

## Praying with the Women of the Old Testament

### Session One

**Opening Prayer:** “Our souls proclaim the greatness of the Lord, and our spirits rejoice in God our Savior. Lord Jesus, teach us to pray. Mother Mary, pray for us.”

**(1)** “For now, treat the Scriptures as the face of God; melt in its presence.” (St. Augustine)

“When we take up the sacred Scriptures and read them with the Church, we walk once more with God in the Garden.” (St. Ambrose)

**(2)** “For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven; it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy.” (CCC 2559)

**(3) READ: Gn 3:1-5** Now the serpent was more subtle than any other wild creature that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree of the garden?’” <sup>2</sup>And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees of the garden; <sup>3</sup>but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree which is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” <sup>4</sup>But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not die. <sup>5</sup>For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.”

**(4) READ: Gn 3:6-7** <sup>6</sup>So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, and he ate. <sup>7</sup>Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves aprons.

**(5) READ: Gn 3:14-15** <sup>14</sup>The Lord God said to the serpent, “Because you have done this, cursed are you above all cattle, and above all wild animals; upon your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. <sup>15</sup>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.”

**(6) READ Gn 3:20-24** <sup>20</sup>The man called his wife’s name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. <sup>21</sup>And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed

them. <sup>22</sup>Then the Lord God said, “Behold, the man has become like one of us, knowing good and evil; and now, lest he put forth his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever” — <sup>23</sup>therefore the Lord God sent him forth from the garden of Eden, to till the ground from which he was taken. <sup>24</sup>He drove out the man; and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to guard the way to the tree of life.

**(7) READ Gn 4:1** Now Adam knew Eve his wife, and she conceived and bore Cain, saying, “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord.”

**(8) READ Gn 4:3-7** <sup>3</sup>In the course of time Cain brought to the Lord an offering of the fruit of the ground, <sup>4</sup>and Abel brought of the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions. And the Lord had regard for Abel and his offering, <sup>5</sup>but for Cain and his offering he had no regard. So Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. <sup>6</sup>The Lord said to Cain, “Why are you angry, and why has your countenance fallen? <sup>7</sup>If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin is couching at the door; its desire is for you, but you must master it.”

**(9) READ Gn 4:25** <sup>25</sup>And Adam knew his wife again, and she bore a son and called his name Seth, for she said, “God has appointed for me another child instead of Abel, for Cain slew him.”

**Closing Prayer: “Father, Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light on our path. May it be done to us according to Your word.”**

## To Wear the Veil

God made male and female “in His image and likeness.” Therefore, we can think of the masculine and feminine as His icons. He has written into them something of His Trinitarian self--the reciprocity, the giving and receiving of love. This iconography is indelible and exists independently from the individual who bears it.

Beginning with their physical bodies, we see the masculine was designed to initiate, to implant, to generate (as God did in Creation). The feminine was designed to receive, to be implanted, to gestate, to birth and nurture life (as Creation was designed by Him to have a passive acceptance of always waiting on Him for its existence and His action on it, of being utterly dependent on Him).

The feminine, therefore, represents all Creation—a willingness to receive, or, in spiritual terms, the soul’s willingness to be blessed. Inherent in this, of course, is humility. There is a smallness to it, a willingness to not be the actor, the aggressor, the main observable player on the stage of history.

When Eve reached for the forbidden fruit, lured by a fallen angel, her sin wasn’t that she grasped the fruit; it was that she grasped it *as woman*, a deep violation of her vocation and her *meaning* for all the rest of Creation. Life’s *meaning* (to be *receptive* of God’s action) was turned upside down with that grasp.

When Gabriel, God’s appointed messenger, appeared to Mary and announced what God wanted to do in her, she, being full of grace, gave the response that can now resound on the lips of all women first, and then all of Creation, both male and female: “*Let it be done to me according to your word.*” Here the vocation of woman (and all Creation) is restored, set right side up.

For God to “hide” the true meaning of life for all Creation in the human creature who was less strong, the “helper,” not the main actor, the receiver and not the giver in the transmission of life, was His first act of “veiling.” There have been countless others, of course, culminating in His own “veiling” in human flesh and blood, as well as the “veiling” of Himself in the Bread and Wine of the Eucharist. Jesus, whose divinity was veiled for a time, was ultimately revealed as the Bridegroom, come to claim His Bride, the Church (and all Creation, created through and for Him).

In a wedding, only the Bride is veiled. The veil represents her vocation (a willingness to receive, to be blessed), as well as the mystery of fecundity, where, hidden inside her body, not able to be seen, the miracle of conception and life occur (her reproductive organs are hidden, veiled, in the way a man’s aren’t). This hiddenness permeates and truly defines the feminine.

The sacrament of marriage, then, confirms the totality of man and woman in the image and likeness of God, establishing the reciprocity of love between them. Thus, marriage becomes an abiding icon of the love of Christ for His Church, as He laid down His life for her out of love, and she returns this love in willing submission to Him.

And so, for a woman, *married or not*, to veil herself in Church is her *gesture of willingness* to be the icon in the world of the marriage of Christ to His Church, the veiled Bride for the Bridegroom. God desired to write this into her, and she responds: "Behold, I am a handmaid of the Lord. Let it be done to me according to your word."

### **A Single Thought**

Our Savior was not sent  
to attend to everything at once.  
It must've hurt him to refuse  
the eyes asking him to stay,  
as he sensed the call from distant towns  
tearing him away.

Now we have  
social networking systems  
which instantly transmit desire,  
send images of accompaniment,  
tap hearts, magnify faces,  
and receive endless solicitations.

We're fatigued from  
constant tweets  
devoid of depth.

In every age,  
there must be a place  
Where Christ can rest.

Would your heart be a desert  
that draws him?  
Can your mind hold  
a single thought?

Rita Simmonds

## For Personal Reflection

When Eve was tempted to doubt God's goodness and to act contrary to His command, she didn't call out to God or Adam for help. She acted unilaterally.

Have there been times when you know you should have prayed or asked for help but didn't? If so, what were the results?

What situations tempt you to act without first praying for God's direction?

Eve was distracted from obeying God's command by the beauty and benefits of the forbidden fruit.

Is now a good time to check yourself for distractions that aren't bad in themselves but have kept you away from attention to your relationship with God or other people?

Eve learned lessons about herself and God through her experience of disobeying Him. These lessons changed her in a wonderful way, putting the bible's first prayer of acclamation on her lips.

What lessons like these have you learned through your failures?

What simple prayer of acclamation can you put on your lips today in order to keep these lessons alive for you when you most need them?

Read again the definition of prayer from St. Therese: "For me, prayer is a surge of the heart; it is a simple look turned toward heaven; it is a cry of recognition and of love, embracing both trial and joy." (CCC 2559)

If you are someone who suffers from guilt over your prayer life, can this definition help to encourage you and have a different perspective?