

On November 2, 1984, Velma Barfield was executed at Raleigh, North Carolina's Central prison. She was convicted of killing 4 people. But the Velma Barfield who was executed that morning was not the same woman who came into the prison in 1978. During her 6 years of confinement, Velma underwent a remarkable conversion. This journey was captured in the pages of the book, *Woman on Death Row*. Velma recounts in the book a night in her cell when in the darkness she was weeping. As she wept she wondered if Jesus would ever forgive her and love her again after all she had done. Then, Jesus spoke to her, loud and clear Jesus said, "Yes, I died on the cross for your sins too. Won't you let me come and give you a brand new life?" Velma recalled that right then and there she confessed her sins to him and he entered her life.

A lasting legacy of Velma's transformation is her bible; almost every page has something written on it. On one of the pages, Velma wrote October 1984; "Tonight I am going to start naming my sins before the Lord and trust Him for deliverance." She also decided that night, "I am resolved to return to God everything he gave me. Lord, take my children, they are not mine, either; they belong to you and I am leaving them in your care." These two decisions define the depth of Velma's conversion.

Velma's story dramatizes the two extremes that we encounter in our readings for this first Sunday in Lent. The first extreme is the disobedience of Adam which condemned the human race and doomed it to a spiritual death. The second extreme is the obedience of Jesus which redeemed the human race and restored it to spiritual life.

This clearly show the depths to which we can fall if we are drawn in by temptation, like Adam and at the same time it shows the heights to which we can rise if we reject temptation, like Jesus.

Velma made this discovery in prison, we are invited to consider this in the season of Lent. Lent is a word which comes from the Anglo Saxon word lencten, which means “springtime” even though these days it would be hard to recognize spring with all the up and down temperatures we have experienced.

The forty days of Lent correspond to the 40 days that Jesus spent wandering in the desert and the custom of fasting is derived from the fact that Jesus fasted while in the desert. The Church eventually prescribed fasting for two groups of people in particular: Adult catechumens, those who were being

instructed in the faith and preparing to be baptized at Easter; it would be appropriate to acknowledge at this point that this year we have five catechumens in our midst, Jason Oswald, Caroline Prisk, Brian Pakkli, Amy Trees-Pakkli and their children Sylina and Toby. Since the fall they have been preparing to receive the sacraments on Holy Saturday Night.

The second group was all adult Christians who were getting ready to renew their own baptismal vows at the Easter vigil. It would only be appropriate to acknowledge at this point that the rest of us fit into that second category. During this season of Lent, we like Velma Barfield are called to evaluate our lives. It is a time when we are to deal with our sinfulness honestly and courageously. We who are the disobedient children of

Adam are called to turn away from sin and become obedient followers of Christ. Lent is when we prepare to renew our baptismal promises and recommit ourselves to Christ in a deeper and more profound way.