

“Where are you?” Did God need help in finding the man and his wife? Did He need Adam to call out with something like, “I’m over here by the fig tree, the one next to the pool of water!”

Of course not. God knew the exact location where the man and his wife were hiding. Then why bother calling out to the man at all? Why not just go to where Adam and Eve are hiding, maybe sneak up behind them, and surprise them with a tap on the shoulder? Probably for the same reason He doesn’t do that to us. God does not delight in scaring anyone to death. Nor does He play hide and seek with those He created.

What He does want is for us to confess, maybe very simply, “I don’t know. I don’t know where I am.” At least that would be an honest answer.

Adam and his wife, Eve, are lost. Not geographically, spiritually. Before disobeying God, they loved to be in His presence. But now they hide from Him. Did God change? No, they did. Because of sin, even just the one sin, they are spiritually dead, lost, and condemned, having no place with their loving God anymore. “Where are you, Adam?” In truth, he could say, “I’m in trouble. I disobeyed You, and I need Your help.”

But the man is afraid of the truth. And so, he gives excuses. “*I was naked... She gave me fruit to eat...*” He blames his wife. She blames the serpent. They both blame God for what they did. The truth alone sets us free. But Adam cannot speak the truth, nor can his wife, for they are now dead in sin, dead to the truth.

The very first words that come from the mouth of God to Adam and Eve, as the Bible records them for us, are these words, “Where are you?” And these words demand a truthful response. But because they, and we, hide from the truth behind excuses, it is God who must speak the truth to them and to us. “Where are you?” He asks Adam. “You are with the Serpent now. The evil one. You are now in his domain, in his kingdom. This is where your disobedience has placed you. You disobeyed Me and obeyed the Serpent. And so, you belong to him now. This is where you are.”

And because we all come from Adam, this is where you and I are born. Into a family, yes, but not God’s family. We would be lost forever unless delivered from Satan’s kingdom. And this deliverance begins with God’s question, “Where are you?” He confronts us with our disobedience just as He confronted our first parents. And just as they hid themselves under the clothing of their excuses, so do we. “I’m doing fine, God. Thanks for asking. And I’ll be fine because others are worse than me. Where am I? Oh, I’m in a good place. It may not be with you, God, but it’s the place where I choose to be.”

The reason why people stay away from the church is not for the reasons they give. Those are the excuses they hide behind. It’s because we want to go through life avoiding the question, “Where are you?” People stay away from the church, from the preaching of the Word of God, because they, yes we, stay away from the truth.

But only the truth sets us free. Where are you? Where am I? God's Holy Word tells us where we are. We are born in sin, apart from Him and His love, and we need help. We need Him to come and deliver us from our sins, from the powerful domain of the evil one.

And come He does. In our Gospel reading for today, we see Him in the wilderness confronting our enemy. Confronting the very Serpent into whose kingdom we were born. And this confrontation begins, not with God asking the question, but with the Serpent putting a question to God. Not, "Where are you?" but "Who are you?" "If you are the Son of God," says the devil, "then do this and do that. Turn these stones into bread. Jump down from the temple. Bow down to me."

But Jesus knows who He is, and He knows why He is here. He came into our wilderness to rescue us from sin, death, and the devil.

And this rescue begins, continues, and ends with our baptism. You are not just baptized. You are baptized into Christ Jesus. And this means everything. Because there are times in our life when we honestly do not know where we are. We fall into sin. The very sin we detest but did anyway. The very sin we asked God to forgive so many times throughout our life. What He must think of us! Will He forgive me again? Maybe He's done with me. Perhaps His mercy has reached the end with me.

When you do not know where you are with God, your baptism tells you, yes it screams with joy to you, that you do know who you are. You are God's dear child in Jesus Christ. You are baptized into Jesus' death on the cross and into His resurrection from the tomb.

Where you are in life does not matter when you know who you are. You belong to Jesus. Even when you sin, you belong to Jesus because His blood, shed on the cross, forgives all your sins. Even when you fall into the same, horrible sin, you belong to Jesus because your baptism into Christ is forever.

Where are you? Are you hiding from God? Hiding from the truth? Run to your baptism and hear God's truth. You are one for whom Christ died. You are loved by your God. His mercy toward you never comes to an end. You, dear sinner, are forgiven of all your sins. No matter where you are, this is who you are. Amen.