The book of Genesis as a whole, and Genesis 1-3, holds a special interest to me in studying theology. You can search my blog to see how often I comment on a theme from Genesis, and I wrote a long series of reflection on Genesis 1-3 in my book, QUESTIONING GOD. Currently I am reproducing on my blog a series of reflections I wrote on Genesis 4-11. I hope one day to continue by writing reflections on the rest of Genesis beginning with chapter 12.

In this series of blogs I will be quoting and commenting on hymns from the Sunday before Great Lent begins which commemorates the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise. It is a wonderful theme but in Orthodoxy today seems to take a back burner to “Cheesefare” and “Forgiveness Sunday.” The fact is that the Sunday themes of Great Lent reflect several layers of development, with the newer layers being monastic themes, while the oldest layers are catechetical themes. This reflects the historical development which took place in Orthodoxy where Great Lent was originally a time of preparing catechumens for baptism, but as the empires and nations which embraced Orthodoxy lost this more missionary and outreach emphasis, they eventually turned Great Lent inward toward the existing Christians and into a discipline aimed at encouraging Christians to embrace monastic ideals which were often viewed as more fully keeping a Christian way of life. One can readily see this in the Sunday Epistle and Gospel readings where there are Scripture readings which do have a catechetical nature to them mostly from the Gospel According to St. Mark and then there are the newer set of readings which have monastic themes (Sts. John Climacus, Gregory Palamas, and Mary of Egypt). Palamas lived in the 14th Century, which gives us the clear sense that his memory a Sunday theme of Great Lent is relatively recent on the Orthodox scale of time).

The hymns for Vespers on the eve of the Sunday before Great Lent are totally dedicated to the theme of Adam and Eve being expelled from Paradise. So too the Canon from Matins is dedicated to this theme. I thought it worth reproducing these texts throughout Great Lent as well, and offering a few comments on them because they are so important to our understanding of Great Lent, repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ.
Genesis is a book of theology – it is theology in narrative form or as St. Gregory of Nyssa wrote, the book of Genesis is “not so much history as ‘doctrines in the guise of narrative.’” God chooses to reveal what we receive as the doctrines and dogmas about Himself in the form of narrative. Those who reduce Genesis 1-3 to literal lessons in history or try to make it to be science lose the depth and riches of the revelation found in the text.

“O the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways!” (Romans 11:33)

St. John Cassian (d. 435AD) reports one discussion he has with the monks in Egypt regarding the heresy of the Anthropomorphites whose absolute literal reading of Genesis had led them into theological heresy as they took every word deed and action of God described in Genesis 2-3 to be absolute historical fact and thus ended up understanding God in totally human terms. A sympathetic view is offered of the Anthropomorphites whose literalism was seen as resulting from their simplicity – they simply were not able to think in abstract terms so their literalism caused the meaning of Genesis to be hidden from them which led them into theological error. They brought one learned monk to attempt to help these monks out of their heretical reading of the Scriptures.

“He asked him how the Catholic churches of the East interpreted the words in Genesis, ‘Let us make man in our own image and likeness’ (Gn 1:26). Photinus explained how all the leaders of the churches were unanimous in teaching that the image and likeness of God should be understood not in an earthly, literal sense but spiritually. He himself demonstrated the truth of this in a lengthy discourse and with abundant scriptural evidence.”

(CONFERENCES, p 126)

Cassian’s discourse goes on to explain that the problem with the simple, literalist interpretation of the Scriptures doesn’t come from demonic deception but rather from paganism. Paganism gave human form to the gods they worshipped, and when these people converted to Christianity they brought this same simplistic understanding of their gods as humans to the God of Genesis. He says no one reared in the Catholic Tradition of Christianity would make this same mistake.

So as we read Genesis 1-3, we need to recognize the theological import of the text and not overly simplify the text because it is more comfortable to read them in a literal fashion. We Orthodox have the Tradition of the Church in which to read, listen to, comprehend and interpret the Scriptures. The Orthodox hymns commemorating the
Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise are part of the Tradition in which we interpret the Scriptures.

**Vesper Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (1)**

Posted on **February 16, 2010** by **Fr. Ted**

The first blog in the series was entitled *The Expulsion of Adam & Eve from Paradise (Hymns)*.

The hymns for Vespers on the eve of the Sunday before Great Lent are totally dedicated to the theme of Adam and Eve being expelled from Paradise. So too the Canon from Matins is dedicated to this theme. I thought it worth reproducing these texts throughout Great Lent as well, and offering a few comments on them because they are so important to our understanding of Great Lent, repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ.

*THE LORD TOOK A HANDFUL OF DUST FROM THE EARTH.
HE BREATHED INTO IT, AND CREATED ME, A LIVING MAN!
HE MADE ME LORD AND MASTER OF ALL THINGS ON EARTH;
TRULY I ENJOYED THE LIFE OF THE ANGELS!
BUT SATAN THE DECEIVER, IN THE GUISE OF A SERPENT, TEMPTED ME:
I ATE THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT, AND FORFEITED THE GLORY OF GOD.
NOW I HAVE BEEN DELIVERED TO THE EARTH THROUGH DEATH.//
MY COMPASSIONATE LORD, CALL ME BACK TO EDEN!*

The first “Lord I call...” hymn basically recounts the story of Genesis 2-3 as seen through the eyes of Adam. Of interest in the first hymn is that Adam says he “enjoyed the life of the angels.” Angels play no part in Genesis 1-3 and aren’t mentioned at all. God’s interest in Genesis is with humans who do seem to occupy the high point of the Lord’s creation. Humans, not angels, are made in the image and likeness of God. One might even imagine the sentiment of the text being reversed: the angels wishing they enjoyed Adam’s place of favor. Paradise was made by God for His human creatures not for angels.

