

Great Lent:

Creation, Humanity, and the Fall



“In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth . . . So **God created man in His own image**; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

- **Genesis 1:27**

“But the very essence of the person is the image of God, and this remains in him despite every disfigurement.”

- **St. John of Kronstadt**

The reference point of human value is God - creation of human beings in the Image and Likeness of God gives each human being inestimable value as the handiwork of God and the reflection of the Creator.

While sin mars the Likeness of God, the Image remains in each human person - ‘despite every disfigurement’.



“Human nature also, as it was made to rule the rest, was, by its likeness to the King of all, made as it were a **living image**, partaking with the archetype both in rank and in name, not vested in purple, nor giving indication of its rank by sceptre and diadem (for the archetype itself is not arrayed with these), but instead of the purple robe, **clothed in virtue**, which is in truth the most royal of all raiment, and in place of the sceptre, leaning on the **bliss of immortality**, and instead of the royal diadem, decked with the **crown of righteousness**; so that it is shown to be perfectly like to the beauty of its archetype in all that belongs to the dignity of royalty.”

- **St. Gregory of Nyssa**



“Then God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth.’ So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.”

- Genesis 1:26-27

Man created first, then woman - not as a sub-human slave, nor as identical to him, but as his beloved helper, also sharing the Image of God.

The Fathers of the Church often use the term ‘man’ to refer to humanity, though this refers to both men and women (through reference to Adam from whom all creation came - likewise it is through Christ, the Last Adam, that the new creation is realized in His Body).



“Purity, freedom from passion, blessedness, alienation from all evil, and all those attributes of the like kind which help to form in men the **likeness of God**: with such hues as these did the Maker of His own image mark our nature.”

- **St. Gregory of Nyssa**

Man the crowning work of God's creation, the final thing created. Man combines visible and invisible worlds (St. Maximos the Confessor) as priest of creation (offering creation to God).

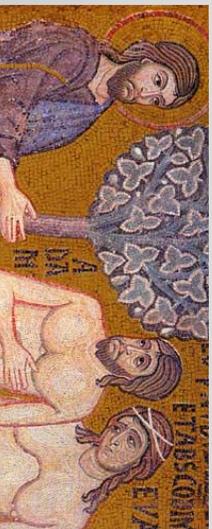
Image and Likeness of God is seen in dominion over the earth, rational reason, and the nous (spiritual part of the soul - communion with God/worship of God).

Man created to walk on two feet to look up to heaven (St. Gregory of Nyssa).



“And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.’”

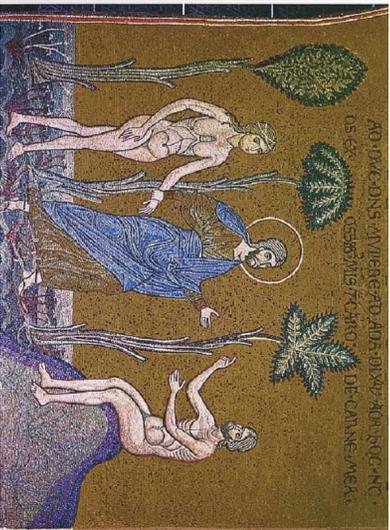
- **Genesis 2:16-17**



“Of one plant you forbade me to eat from, that of which You have said to me of it only do not eat, but according to my will, I did eat. **I put Your Law behind me by my own counsel**, and became slothful towards Your Commandments. I plucked for myself the sentence of death.”

- **St. Gregory the Theologian**

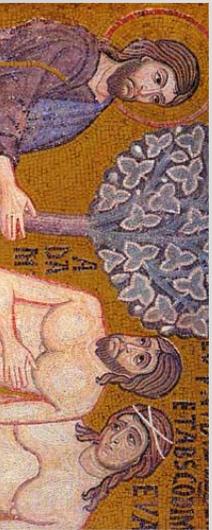
The first human fall is realized and seen in each human person. The story of the first humans is also in some true sense the story of each person. The order of human life and being is reversed: instead of the body following the soul and the soul serving God, the soul is oriented toward the body and the bodily/earthly things.



“Of one plant you forbade me to eat from, that of which You have said to me of it only do not eat, but according to my will, I did eat. **I put Your Law behind me by my own counsel**, and became slothful towards Your Commandments. I plucked for myself the sentence of death.”

- **St. Gregory the Theologian**

Love must be free. Adam and Eve have the full field of life in communion with God, but also the choice not to eat from one tree alone - by following this commandment, they freely showed their love for God.



St. Gregory the Theologian says that the tree was not evil in and of itself, but would have been good if partaken of at the proper time. But God told them at that time to follow His commandment by simply not partaking of this one tree.



“You, for the sake of goodness, brought man into existence out of non-existence, and put him in the **paradise of joy**.”

