

Homily

# Living in Exile!

Sunday of Forgiveness &

The Commemoration of Adam's Expulsion from Paradise

St. Andrew Orthodox Church, Riverside, Ca. 2/21/99

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**Introduction:** In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit, One God. Amen. “Woe is me!” cries Adam. “By evil deceit was I persuaded and led astray, and now I am in exile from glory...Woe is me!...O Paradise, no more shall I take pleasure in thy joy; no more shall I look upon the Lord my God and Maker” (*doxastikon* from Great Vespers for the Sunday of Forgiveness). This morning we commemorate the “Casting out of Adam from Paradise”. This is the final Sunday before Lent begins, and is the last major theme that the Church wishes to leave in our minds as we commence our Lenten journey.

**Adam Loses the Garden Paradise:** The entire Scriptural record, and indeed the whole economy of salvation, is built as a house upon the foundation of man's original existence in Paradise as described in the opening chapters of the Book of Genesis. In order to understand the purposes of God, and even your own self, why you have the desires that you do, it is necessary to have this morning's lesson always in your mind. A central reality at the heart of our spiritual life is set before us in our commemoration of Adam's expulsion this morning. This reality is simply this: **We are not where we should be.** According to God's creation we have absolutely no business being where we are. By this I mean, we have no business being outside of Paradise. Here, we are away from home.

If you were asked to define 'Paradise' how would you do so? Many common conceptions of 'Paradise' are simply far too banal, too commonplace and lowly. Paradise is not a place of sensual delights, as though it consists (in the children's vernacular) as some perpetual consumption of ice cream cones. True Paradise, all of our original homeland, is far, far more glorious. The Garden of Eden, the Paradise of Delights, was created as man's home. It is unsurpassed in beauty. There man was formed, there man lived clothed in glory in unceasing communion with God (which is the essential definition of "paradise"), each other, and the created world. Man lived naturally in communion with the Word of God as did the prophets who were to come. Man had no disposition or necessity to sin, and was in himself a macrocosm of the world- serving as the point of union between the visible and invisible worlds. There man was, according to St. Gregory the Theologian, "Ζωον Θεουµενον" (Zo-on theoumenon), "deified man". There man suffered no want, no deprivation, no sorrow, and no grief. Man ruled there as the King of creation. First, as King of himself, and then as that of all the creaturely kingdoms. In the Garden man suffered no inner contradictions, no internal war as he does now. If we are asked to define "Paradise" we should answer that Paradise is man's unbroken communion with God, from which flows every blessing.

As we know by experience we have lost our primal home. We have sinned. We have transgressed. We have done evil in God's sight. We have shattered our perfect communion with God, and have become the Lord's enemies by our wickedness. We have violated nature, and have lost our harmony with the animals. We have become even divided within ourselves, at war on the inside, and as a result of this we were forcibly cast out of Paradise. **Since then we have lived in exile.** The gates of Paradise were shut, and a cherub with a flashing sword was set before the gates to guard against our re-entrance.

Interestingly, the Lord placed Adam just outside the bounds of the Garden (Gen. 3:22-24). In this way, Adam could see Paradise and could ruminate on his loss. There he sat with his head in his hands weeping and lamenting over his foolishness. Placing Adam so near the Paradise which he had lost was a great mercy. It was a signpost designed to help Adam keep in mind his original dignity, and a motivation for him to work hard on the

long journey he now had to commence to regain Paradise. Adam's journey is our journey, and the journey is this present life. **The purpose of this life is to find our way back to Paradise.** St. Paul writes, "For our citizenship is in heaven, from which also we eagerly wait for a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ" (Phil. 3:20). And the Prince of the Apostles introduces his first epistle by saying, "Peter, an apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who reside as aliens, scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia" (1 St. Pt. 1:1, cf. Heb. 11:13-15). We are aliens and exiles in this life. How important it is to remember this! So many of our human brothers want to pretend that our present existence is not an exile but is natural to man. Unbelieving man, having the remnants of the memory of Paradise, suggest either that this is Paradise, or that the earth can become Paradise! Nonsense! As God put Adam just outside the bounds so that he could remember, and in remembering strive to return, so the Lord has given us signposts to help us orient ourselves.

We have the memory of Paradise which drives mankind in its pursuit. Not all men use this innate drive for the recovery of Paradise correctly. Some fabricate a false Paradise and many are ignorant of the true path of return, but nevertheless the universal memory of Paradise itself is a gift from God to keep us from accepting this miserable and mournful existence as normative. We have many other signposts which remind us that we are outside of Paradise. St. Gregory of Nyssa lists the following: sexual union, biological conception, birth as we know it, pollution, the consumption of food as we know it, excretion, gradual growth to the full stature, adult life/old age, sickness, and death. With this in mind all of these earthly realities in which we live can become pointers toward Paradise. Ultimately, in the unfolding of God's plan of salvation, Paradise has now regained an outpost on the earth. It is no longer at the intersection of the Tigris and Euphrates rivers. The local church is this outpost, an embassy of Paradise, and the means to regain Paradise.

**Regaining Paradise through Fasting:** If Paradise is our true home, and we are living as exiles, how are we to return home? This question has an in depth answer involving all of our life in the Church, which contains the earthly door to another dimension through

which man must pass to recover Paradise. This morning, however, the Church sets before the faithful one primary means to recover Paradise: fasting. It was from a failure to properly fast that Adam and Eve fell and led us into exile, and it is through fasting that we will recover. This is why the Church has placed the Commemoration of Adam's Expulsion from Paradise just prior to the beginning of Lent, and this is why the Gospel assigned for today's commemoration consists on our Lord's teaching on fasting (St. Matt. 6:14-21). How is it that fasting is such an important means to recover Paradise?

If the loss of Paradise consists chiefly in our loss of unceasing communion with God and in our loss of the supremacy and dominance of our souls over our bodies in our existence then it is clear how fasting returns us to Paradise. When we fast we fulfil in ourselves the Lord's words, "Man does not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds from the mouth of God" (St Mt. 4:4). The Lord is our true sustenance. He it is that nourishes our life. Even when we do eat in this exile it is He who gives us energy and strength from dead matter. Fasting is a move back (and forward) toward Paradise when we do not eat to live as we do now. In Paradise we pray to live. Secondly, our loss of Paradise has involved the usurping of the bodily passions over the soul of man. We have been turned upside down. Our bodies are given to us to be the servants of our souls, to be the means of fulfilling all the noble intentions of our souls. We see someone in need, and the body is to be the instrument of our compassion. We desire to praise God in our souls, and our mouths are to speak of His glory. Sadly, sin has reversed this natural relationship, and the body and sensual passions have come to dominate man. We are driven by desires, and the body has become its own master. Through fasting we humble the body. We discipline it and put reigns upon it, and seek to make it subservient and obedient to the soul. This relationship is fleshed out each time we fast or violate the fast. When we fast we show the body to be obedient to the soul. When we break the fast we show the body is ruling the soul. Our soul desires to fast, but the body is just too strong. Paradise is formed in us as we fast.

May we join our firm resolution to fast this Lent with fervent expectation for help from above, and may we find again our long lost homeland and dwell with the All-Desireable One, our True God, the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