“Now God did not subject the coming world, about which we are speaking, to angels. But someone has testified somewhere, ‘What are human beings that you are mindful of
them, or mortals, that you care for them? You have made them for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned them with glory and honor, subjecting all things under their feet.” (Hebrews 2:5-8; see also Psalms 8:4-6 and Psalm 144:3-4).

Another point of interest in the hymn: Adam says he was tempted by Satan, not misled by Eve. In Genesis 3:12, when confronted by God for his sin, Adam blamed the woman and God for giving him the woman! In the hymn Adam owns up to what he has done. Adam recognizes his actions have resulted in his mortality.

WHEN THE ENEMY TEMPTED ME,

I DISOBEYED YOUR COMMAND, O LORD.
I EXCHANGED THE GLORY OF MY IMMORTAL BODY FOR SHAME AND NAKEDNESS.
NOW I MUST WEAR GARMENTS OF SKINS AND FIG-LEAVES;
I AM CONDEMNED TO EAT THE BREAD OF BITTER HARDSHIP
BY THE SWEAT OF MY BROW.
THE EARTH IS CURSED, AND BRINGS FORTH THORNS AND HUSKS FOR ME.
LORD, YOU TOOK FLESH FROM THE VIRGIN IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME://
CALL ME BACK AND RESTORE ME TO EDEN!

Again in the 2nd hymn, Adam fully acknowledges his disobedience to God. The text then recognizes a common idea held by the church fathers and some ancient Jewish writers: namely that when Adam lived with God in Paradise he was naked (Paradise was not a naturalist/nudist colony), Adam was clothed by God in a glorious garment (see my Theophany, Baptism and the Garment of Salvation). Adam lost the right to wear this divinely made garment and ends up being clothed in mortality, struggling to survive.

At the incarnation, the Word of God puts on flesh which becomes a glorious garment of salvation for all of us. In the incarnation we are given the possibility to be glorious clothed again by God. “As many as have been baptized into Christ, have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). We also celebrate God’s putting on flesh as a garment at Vespers in the Prokeimenon: “The Lord is king, He is robed in majesty.” The flesh Christ has taken on is made majestic by Christ who clothes Himself with light as with a garment.

“For this perishable nature must put on the imperishable, and this mortal nature must put on immortality. When the perishable puts on the imperishable, and the mortal puts
on immortality, then shall come to pass the saying that is written: ‘Death is swallowed up in victory’” (1 Corinthians 15:53-54).

**Vesper Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (2)**

 Posted on February 18, 2010 by Fr. Ted

The hymns for Vespers on the eve of the Sunday before Great Lent are totally dedicated to the theme of Adam and Eve being expelled from Paradise. So too the Canon from Matins for this Sunday is dedicated to this theme. Below are some of the “Lord I call...” texts with a few of my own reflections - the texts are so important to our understanding of Great Lent, repentance and salvation in Jesus Christ.

One theme running through Great Lent is that of exile and looking for the promised homeland. The texts commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise relive the longing of Adam for the homeland from which he was expelled.

PARADISE, GARDEN OF DELIGHT AND BEAUTY,
DWELLING-PLACE MADE PERFECT BY GOD,
UNENDING GLADNESS AND ETERNAL JOY,
THE HOPE OF THE PROPHETS AND THE HOME OF THE SAINTS,
BY THE MUSIC OF YOUR RUSTLING LEAVES BESEECH
THE CREATOR OF ALL
TO OPEN TO ME THE GATES WHICH MY SINS HAVE CLOSED,
THAT I MAY PARTAKE OF THE TREE OF LIFE AND GRACE/
WHICH WAS GIVEN TO ME IN THE BEGINNING.

Paradise is described as being in full communion with God – even its “rustling leaves” speak to the Creator. It is this total and intimate communion with God which humanity lost through sin. The impression is that Paradise is not so much a place as a state of being, and a state of being in communion with God - very similar to notions of heaven (or hell) that we find in some Orthodox theologians (see my blog series which began with [Hell, No?](http://www.vespertexts.com/post/10963267955/hell-no)).

The notion of exile so obvious in the story of Adam’s Expulsion from Paradise is repeated throughout the Scriptures: the Israelites in slavery in Egypt longing for the promised land, and then later in exile from Jerusalem while in Babylonian captivity. There is a strong sense in the Scriptures that earth is not our real homeland. Slavery,
captivity and exile are all in the experience of the people of God in this world. We look for that world to come in which we will be at home. We are sojourners on earth walking the toilsome path to God’s Kingdom.

The Great Fast reminds us of our being in exile, and yet we have become addicted to this fallen world and find it so seductive and alluring. We hate the fast and having to give up any of the things of this world because we value them more than the Kingdom of God.

“Adulterers! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Therefore whoever wishes to be a friend of the world becomes an enemy of God” (James 4:4).

We move spiritually from earth to heaven, from death to life as we sing at Pascha. The spiritual life, like the Divine Liturgy itself, is movement toward the Kingdom of God.

ADAM WAS EXILED FROM PARADISE THROUGH DISOBEDIENCE;
HE WAS DRIVEN FROM ETERNAL BLISS, DECEIVED BY THE WORDS OF EVE;
HE SAT NAKED AND WEEPING BEFORE THE GATES OF PARADISE.
LET US HASTEN TO ENTER THE SEASON OF FASTING;
LET US CAREFULLY OBEY THE GOSPEL COMMANDS,
THAT WE MAY BE MADE ACCEPTABLE TO CHRIST OUR GOD,
AND REGAIN OUR HOME IN EDEN.

“Adam” as is well known is not only the name of the first human. It also is the Hebrew word for “a human.” Adam’s story is our story. His story is not so much ancient history of the origins of humankind as it is a prototypical story of what it is to be human in a fallen and imperfect world, exiled from our Creator and the homeland he created for us.