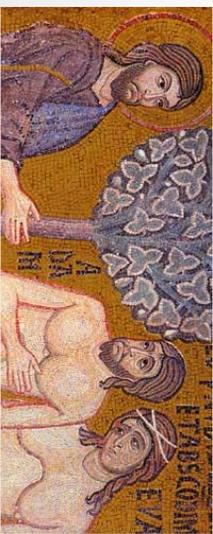
- **St Gregory the Theologian**



‘Paradise of joy’ - the true joy is not in abundance of world goods of themselves, but in communion with God. Use all things to the glory to God, returning God’s gifts to Him with thanksgiving. This is the human vocation (i.e. building churches, prayers before eating - ultimately the Holy Eucharist).

In eating the fruit, man turns the enjoyment of earthly things into an end in and of themselves apart from God’s commandments and thanksgiving to God.

St. Augustine distinguishes ‘use’ of material things (having a higher reference point in God) from their ‘enjoyment’ (in the sense of making an end of them in themselves).



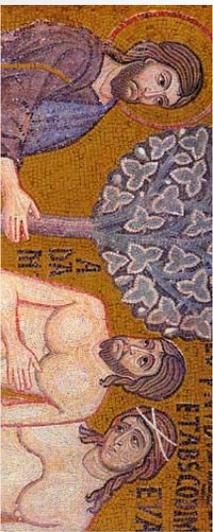
“And He [God] said . . . ‘Have you eaten from the tree of which I commanded you that you should not eat?’ Then the man said, “‘The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate.’” And the Lord God said to the woman, ‘What is this you have done?’ The woman said, ‘The serpent deceived me, and I ate.’”

- **Genesis 3:11-13**



We see here the man failing to take responsibility for his actions. Instead, he blames his wife. This is why the fathers of the Church teach us to take responsibility for our sin as a necessary step on the path of repentance. “Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy on me, the sinner.”

The woman likewise blames the devil. Of course, this is a temptation we also face - to say ‘it was the devil who tempted me’; yes, but it was God who gave the commandment.



“And the Lord said, **‘My Spirit will not strive with men forever’** . . . Then the Lord saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. **And the Lord was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart** . . . but Noah found grace in the eyes of the Lord . . . The earth also was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence. So God looked upon the earth, and indeed it was corrupt; for **all flesh had corrupted their way on the earth.**”

- **Genesis 3:11-13**



St. Cyril of Alexandria saw this as a collective fall of humanity - something that occurred by the sin of Adam and Eve, and then fell even further by the continued sin of humanity.

One commandment - only one tree not to eat from. By this we see that it is not the difficulty of God's laws that causes man to sin, but the sinful choice to follow the ‘deception of the enemy’ by ‘my own counsel’ (St. Gregory the Theologian).

Don't need to look to a distant point in history to see this - in each one of us this is realized. We turn from the good to enjoy the things of the earth apart from reference to God's commandments (this ancient reading of Scripture shows us a clear vision of what is most important in the story of humanity, and of all humans individually).



“Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him. Then the Lord said to Cain, ‘Where is Abel your brother?’ He said, ‘I do not know. Am I my brother’s keeper?’ And He said, ‘What have you done? The voice of your brother’s blood cries out to Me from the ground.’”

- Genesis 4:8-10

In one recorded generation, the initial rebellion against God grew to murder - the killing of the Image of God in a fellow human being. The blood of the innocent Abel cries out to God.

By taking a human life, one assaults God’s Image and cuts short his brother’s opportunity for repentance.



The scribes and Pharisees were 'sons of those who murdered the prophets' since they saw evil in others (those before them) yet did not repent of the evil in themselves ("we would not have been partakers . . .")

"Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! Because you build the tombs of the prophets and adorn the monuments of the righteous, and say, 'If we had lived in the days of our fathers, we would not have been partakers with them in the blood of the prophets.' " Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers' guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How can you escape the condemnation of hell?"

Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that **on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation. "**

- **Matthew 29:36**

The sin of murder finds its apex in the murder of the Son of God and those sent by Him (the Holy Apostles and Martyrs).



“Truly You are **holy** and **most holy**, and there are no bounds to the majesty of Your holiness. You are **holy in all Your works**, for with righteousness and true judgment You have ordered all things for us. For having **made man by taking dust from the earth**, and having **honored him with Your own Image**, O God, You placed him in a **garden of delight**, promising him eternal life and the enjoyment of everlasting blessings in the observance of Your commandments. But when he **disobeyed You**, the true God who had created him, and was led astray by the deception of the serpent becoming subject to death through his own transgressions, You, O God, in Your righteous judgment, **expelled him from paradise into this world**, returning him to the earth from which he was taken, yet providing for him **the salvation of regeneration in Your Christ. For You did not forever reject Your creature whom You made . . .**”

Questions / Discussion