *made for* in the best sense of that phrase. The first thing she knew about herself was that she was a gift. She was someone created by God and meant for Adam. She was a helpmeet, a “helper fit for him” (Gn 2:18).

Do you find yourself cringing at Eve being a “helpmeet”? Despite the English connotations of that word, God didn’t create Eve to be a doormat for her husband. The Hebrew is *‘ezer kenegdo*. Jewish scholar Robert Alter translates it as “sustainer beside him.”³

In the Psalms, *‘ezer* is used for God as one who delivers, protects, and upholds life.⁴ In John’s gospel, Jesus uses the Greek equivalent of the word to describe the Holy Spirit, the “Counselor” or helper he sends to be with us in his absence.⁵

Clearly Eve wasn’t a lowly sidekick but someone whom Adam really needed, who had strengths that Adam didn’t. Like Adam, she was like God. She wasn’t a subordinate but a partner. Eve was an indispensable companion in fulfilling the will of God.

I expect that Eve knew right away how much she was loved and appreciated, because when Adam saw her, he didn’t respond as if he had finally found the help he needed. It was more like, “Where have you been all my life?!”

“This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gn 2:23), he cried. Woo-hoo! He had spent his whole life so far tending the garden, coaxing fruit from the vines and planting trees down by the river where they could flourish. He had been naming the animals, discovering all the wonders of God’s creation. But in Eve he saw something new! Hers was a beauty far beyond that of the sky or any other creature. Adam took one look at Eve and his heart was hers. In that instant he knew he was created for more than just work. He was created to love.

Adam and Eve stood before God, and God blessed them and their union. He charged them to be fruitful and fill the earth with their children, to care for the earth and its creatures. Eve must have taken a good look at the delights around her as God continued. This was to be their home! Having blessed the first couple, God gifted them with everything they would need. And he saw that “it was very good” (Gn 1:31).

LOVE IS SHATTERED BY DOUBT

The Bible is silent about what happened after Adam and Eve met, but there must have been time for the newlyweds to get acquainted, time for Adam to fill Eve in on what he learned from God before she got there. Presumably he showed her around the garden and told her that God gave them every tree to eat—“but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall die” (Gn 2:17). He must have shown her that tree and impressed on her its importance.

I suspect he introduced her to the animals as well and told her their names and how those names reflected each one’s essence. *That one I called serpent*, I can hear Adam saying. *Listen to it hiss. . . . Watch out for that one, now.*⁶

I’m imagining that conversation, of course, but scripture is clear: God gave the command about the tree to Adam *before* he created Eve (see Genesis 2:16–18). So when the serpent sidled in and said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” (Gn 3:1)—how did she know what God said unless she heard it from Adam? And was the serpent questioning God’s word or Adam’s reliability?

We can’t eat from that one tree, Eve said, *or even touch it—or we’ll die* (see Genesis 3:3). It’s hard to know if Adam told her that, or if she embellished the command. But the serpent called the whole thing a lie. “You will not die,” it said. “For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gn 3:4–5).

If it wasn’t good for Adam to be alone, it wasn’t good for Eve to be alone either. She didn’t look to Adam for help; she listened to the serpent. I can see her pause to think. *What if the serpent was right?* Maybe God was withholding something good. Maybe Adam lied. Whom was she going to believe?

So Eve went right up to the tree and took a piece of fruit in her hand to check it out for herself.

Here’s where I relate to Eve. The fruit was “a delight to the eyes” (Gn 3:6)—and I love beauty. I’ve been known to drive off the road

under the influence of the sun setting on a mountain range. I can't find my way through the woods because I get too distracted by moss and mushrooms (looking at them, not eating them!). When something is particularly beautiful, I can get almost sick with wanting it. Never mind if it's too expensive or somehow bad for me.

Eve faced a triple threat. The fruit was beautiful; she saw it would taste good; and the serpent told her it would make her wise. That pretty well sums up the temptations to sin that the world imposes upon us: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life (see 1 John 2:16).

It was all too much to resist. Eve took another look at the tree and forgot all the good things God had given them. She had eyes only for that tree, and she wanted it. It was the word of the serpent against the word of God and the word of Adam, and she went with the serpent. She took the fruit and ate; and she gave some to Adam, and he ate too.

The *Catechism* describes what happened: "Man, tempted by the devil, let his trust in his Creator die in his heart and, abusing his freedom, disobeyed God's command" (CCC, 397).

When trust dies in your heart, what happens to love? In my experience, it flies out the window. Adam and Eve preferred the lies of the serpent to the words of the One who loved them. They disobeyed God's word, they lost trust in his goodness, and they exalted themselves over God and therefore chose against their own good.

GOD'S LOVE HANGS IN FOR THE LONG HAUL

Those choices had consequences. Adam and Eve (and their descendants) became subject to suffering and death. They still bore God's image; they were still called to be fruitful and multiply and govern the earth. But all those things would be marred by pain and labor and would be carried out *outside* of Eden. And where desire between the man and woman once led to a mutual self-giving, now there would be domination. Eve's desire would be for her husband,

but Adam—instead of ruling the earth with his partner at his side—would rule over her.