Great Lent is a time in which we bring to the forefront of our thinking and imagination our own exile from Paradise. It is our sins which keep us out of paradise just as his sins closed the gates of paradise to Adam. We experience what he experienced because we all share the same human nature. It is not that we all share the guilt of the original sin, rather we all are guilty by our own sins. God is not so unfair as to condemn us all for the sin of Adam, nor has He predestined us each to sin.
We share with each other that tendency toward evil which caused God Himself to feel
grief and regret in His own heart (Genesis 6:6). It is the wickedness in our own hearts
that cause us to go astray, to depart from God and to go into exile. It is Christ who calls
us to repentance – to a change of heart. The attraction of evil will not depart from us in
this world, but we do have the ability to recognize the evil in our hearts and to seek out
God. Great Lent is a time for us to seek that which we have lost.

“Remember then from what you have fallen; repent, and do the works you did at first”
(Revelation 2:5).

Vesper Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (3)

The hymns for Vespers on the eve of the Sunday before Great Lent are totally dedicated
to the theme of Adam and Eve being expelled from Paradise. The very basis for
“Forgiveness Sunday” is found in “of what do we humans need to be forgiven by God?”
The Story of Adam and Eve is our story – it’s not about how humans behaved “once
upon a time.” Adam and Eve are prototypical human beings, their story is our story;
there story is about us and how we behave. We are their children, not foreigners to
them and how they behaved.

**ADAM SAT BEFORE THE GATES OF EDEN,**

**BEWAILING HIS NAKEDNESS AND CRYING OUT:**

**WOE TO ME! I HAVE LISTENED TO WICKED DECEIT;**

**I HAVE LOST MY GLORY, AND NOW AM DRIVEN AWAY!**

**WOE TO ME! MY OPEN-MINDEDNESS HAS LEFT ME NAKED AND CONFUSED!**

**NO LONGER WILL I ENJOY YOUR DELIGHTS, PARADISE;**

**NO LONGER CAN I SEE MY LORD, MY GOD AND CREATOR.**

**HE FORMED ME FROM DUST, AND NOW TO THE DUST I RETURN!**
I BEG YOU, COMPASSIONATE LORD:

HAVE MERCY ON ME, WHO HAVE FALLEN!

In these hymns Adam laments having lost through sin “his glory.” What exactly is the glory of the human which Adam has lost?

“For a man ought not to cover his head, since he is the image and glory of God; but woman is the glory of man” *(1 Corinthians 11:7).*

St. Paul connects human men to the “glory of God”: a male is “the image and glory of God.” This is an intriguing claim of St. Paul for nowhere in the Old Testament is the Glory of God connected with the creation of humankind {let alone with males (Greek: *aner*) only – in Genesis 1:26-27 and 5:1-2 it is clear that humans (Greek: *anthropon*), both male and female, are created in the image of God}. However, leaving aside St. Paul’s rereading (rewriting!) of Genesis 1 and 5 (which goes way beyond the scope of this blog), let us further consider Paul’s connecting humanity to the glory of God.

“... since all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God...” *(Romans 3:23)*

“...through whom we have obtained access to this grace in which we stand; and we boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God” *(Romans 5:2).*

“And all of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit” *(2 Corinthians 3:18).*

St. Paul has humans falling short of the glory of God through sin. This along with the Romans 5:2 claim that we hope in sharing the glory of God suggests that for St. Paul, humanity’s sharing the glory of God was an envisioned future event (See also 1 John 3:2 where in the future we Christians shall be like Jesus when he comes in His glory). We “are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another” *(2 Cor 3:18)* – this is an ongoing process whose culmination has not yet been attained.

St. Paul is at times credited or blamed with causing some Western Christians to embrace an idea of the total depravity of humankind because of his exposition on “original sin.” Indeed his reading and use of the Genesis 2-3 story of the Fall of humans appears to have been his own creative insight into Genesis, humanity, Christ and salvation. This insight led him to realize that the purpose of the
Law had been fulfilled in Jesus Christ, and that strict adherence to the Law could never perfect humanity in God’s eyes, nor was it intended to. St. Paul is unfairly blamed with having formed the notion of the total depravity of mankind, for that phrase doesn’t occur in his writings. On the other hand, St. Paul’s reading of the Old Testament does cause him to connect humanity to the “glory of God”, something which the Western “total depravity of man” thinkers completely ignore. St. Paul has a rather exalted view of humanity!

Still St. Paul seems to connect humanity with the glory of God as something emerging and to be completed in the future. The hymns of Adam’s expulsion from Paradise have him lamenting a glory which was lost, not one to be gained in the future. The hymnographers build upon the ideas of St. Paul in reflecting on what happened to humanity as a result of sin. They see the original and natural state of humans as having shared in the glory of God – a state which was lost along with so much else when humanity through sin fell from the grace of living with God in Paradise.

Humans created by God to share in His life and glory are reduced through their own sin to inert matter, as Adam in the hymn laments:

HE FORMED ME FROM DUST, AND NOW TO THE DUST I RETURN!

That however is not the end of the story as we well know.

“Thus it is written, ‘The first man Adam became a living being’; the last Adam became a life-giving spirit. But it is not the spiritual which is first but the physical, and then the spiritual. The first man was from the earth, a man of dust; the second man is from heaven. As was the man of dust, so are those who are of the dust; and as is the man of heaven, so are those who are of heaven. Just as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the man of heaven” (1 Corinthians 15:45-49).

**Vesper Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (4)**

Posted on February 22, 2010 by Fr. Ted

One theme common in the liturgical texts of Great Lent (found in the [Lenten Triodion](https://www.orthodox.net/lenten-triodion.html)) is that of exile: we humans live in a world in which we are not fully at home. We recognize that this world is a fallen world, a world in which human desire is at enmity
with God, and so with Adam, expelled from God’s Paradise, we long for the time when we can live fully at peace and in communion with God.

ADAM ATE THE FORBIDDEN FRUIT AND WAS DRIVEN FROM PARADISE.

