

Last Sunday we said goodbye to eating meat until Pascha. On this Sunday, when we say goodbye to almost everything else that is worth eating, the Church gives to us the remembrance of an event: the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. We know the story. How God told Adam and Eve they may eat of everything in Paradise except from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, because they weren't ready for it yet. And how, tempted by the serpent, Eve took and ate, and Adam took from her and ate. And then they discovered that they were naked of glory and were ashamed and hid themselves. God did not wait for them to come to Him, He went to them, calling out for them. And Adam replied by placing the blame on Eve. It's as if Adam said, "This is all your fault, God. This all happened because of the woman You gave me." No humility here. And for this lack of humility, they were cast out from Paradise. (Elder Aimilianos, St. Dorotheos of Gaza) This is what we remember today.

From last evening's vespers, we heard Adam's lament outside the gates of Paradise. There Adam sat and wept bitterly saying "Woe to me! What will become of me, a worthless man? I disobeyed one command of my Master and lost every good thing! O holy Paradise, planted for me by God, and closed by the weakness of Eve, grant that I may once again gaze on the flowers of your gardens!"

Adam is each one of us. There is no beginning to the spiritual life until we become like Adam here: knowing that we are exiles from Paradise by our sins. Understanding the hole in our heart that cannot be filled by anyone or anything of this earth – only by God. Knowing that we are dust, and as Father Schmemmann wrote, the food we eat we refrigerate because it is dead. We have no lasting home here.

(Hebrews 13:14). Paradise is our home and we by our sins are cast out of it. And so we weep. This is Adam's lament – our lament.

Yet, we discover, that we are not left alone outside the gates of Paradise. God did not and never will abandon us. The hymn continues:

“The Savior said to Adam: ‘I do not wish the death of my creation! I desire that all should be saved and come to the knowledge of the truth, for the one who comes to me I shall never cast out!’” “Because man will not bow down to God, God, in His infinite humility, bows down to man.” (Elder Aimilianos). Christ Himself bows down to the little god He created, to Adam, and empties Himself to bring Adam, us, back to Paradise. “All day long, Christ, the Great High Priest, stands with His hands outstretched on the cross on which (we) the little gods have nailed Him. And from that lofty vantage point, He supplicates His heavenly Father on our behalf. Though we crucify Him every day, God prays for us! That, my beloved, is humility!” (Elder Aimilianos)

It is this divine humility which we seek to be every day – a school of humility that is Great Lent especially. This is the likeness to God that leads to forgiveness of sins – us forgiving others and God forgiving us. It is a paradox that we, like Adam, will blame others for their sins but make excuses for our own sins. And so we are cast out. Life-giving

humility is found in making excuses for others' sins and never making excuses for our own. Knowing our own sins, we see to the plank in our own eye and never mind about the speck in our sister's or brother's eye. And so we may enter a place loftier than Paradise, the heavenly kingdom which Christ now bends down to touch the earth. Whereas Adam's food was the fruit of the garden, we eat of the "bread which came down from heaven" (John 6:32-35), hearing Christ's words: Take, eat, drink as He calls us to the communion of paradise which may we all attain in and through Christ Jesus our Lord.