This isn't how we were created to be; it's a damnable result of the Fall.

God could have left things as is, I suppose. Like the cosmic clockmaker some people imagine him to be, he could have brushed off his hands and started fresh somewhere else. But love doesn't give up. God cursed the serpent, and then declared war.

God said to the serpent, "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your seed and her seed; he shall bruise [or "crush," as the same word is translated in Job 9:17] your head, and you shall bruise his heel" (Gn 3:15).

In other words, in an ongoing battle that is within the providence of God and his loving plan, the serpent will continue to work against people and even harm them. That is the "bruised heel" God spoke of. But a seed (descendant) of the woman will crush the serpent's head. The woman who was deceived will be the key to making things right. And not just the woman; the woman *and her seed*. Normally we speak of the man as having seed and the woman as receiving it. It's mysterious here, but we see that it's not a woman as an individual who is involved but rather a woman and her child who will be victorious.

EVE'S DOUBT DISSOLVES IN HOPE

The way the Bible tells it, Eve took God at his word and began looking for that promised "seed" and savior. She had a son and named him Cain, "saying, 'I have gotten a man with the help of the LORD'" (Gn 4:1). Notice that she still had a relationship with God and with Adam, however damaged those relationships might be. She and Adam were still intimate. And Eve, rather than being estranged from the God she betrayed, saw him as "the LORD" who helped make her fruitful. She went on to become "the mother of all living" (Gn 3:20).

Before the Fall, Eve doubted God's word. After the Fall, she hoped in his promise.

But Cain wasn't the promised "seed." In a fit of jealous rage, he killed his brother Abel and was banished. Putting myself in Eve's place, if I lost my first two sons that way, I might not try for another. Why continue to "be fruitful and multiply" if the result is murder and death? But see the growing faith of Eve: in Genesis 4:25, she bore another son and called him *Seth*, which means "given" or "appointed." For "God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him," she said.

It's an interesting word choice. Eve saw in her son someone *appointed* by God, as to a role in his plan. She wasn't overcome by despair but rather filled with hope. Here was another son, another seed from God. Maybe he would overcome the devil and the curse that plagued them!

Seth didn't overcome the devil in that way, but with his line, "men began to call upon the name of the LORD" (Gn 4:26). Genesis traces Seth's family line to Noah, who was expected to bring relief from their work and toil on the cursed ground (Gn 5:29). The promise lived on! And from Noah's son Shem came another family line that led to Abraham, whose wife was Sarah: two who would father and mother the people of God. From that people would come a new Eve and a second Adam, Mary and Jesus, the promised woman and her seed who would definitively crush the head of the serpent. Along the way, prefiguring that woman, came the women we will meet in the rest of this book.

CLAIMING EVE'S LEGACY: THE TRIUMPH OF LOVE

Fast-forward to Holy Saturday, AD 33.

Eve once again woke up to love, this time from the grave.

Her eyes opened on the face of God the Son—who had died on the Cross, descended into the realm of the dead, and triumphantly thrown open its gates for the souls awaiting their savior.⁷ Here at

last was the promised “seed of the woman.” How Eve must have rejoiced to see him!

Christ’s descent to deliver the dead so they can rise to heaven has traditionally been called the “harrowing of hell,” or *anastasis* in Greek. Some Christian art shows them released from graves; others depict them snatched from the jaws of a monstrous beast reminiscent of the serpent. Most show Jesus offering his hands first to Adam and Eve. They emerge from death leading the righteous dead. All those years ago in Eden, God brought the newly created Eve to his “son,” Adam. Now *the* Son, Jesus, brings Eve, bursting with new and eternal life, back to the Father. In that outstretched hand I see the one he offered me. I hear again, *Are you coming?*

People tend to have one-sided pictures of Eve. They see her as the original temptress, the cause of the Fall for us all. Or they see her as weak and cursed with pain in childbirth and subjected to domination by men. Some people see all women in that way. But even if you feel like that sometimes, God cursed the serpent, not Eve; and he featured the woman in his promise. The effects of the Fall are not a curse from God but a state from which he wants to free us. It’s up to us to respond, in love and faith.

Our picture of Eve isn’t complete without what she did after the Fall. Eve didn’t let guilt defeat her. She grabbed onto God’s promise and didn’t let go. She acted on it, continuing to do her part to bear the promised “seed,” even when the first was wicked and the second one died. She didn’t give up when the picture was bleak. How was she able to do that, unless she knew God’s love was stronger than her sin?

Know that you are loved, like Eve, and that nothing will stop God from loving you. If you have out-and-out defied him as Eve did—he went to death to get you back. Turn around and you will see his outstretched hand. If you have wandered off, he’s looking for you. If you’re lost and confused, as I was, stop and listen. His love is calling: *Are you coming? Come and see. Follow me.*

Eve gives me hope. I struggle because of the Fall. But that doesn’t mean that I am damned. God loves me and remains faithful