HE SAT OUTSIDE, WEEPING BITTERLY:

WOE TO ME! WHAT WILL BECOME OF ME, A WORTHLESS MAN?
I DISOBEYED ONE COMMAND OF MY MASTER, AND LOST EVERY GOOD THING!
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!
THE SAVIOR SAID TO HIM:
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 HE WHO COMES TO ME I SHALL NEVER CAST OUT!

The theme of exile fits well into the Lenten theme of repentance – it reminds us that our sins do have consequences. Adam committed one sin and is removed from Paradise. We commit various sins on a daily basis and hardly think twice about their consequences, so sure are we that we will “die and go to heaven” simply by claiming to be Christians. The story of Adam and Eve warns us that sin can exclude us from the presence of God. All of Adam’s sorrow and lamentations outside the gates of Paradise could not gain him re-admittance to the Eden.

But note also, expulsion from Paradise did not mean he had forgotten Eden. Even though he couldn’t even see the flowers of the Garden of Delight any more, Adam in the hymns longs for Paradise. We too living in this same world which Adam occupied after
his fall from grace would do spiritually well to cultivate a similar longing for the Kingdom of God. So Jesus teaches us in Matthew 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled.” We must hunger and thirst for the goodness of God’s Kingdom. In Lent we endeavor to stimulate our hunger, not for food, but to remind ourselves what it feels like to hunger for something so that we can know what we should be feeling like in terms of our desire for Christ and the Kingdom.

MY MAKER AND REDEEMER, CHRIST THE LORD, WAS BORN OF YOU, MOST PURE VIRGIN!
BY ACCEPTING MY NATURE, HE FREED ADAM FROM HIS ANCIENT CURSE!
UNCEASINGLY WE MAGNIFY YOU AS THE MOTHER OF GOD!
REJOICE, CELESTIAL JOY!
REJOICE, O LADY!
THE PROTECTION, INTERCESSION AND SALVATION OF OUR SOULS!

In Patristic theology, it is not only in the death and resurrection of Christ that we find our salvation. For the claim about Christ from the beginning is that He is the Son of God in the flesh.
“The beginning of the good news of Jesus Christ, the Son of God” (Mark 1:1).
“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. . . . And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father’s only son, full of grace and truth” (John 1:1-4, John 1:14).
By becoming flesh, by accepting our human nature, Christ already began the process of salvation: redeeming human nature, and re-uniting fallen humanity back to God.

Next: Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (1)

Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (1)
Posted on February 25, 2010 by Fr. Ted
In this series of blogs I will be quoting and commenting on hymns from the Sunday before Great Lent begins which commemorates the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from
Paradise. The first blog in the series was entitled The Expulsion of Adam & Eve from Paradise (Hymns). The blog immediately preceding this one is Vesper Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (4).

In CANTICLE ONE of the Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise we encounter the familiar theme that Adam’s sinning did not just open his eyes to his nakedness but actually stripped him of the glorious garments with which God had originally clothed him.

Come today, my wretched soul; weep over your deeds, remembering how once you were stripped naked in Eden and cast out from delight and unending joy. The Canon is Adam’s lamentation as he sits outside the gates of Paradise sorrowfully considering what he has lost through sin. The Canon however will change voice and person, sometimes it is Adam speaking and sometimes the narrator is talking to Adam, but in a play on images, it is also clear in the text that the speaker is also each of us. Adam speaks for us all as the prototypical first human being. Adam’s story is our story, and the story of the Fall is not ancient history but is the ongoing story of each of us to this day.

We each have fallen from grace and soiled the divine image of God which was impressed upon each of us when we were brought into being. We each need to repent of our misdeeds – Adam’s regret will not bring about our salvation. Adam can’t repent for each of us, but we can learn from his repentance about how we each need to approach God and weep for what our sins have done to others and to ourselves.

In the wealth of Your goodness, Creator and Lord, You planted in Eden the sweetness of Paradise, and bade me take my delight in fair and pleasant fruits that never pass away.

An interesting image in the Canon: the pleasant fruits of God’s planted Garden in Eden themselves never pass away. Does this imply that immortality extended to all creation not just to human souls, or to all living things including the fruit of the garden? Or is the text speaking metaphorically and spiritually about the fruits of the garden – they were not empirical realities but spiritual ones? The sense of God creating one original good world (Paradise) for the humans to live in and then casting them out into the evil
fallen world is more of a non-Jewish (Babylonian) one than a biblical one. Israel was convinced the world we live in was made by the good Creator and is good itself. But Genesis does not directly address any issue of immortality – not of humans let alone of the rest of the created order. St. John Chrysostom does say however that the threat of death from God to Adam should he eat of the fruit of the Forbidden Tree makes no sense if Adam was going to die anyway. So perhaps in a roundabout way the text suggests humans were meant to be immortal beings.

Woe to you, my wretched soul!
You received authority from God
to take your pleasure in the joys of Eden,
but He commanded you not to eat the fruit of knowledge.
Why have you transgressed the law of God?

The voice and perspective of the canon hymns can be either Adam’s or anyone of us and it can be both. We inhabit not a perfect paradise, but a fallen world which is the source of much grief for humanity. Yet God loves the world and sees it as redeemable and savable. The world is not totally depraved. The first canticle concludes by moving away from Adam to looking at one of his descendents, Mary, the Theotokos.

You are a daughter of Adam by descent, Virgin Theotokos, but by grace the Mother of Christ our God.
I am an exile from Eden:
Call me back again.
There is hope for humanity for humans are capable of working synergistically with God for the salvation of the world as well as their own souls.

