

Homily for the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise: The Sunday Before Great Lent

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Today, as we stand on the threshold of Great Lent, we are reminded of the profound reality of the Fall of Man. This Sunday before Lent, the Church invites us to reflect on the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from the Garden of Paradise – a pivotal moment in our salvation history, and a sobering reminder of both the consequences of sin and the immeasurable mercy of God. The story of the Fall calls us to examine our own lives, to acknowledge our own shortcomings, and to recognize the profound need for God's forgiveness as we prepare ourselves for the journey of repentance.

The Expulsion of Adam and Eve: A Consequence of Disobedience

When Adam and Eve were placed in Paradise, they were given everything – perfect communion with God, freedom from pain and death, and the beauty of an unspoiled creation. They were created in the image and likeness of God, destined to live forever in the joy of this perfect harmony. Yet, in their free will, they chose to disobey God's command not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. Their disobedience, their turning away from God, brought with it a disastrous consequence: they were expelled from Paradise.

The Fathers of the Church have reflected on this expulsion with great depth. St. John Chrysostom, in his homily on the fall of Adam and Eve, reminds us that the expulsion was not simply a punishment, but also a mercy. For if Adam and Eve had remained in Paradise after their fall, they would have eaten from the Tree of Life and would have lived forever in their fallen state, forever cut off from God. Thus, in God's justice, He expelled them to prevent them from living eternally in a state of sin. St. Gregory of Nyssa further emphasizes this point, suggesting that the expulsion was not the end, but the beginning of humanity's long journey of redemption – a journey that would ultimately bring them back to God through the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

The Expulsion as the Reality of Sin

For us, the Expulsion from Paradise represents the reality of sin and its effects on humanity. It serves as a reminder that sin disrupts our relationship with God, leading to spiritual death and separation from divine grace. However, this event also foreshadows God's redemptive plan. The very expulsion, in Orthodox Christian thought, ultimately paves the way for the Incarnation of Christ, who came to restore what was lost in Eden. Through Christ's sacrifice, we are offered the possibility of reconciliation with God and the hope of eternal life, not in the earthly paradise, but in the restored heavenly kingdom. Thus, the Expulsion can be seen as our hope in times of distress - that we are not lost forever in sin and that God does not abandon His own even when they disobey Him.

Forgiveness and Repentance: The Gospel of St. Matthew

The theme of forgiveness shines brightly in today's Gospel reading from St. Matthew (6:14-21). Jesus speaks of the need for forgiveness and repentance, urging us to forgive others so that we may be forgiven by our Heavenly Father. "For if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; but if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses."

Here, Jesus is teaching us something essential about the relationship between sin and forgiveness. The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise was a result of sin – sin that brought separation from God. But just as Adam and Eve were not abandoned by God forever, neither are we abandoned in our sin. Forgiveness is always available, but it requires repentance and the willingness to forgive others.

In the light of this, the Expulsion from Paradise can be seen as an invitation to return. The Fathers often speak of Paradise not as a distant, lost place, but as a state of communion with God. St. Maximus the Confessor teaches that the Fall was not merely a historical event, but a spiritual one: the "fall" of the human soul into division and disunity with God. Our journey back to Paradise, therefore, begins with forgiveness – both of others and of ourselves, as we seek God's mercy.

The Role of Great Lent in Our Return to Paradise

As we prepare to enter Great Lent, we are given an opportunity to reflect on this journey of repentance and forgiveness. Lent is a time for us to return to the "Paradise" from which we have been exiled. It is a time to humble ourselves, to repent for our sins, and to forgive those who have wronged us. Through fasting, prayer, and almsgiving, we imitate Christ in His humility and mercy. As St. Isaac the Syrian writes, "Forgiveness is the true form of repentance, the sign of a heart that has turned towards God."

In the practice of repentance, we recall the example of the Prodigal Son, who, after squandering his inheritance, returns to his father in repentance. The father, instead of rejecting him, runs to meet him and forgives him completely. This is the essence of God's love: even when we have fallen, He is always ready to forgive us and to restore us to Himself, if we repent and forgive others in turn.

The Expulsion from Paradise as a Sign of Hope

Though seemingly a tragic moment, the Expulsion from Paradise is actually a sign of hope within the Orthodox Christian faith. At first glance, it might appear as a punishment for their disobedience, but the Fathers of the Orthodox Church, such as St. John Chrysostom, point out that it was also a merciful act of God. By banishing them from Eden, God prevented them from eating from the Tree of Life while in a fallen state, which would have meant living forever in sin and separation from Him. In this way, the Expulsion became a necessary step for humanity's

eventual redemption. It marked the beginning of God's plan to restore creation, offering a path to salvation that would ultimately be fulfilled through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise is not the end of the story. It is the beginning of God's plan for our redemption. Through the death and resurrection of Christ, we are invited back into communion with God, to the Paradise that Adam and Eve lost, and to the eternal joy and peace that awaits all who truly repent and seek forgiveness. Furthermore, the Expulsion highlights the possibility of reconciliation.

Even in the face of human failure, God's mercy remains present. Adam and Eve's departure from Paradise did not mean the end of God's relationship with humanity. Instead, it set the stage for the coming of Christ, who would open the door to the Kingdom of Heaven, restoring the communion with God that had been broken by sin. The Fathers emphasize that this event points to God's love, as He did not abandon humanity, but instead set into motion the path that would lead to our ultimate redemption and return to eternal life.

Conclusion

Brothers and sisters, as we stand on the threshold of Great Lent, let us remember the lessons of today's readings. The story of Adam and Eve reminds us of the consequences of sin – the rupture in our relationship with God, and the need for repentance. But the Gospel of St. Matthew teaches us that forgiveness is always within reach. If we forgive others, we will receive forgiveness from God. Let us not allow the bitterness of sin to hold us back, but let us, through repentance and forgiveness, make our way back to Paradise, to the communion with God that we were always meant to have.

The lesson of the Fall and Expulsion invites us to reflect on our own choices and relationship with God. It calls us to seek repentance, to recognize the consequences of sin, and to embrace God's mercy. The Fathers of the Church teach us that even in the midst of our fallen state, God's love remains constant, and He desires to bring us back to a fuller communion with Him. The Expulsion, then, is not just a moment of loss, but also the beginning of the divine plan to restore us to Paradise, not through our own efforts, but through God's grace and the redemptive work of Christ.

May the coming season of Great Lent be for us a time of true repentance and reconciliation, so that we may experience the full depth of God's forgiveness and the joy of His eternal Kingdom.

Amen.