

HOMILY ON THE FALL OF ADAM AND EVE (Cheesefare Sunday 1/3/2020)

On this day, the Church recalls the horrible tragedy that humanity suffered in the very beginning of history: The expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise.

As we know, God created man to be free, and to live in constant communion with Him in eternal happiness. Unfortunately, this freedom of will was abused, insulting God by disobedience. They chose to listen to the devil, the cause of evil from the start, and this led them to their fall and destruction. God is love, as the Holy Scriptures reveal to us. Immediately after their fall, God wanted Adam and Eve to realize their sin and to repent in order to find forgiveness. Sadly, they remained hardened and unrepentant. Even worse, they tried to find excuses for their actions. Each one blamed the other for what had occurred. Adam turned on Eve, declaring that she was the one who told him to do it. Eve blamed the serpent, saying that *the serpent deceived me, and I ate*" (Genesis 3:13). It was this disobedience and lack of repentance that cost them Paradise in communion with God. Their sins were to have tragic consequences for all who came after.

After being expelled from Paradise, their lives changed drastically. Their work, which in Paradise was pleasant and fruitful, became harsh and difficult. It was only by sweat that they could care for themselves, as the fields now had thorns and thistles. Sorrow came upon them, which was rooted in pain, disease, natural disaster, deprivation, and the hard labor which was necessary to live (see Genesis 3:18). They were outside of the Garden of Eden, which had everything, and they wept over the disaster that was now theirs. They reflected on what they had lost, comparing it with the hardships they now endured, and mourned deeply. This weeping and groaning would continue through the ages by their descendants.

One has to wonder, why is our Church reminding us of this great tragedy today? The reason for this, is to prepare us for the fast of Great Lent, which starts tomorrow. Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command to abstain, and ate the forbidden fruit. We bring to mind the disastrous consequences of this sin, so that we may never forget the spiritual damage suffered by those who do not obey God and do not fast. On the other side, we are encouraged to choose the path of God's will and joyfully welcome the fasting period. The readings, prayers and hymns of today all point us towards this same goal: Let us come forward to embrace the fast, live the Gospel, and in so doing become pleasing to Christ, proving our worthiness for Paradise once more [4th *Sticheron* of the Vespers Service]. Also, let us desire self-control, so that we may not find ourselves mourning outside of Paradise (like Adam), but that we may enter into the delight of Paradise (Vespers *Kathisma* Hymn).

There are Christians who dismiss fasting and think little of it, supposedly because they are focused on higher, more spiritual matters. They contend that fasting is unnecessary. Yet, Jesus Himself observed an absolute fast for 40 days. The Holy Apostles and the early Christians also used to fast. We heard in today's Gospel reading the Lord's instructions on how we should fast. The Apostolic Canons have set days and guidelines for fasting. We also know from experience the benefits that fasting has in the lives of the faithful. Certainly, fasting is not an end in itself. It is, however, a precious means to grow in the spiritual life and achieve those goals we have set for ourselves. This is because fasting and obedience to God are related, and it is in this that God's grace comes to us. It is necessary in acquiring the fruits of the Holy Spirit, and in reaching union with God (*theosis*). The Holy Canons provide for those who for reasons of health or physical weakness cannot fast, to not create impossible burdens. Under the care of a Spiritual Father, further

guidance is given to the Christian to keep the fast according to their abilities. In this way, obedience towards the Church of Christ (which is the basic reason for fasting) is not violated.

My brothers and sisters, at the start of Great Lent tomorrow, let us keep our eyes fixed on Christ Who suffered being nailed on the Cross, in order to make wide open the gates of Paradise for us. As a sign of gratitude, let us sacrifice for Him and fast as best we can in the manner He taught us. Along with our abstention from food, may we also offer to our Benefactor Christ our spiritual fasting, as the God-bearing Father, St. Basil the Great has described it: “Abstaining from food is not sufficient ... True fasting, along with fasting from food, means escape from evil, guarding the tongue, avoiding anger, rejection of evil desires, reprimands, lying and perjury” (Basil the Great, *On fasting*, 2:7. *PG* 31:196D). With such resolutions in our hearts, may we enter the “stadium of virtues,” and after having completed our spiritual struggles in the fast, become worthy, with holy souls, to venerate the holy Passion and Resurrection of our Lord.