Next: Matins Texts of the Expulsion of Adam & Eve (2)

Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (2)

The Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise explores themes of what it means to be human. Adam is treated not merely as the historically first human being, but as a prototype of all human beings. His story is
the story of each of us – relating why our relationship to God is what it is, and why the earth we live in is not some perfect paradise – why didn’t God create a paradise for us? He did, so Genesis says and so Great Lent reminds us, but we lost that Garden of Delight through OUR sin. In Canticle 3 we find these words:

Long ago the crafty serpent envied my honor
and whispered deceit in the ear of Eve.
Woe is me! I was led astray
and banished by her from the dance of life.
Note the play on switching between Eve, Adam and us: the serpent whispers to Eve, and I am deceived laments Adam! His lament is our lamentation as well. Humans who share the same nature, share common weaknesses, common temptations and sin. Many images are contained in the above verses. There is an explanation offered for why Satan deceived humanity into sinning - it was envy. Satan a glorious angel who stood in God’s presence was envious of the attention God gave to humans, and so Satan set out to destroy those he jealously perceived to be his rival for God’s attention. Satan’s motivation for attaching humanity turns out not to be the result of His love for death and destruction, but because of his self centered narcissism. Satan could not love, nor could he believe that the God who is love would have enough love for him.

Satan “whispered deceit in the ear of Eve.” A gentle touch – temptation comes to us often in soft and subtle ways. We might be repulsed if it came at us in blaring, glaring evil. We are deceived not only by what we see and hear but by who speaks to us and how. The spiritual warfare against temptation requires tremendous counterintelligence
on our part. The enemy is not seducing us with bombs of destruction or loud threats of hell fire, but with whispers of deceit. Too much of modern Christianity portrays Satan as almost God’s equal and evil opposite – all powerful, controlling our lives by violently forcing us into sin. Satan’s methods however lie not in the ability to force us to do things (he cannot), but in his subtle deception. In our baptismal exorcisms we defiantly proclaim Satan doesn’t even have power over swine. We however can choose to be deceived.

Satan whispers in Eve’s ear and deceit becomes incarnate in her actions. Disregarding the commandment of the Creator who loves her, she follows the suggestion of Satan (He never told her to do anything, he only hints that God lied). The incarnation of deceit will be reversed and defeated when the Virgin Mary listens to the Archangel Gabriel, allowing his word to enter into her ear, through her heart, into her womb where the Word becomes flesh: Jesus, the incarnate God.

One final beautiful image and metaphor – the dance of life. Adam is said to be banished from the dance of life. Paradise was not only a place of life-giving foods, but of joy in which humans experience God through all our senses, through all our physical motions, through all we say and do and are.

Woe to you, my wretched soul!
How did you not recognize the craftiness of the enemy?
How did you not perceive his deceit and envy?
But you were darkened in mind and transgressed the commandment of your Maker.

Another theme of warning from Great Lent – humans are capable of being deceived. We need to learn a certain wisdom – a holy skepticism about our own desires, wants, cravings, perceived needs. We must learn discernment. Just because something looks good or feels good or seems pleasurable, does not mean it has goodness in itself (See Genesis 3:6 - “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.”) The warning of the hymn is to us – it doesn’t do Adam any good and cannot change what happened in the past. “Adam” is long dead, but we the children of the first
human can learn the lesson – Adam’s story is our story and is about us. Treating Genesis 2-3 as purely literal history lessons empties them of their value to the sons and daughters of Adam who still live on the same earth he did – namely us! We learn the story of Adam and Eve, not to regret the sins of our ancestors, but in order ourselves to avoid sin and to embrace the life in God. It is we who have to learn how to live on this earth in a godly fashion – the story is of no value to the first humans, Adam and Eve! “All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work” (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The usefulness of scripture, the value of inspiration, is not that it literally reports history, but even more that it teaches, reprovès, corrects and trains us. The importance of the Genesis 3 account of the Fall of humanity is not that it gives us an exact historical account of what happened, but that it teaches us about our lives today so that we might be equipped for every good work, not just informed about the past.

**Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (3)**

The Matins Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise explores the issues of what effect sin has had on all of humanity. It is not looking just at the original sin of Adam and Eve, as if that occurred in some vacuum. Rather the texts understand Adam and Eve as prototypical (and thus typical!) of all human beings. The sin of any of us and all of us has the effect of sin on all of us. The texts below are from the “Sessional” Hymns of Matins.

**ADAM WAS CAST OUT FROM THE DELIGHT OF PARADISE:**
**WHEN HE BROKE THE COMMANDMENT OF THE MASTER IN UNCONTROLLED DESIRE,**
**HIS TAKING OF FOOD BECAME BITTER,**
**AND HE WAS CONDEMNED TO WORK THE EARTH FROM WHICH HE HIMSELF WAS TAKEN.**
**HE ATE HIS BREAD IN TOIL AND SWEAT:**
**THEREFORE LET US LOVE ABSTINENCE,**
**THAT WE MAY ENTER THROUGH THE GATE,//**
AND NOT WEEP AS HE DID OUTSIDE OF PARADISE.
On the most literal level, the sin of Adam and Eve involved their own passion – their desire for the forbidden food which led them to break the “fast” God had imposed on them in Paradise. God gave them one rule in Paradise – eat all you want of any of the trees except for the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil; for if you eat the fruit of this one tree, you will die. The appetite of Eve and Adam got the better of them. Nowhere in Genesis is there any indication that they ate of any other fruit of God’s Garden – they were given free rein to eat any, all as much as they desired of the rest of the fruit. They were told to abstain from the fruit of the one tree, and that is the very fruit they grabbed and ate in defiance of God. Thus for the Patristic and monastic hymnographers, abstinence, fasting, self control and self deny are the antidote for what ails humanity.

NOW THE SEASON OF VIRTUES HAS COME,
AND THE JUDGE IS AT THE DOOR.
LET US NOT HOLD BACK WITH A DARKENED FACE,
BUT OFFERING TEARS, CONTRITION AND GIVING OF ALMS
LET US KEEP THE FAST, AND LET US CRY:
OUR SINS ARE MORE IN NUMBER THAN THE SANDS OF THE SEA,/\ BUT FORGIVE EACH OF US, THAT WE MAY RECEIVE AN INCORRUPTIBLE CROWN,
SAVIOR OF ALL!

The activities prescribed for Great Lent for all who want to be disciples of Christ instead of just children of Adam and Eve: repentance, contrition, tears, almsgiving, fasting and begging mercy from God. Now we know the result of sin. Unlike Eve and Adam, we have no excuse if we continue sinning. God has offered us all a way back to Him through repentance. We will be judged based upon whether we accept His offer or not.

We also can see in these texts why fasting was of such significance to early Christians. Based upon their reading of the Genesis text, they saw the human sin as not only disobedience to God, but also as humans selfishly and self-centeredly following their own desires, passions, wants, and cravings. Fasting is the effort to say “No!” to oneself.
Then Jesus told his disciples, “If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me. ... For what will it profit them if they gain the whole world but forfeit their life? Or what will they give in return for their life? (Matthew 16:24-26)

Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (4)

The Matins Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise contains many usual devices which Orthodox poets and hymnographers use to convey the sacramental nature of creation. In Canticle Four, the texts have the beauty and glory of the Paradisiacal Garden weeping for the fallen Adam and for all of humanity. This is not purely anthropomorphic imagery. Rather there is a very strong theological sense that humanity is not separated from the rest of creation which did not rebel against God. Humans are forever connected to the rest of created order, even though humans sin. Humans were to be the mediators between God and the created cosmos, and thus the rest of creation was reliant on humanity for its own union with the Creator. However, fallen creation is still sacramental in nature – it potentially still can bear divinity and be united to it. This is the truth at the heart of the theology of the incarnation, of salvation as theosis, and of the holy icons. Salvation consists not in escaping our bodies and physical nature but in redeeming the empirical world, transfiguring and transforming it in Christ and through the Holy Spirit.

Ranks of angels,  
beauty of Paradise and all the glory of the garden:  
weep for me, for I was led astray in my misery  
and rebelled against God.  
Blessed meadow, trees and flowers planted by God,  
O sweetness of Paradise:  
let your leaves, like eyes, shed tears on my behalf,  
for I am naked and a stranger to God’s glory.  
To understand this poetic imagery, one need only call to mind Romans 8:19-23:
For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the children of God; for the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to decay and will obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. We know that the whole creation has been groaning in labor pains until now; and not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the first fruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly while we wait for adoption, the redemption of our bodies.

Human sin, no matter how much each individual wants to insist that it is, is not just between the sinner and God. For all humans share the same nature, and the sin of any one individual touches all of humanity. Humanity in turn shares the same created nature with the rest of the cosmos and thus what humans do affects all of the created order. This is the basic Christian theology concerning sin and salvation as expressed in Romans 5:12-21 and 1 Corinthians 15:22-50.

Precious Paradise,
I no longer see you, nor delight in your joy and splendor, for I have angered my Creator, and have been driven out naked into the world.
Again, we encounter in the above text both the themes of exile and nakedness. We realize that though we live in God's creation on earth, we still are in exile in this world because we lack the total union with God for which God created us. Human nudity in this thinking is not equated with some natural, innocent state, but rather with being exposed as false gods. We are not in control of the universe but rather are subjected to the forces of nature, of hostile elementary spirits, and even of our own passions and desires. See 2 Corinthians 5:1-10 where it is completely clear that salvation does not lead to our becoming naked, but rather to our being further clothed – as the Patristic writers often saw it as our being given back the glorious garments with which God clothed us in Paradise. In baptism, the sinner goes naked into the water and is buried with Christ, but he/she is then raised with Christ and puts on Christ who is our robe of light. It is the Theotokos and Ever Virgin Mary who gives Christ His body which becomes for us our salvation.
Holy Lady, you opened to all the faithful the gates of paradise which Adam closed of old through his transgression:
Open to me the gates of mercy!

**Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (5)**

The Matins Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise explains that the reason humans were deceived is because Satan of old envied the human relationship with God and the envy drove him to endeavor to murder the humans. Genesis itself does not connect the serpent in Paradise with Satan, but later tradition does (as in the Book of Revelation, certainly connects Satan to the serpent and to being the deceiver of humankind. For example, see Revelation 12:9, 20:10). Even St. Paul only connects the Fall of Eve to the deception of the clever serpent, but he does not explicitly mention Satan (2 Corinthians 11:3). In Canticle Five, we find these words:

Of old, the enemy who hates mankind envied me for the life of happiness I had in Paradise. Taking the form of a serpent, he caused me to stumble and made me a stranger to eternal glory.

In the book of Job Satan is some kind of member of the heavenly court who works as a prosecuting attorney of sorts, trying to show God that the humans He loves so much are not worthy of His love. Later tradition ascribes much more malice to the actions of Satan. The above text has Satan hating mankind and so acting in malice aforethought against the humans to destroy us.

The exact explanation for the Fall of humanity is hard to reason through. If God is all powerful and all good, why didn’t He stop the Fall from happening? If humans are created in God’s image and likeness, breathing God’s breath, and seen as very good in God’s eyes, how is it that we make so many bad choices. The questions are difficult, and the hymns of the Expulsion of Adam & Eve consider one possibility – humanity has an enemy who works hard to turn us against God and God against us.
I weep and lament in soul, 
shedding abundant tears with my eyes, 
when I reflect upon the nakedness
that is mine through the transgression.
The text in putting words of lamentation in Adam’s mouth is offering to each of us a
proper attitude in approaching God as sinners seeking His mercy. The text suggest that
we live in a fallen world because we each sin, not just because Adam sinned. Each of us
needs to reflect upon our own sinfulness and to come to repentance, that change of
heart and mind in which we willing undertake a new direction in order to overcome the
consequences of our sin.

I was fashioned out of the earth by the hand of God
and told in my wretchedness that to the earth I should return again.
Who would not weep for me!
I am cast out from God’s presence, exchanging Eden for hell.
One aspect of our humanity which we have lost through sin is being something more
than simply dust. God breathed into us His breath/Spirit, vivifying us (as we sing in one
Orthodox hymn – “Every soul is enlivened by the Holy Spirit”). But in Genesis 6:3, God
determines that His breath is not to stay in humankind forever, but only for a limited
duration. And when the breath of God departs from us, we die and our soul too is
separated from our body. This disintegration of the human into separated body, soul,
and spirit is the undoing of the creation of human beings as described in Genesis
2:7.

Undefiled Mother of God,
we all proclaim you in faith as the mystical bridal chamber of glory.
Therefore I entreat you: Raise me up, for I am fallen,
and make me dwell in the bridal chamber of Paradise.
The effect of human sin is to leave us naked of God’s grace and exposed to
the further deleterious effects of sin. The Virgin Mary, Mother of the
God-man Jesus, stands in stark contrast to the rest of humanity in
history. For though being the same flesh as us, she lived in such a way as
to find favor in God’s eyes. Though being a child of Adam and Eve, she shows it is
possible for humanity to reject a way of sin, self-centeredness and separation from God.

Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (6)
The Matins Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise mentions a theme found in Patristic Writers that Adam and Eve in Paradise were given by God divine garments to wear based on a notion that to be in God’s presence one would need special garments as were normally required for being in the presence of an earthly emperor or king. Nudity in this thinking was not connected with innocence and what is natural, but rather with being disrespectfully and indecently exposed. The divinely woven garments in some sense protect the human from the pure holiness of God, while enabling the humans to stand in God’s presence and insuring they can stand there because the provided garments are a sign of God’s favor.

In Your compassion, Savior,
You clothed me in Eden with a divinely woven garment;
but persuaded by the devil, I neglected Your commandment and was stripped naked in my wretchedness.
The story of the Fall in Genesis 3 explains to humans today why we don’t live in the presence of God and why the world is not a Paradise for us but rather a difficult place to live – where sickness, sighing and sorrow are our constant experience. Stripped of God’s glorious garments, Adam realizes his puny nakedness in the face of the God’s loving holiness. Adam is exposed as the emperor – the god wannabe – who has no clothes. The realization of what he has lost brings Adam to sorrowful lamentation and repentance. The story is not Adam’s alone, but is the story of every human being and why we each live outside of a perfect Paradise which we can easily imagine a loving God should have created for us. He did; we have been exiled from it because of our continued sinfulness. Now Great Lent is a season for us to remember what we have lost, been exiled from, and blocked from re-entering because of our sins. We humans cannot re-open the gates of Paradise, only God can do that for us. These Lenten Hymns do not leave the sorrowful lamentation in Adam’s mouth, for the hymns acknowledge we are in the same sinful and fallen condition as Adam, the prototypical human being.
You have departed far from God through your carelessness, miserable soul;
you have been deprived of the delight of Paradise and parted from the angels;
you have been led down into corruption. How you are fallen!
Have mercy, Almighty God,
and take pity on the work of Your hands.
I have cut myself off from the choir of Your angels;
but I entreat You, loving Lord: Do not reject me.
The hymns see Adam’s fall as the story of us all. In fact more than being a historical account of the first human ancestor, the hymns indicate Adam’s story is our story. The story of Genesis 3 is not so much ancient history, but the story of you and me today. It is the story of our own experience of this world and separation and alienation from God, from each other, from creation. A literal reading of Genesis 3 will miss that point. Orthodox tradition clearly presents us with the story of what it is to be human, what it means to be human, and what humans can aspire to if they are willing to repent and overcome their self-centered sinfulness.

Mary chosen by God, and Queen of the world, you have borne the Lord who is King and Redeemer of all. I am a prisoner and an exile from the glory of Paradise: Call me back, I entreat you! The Virgin Mary is the one human whose life was such that God favored her to be the mother of His Son. Through her God re-establishes communion with His fallen human creatures. Her womb becomes Paradise where God and humanity are again united in communion. Through her the gates of Paradise are re-opened, and all of us who are disciples of Christ can experience that communion with God that Adam and Eve knew in Paradise. Through her we experience the salvation God accomplished for His human creatures. This is why the Orthodox offer her such laudatory praise.

**Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (7)**

The Matins Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise offers us a particular explanation for why an all good God did not created for us humans, his favored creatures, a “better” world – free of sickness, sorrow, sighing and death. The Patristic reading of the Genesis 3 account of the Fall of
Adam and Eve explains to us why the world is what it is – a world in which humans suffer and in which humans are mortal beings. The reading is that the world we live in is not the world that God especially prepared for us, but is a fallen world; this is the world to which we were banished and exiled because we sinned and could not live in God’s Paradise because we were unwilling to obey God’s rules and instead wanted to be God. In abandoning the favored position in which God put us to grasp a position which was not ours to take, we not only failed to be God but we lost our position as human mediators between God and His creation. We were not satisfied with being in God’s image and likeness, we wanted to be God and displace Him so as not to have to answer to Him. Instead we lost our position and fell to the position of being more like all of the other creatures of the world. We now answer to our DNA like all the rest of living creation, rather than being in God’s likeness.

Lord, the only Lover of mankind,
At the beginning You honored the work of Your hands
with every kind of gift:
But alas! With his hissing the hateful serpent deceived us,
and stripped us of the blessings we had received.
The Genesis narrative offers to us an explanation of why the world we live in is like it is. We spend too much time reading Genesis as ancient history whereas it is telling us about our lives today. We humans through sin have failed to live us to God’s purpose for us. We have followed the desires and passions of our DNA, and so God has allowed us to live at that level – dust we are and unto dust we shall return.

Why did you listen to bitter counsel,
and disobey the divine command?
You have grieved God, O miserable soul: Woe to you!
Yet you were created to glorify Him with the angels forever
Again the texts can be read as both Adam’s lamentation over what happened to him personally AND the lamentation of each of us because Adam is our prototype and each of us is Adam. Adam’s experience is the experience of each human being.

You were appointed ruler over the wild beasts and creeping things:
then why did you speak with a creature that crept on the earth, destroying souls?
And why did you take the destroying enemy as your counselor?
My wretched soul, how you have been deceived!
In Genesis God gifts the humans with having dominion over all of the animals on earth – this is the favored position of humanity in God’s creation. Humans however have not shown an ability to rule over their own passions and desires, let alone the rest of creation. We have allowed our physical bodies to deceive us – to make us think that the empirical world is all there is to life and so we neglect our souls and the breath of God in us. We cater to our body’s craving and desires and allow these passions and appetites to rule over us. Thus the period of Great Lent, of self denial, abstinence and fasting, is a time for us to learn how to regain dominion over our selves. We were created to be relational beings – beings capable of freely loving one another. When we allow our passions and desires to rule us we become selfish and self centered, we become less than human and fail to love God and one another. This is the Patristic “literal” reading of Genesis 1-3. In Christ we are trying to learn how to be fully human – to become what God created us to be: beings who share in the divine life and who live in love.

Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (8)
Posted on March 22, 2010 by Fr. Ted
The Matins Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise takes into careful consideration Genesis 3:6: “So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate; and she also gave some to her husband, who was with her, and he ate.” From Eve’s self-centered point of view, taking the fruit looked all good to her. She ignores the fact that she is created as a relational being and ignores the implication of her disobedience for her relationships. She chooses self-love over true love. (true love is focused on someone other than oneself). The results are disastrous for relationships and the result is a disintegrating and fractured world – humans separated from God and from creation, males separated from female, and even each person divided against themselves (See Romans 7:15-25 in which St. Paul describes the inner spiritual warfare).

When I took my fill of eating, the taste of the fruit of knowledge in Eden seemed sweet,
but its end was gall. Woe to you, wretched soul!
See how uncontrolled desire has made you an exile from Paradise!
The hymns though acknowledging that sin has exiled us from Paradise, beg God to at least let us see the glory from which we fell. The assumption seems to be that if at least we can still see Paradise, even if we are barred from entering it, we will long for it, repent, and keep out eyes on God. Exile thus has a redeeming nature to it.

God of all and Lord of mercy:
Look in compassion on my lowliness
and do not send me far away from Eden;
but may I see the glory from which I fell.
Thinking about what we have lost through sin will bring us to repentance: thus the value of Confession where we acknowledge the very things that separate us from God and prohibit our return to the Paradise from which we each have fallen.

I weep, groan and lament
as I look upon the cherubim with the sword of flame
set to guard the gate of Eden against all transgressors.
Woe is me! I cannot enter,
unless You grant me freedom to approach, O Savior.
I boldly put my trust
in the abundance of Your mercies, Christ my Savior,
and in the Blood that flowed from Your divine side;
for through Your Blood, loving Lord,
You have sanctified the nature of mortal man,
and have opened to those who worship You, the gates of Paradise
that were closed of old to Adam.
The cross and the tomb of Christ represent for us a return to Paradise. We honor them in the liturgical worship of the Church. We each learn from them the importance of being willing ourselves to take up the cross and to follow Christ.
The Matins Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise frequently mentions an ancient Patristic and Jewish idea that when Eve and Adam ate the forbidden fruit they lost the glorious garments of light with which God had clothed them and suddenly saw themselves as naked – a condition of which they were previously unaware.

LORD, I HAVE DISOBEYED YOUR COMMANDMENT IN MY WRETCHEDNESS.
WOE IS ME! I HAVE BEEN STRIPPED OF GLORY,
FILLED WITH SHAME AND CAST OUT FROM THE JOY OF PARADISE!
I HAVE BEEN JUSTLY DEPRIVED OF YOUR BLESSINGS:
BUT TAKE PITY ON ME IN YOUR COMPASSION AND MERCY.

While in some forms of modern thinking Adam and Eve would have been nude and innocent in Paradise (which feeds a notion that the original sin was sex), ancient writers thought of nudity in God’s presence as indecent, and imagined instead the first humans being clothed by God in garments of light which enabled them to be in God’s presence. It is interesting to note that the New Testament also follows this notion that salvation is not a return to some stated of innocence in nudity. For example, in the Gospel of Luke 24:49, Jesus tells His disciples after His resurrection “stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high.” The coming of the Holy Spirit will clothe the followers of Jesus, not strip them of clothing: we are not trying to escape our bodies, nor to attain some form of nudity, but to be clothed with power form on high.

As St. Paul writes in 2 Corinthians 5:2-4: “For in this tent we groan, longing to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling—if indeed, when we have taken it off we will not be found naked. For while we are still in this tent, we groan under our burden, because we wish not to be unclothed but to be further clothed, so that what is mortal may be swallowed up by life.” As we sing in the baptismal service, “As many as have been
baptized into Christ, have put on Christ” (Galatians 3:27). We clothe ourselves in Christ as in a garment.

Lord, we were banished once from Paradise through eating from the Tree; but you have led us back again through your Cross and Passion, my God and Savior. At the intercessions of your Mother, through your Cross give us strength to keep the Fast in holiness, and to worship your Divine Awakening: the Passover of Salvation!

A Great Lenten theme is that through eating we were exiled from Paradise, and so thus we now embrace fasting as a didactic method of discipleship – so that we might learn to obey God. The price of our disobedience – of our eating the forbidden fruit – is the Cross of the Savior and His death. He bore the discipline—He suffered the pain—which is meant to correct our sinfulness.

Matins Texts of The Expulsion of Adam & Eve (10)

Posted on March 27, 2010 by Fr. Ted

The Matins Canon for the Sunday commemorating the Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise sets a tone for all of Great Lent and gives meaning to Lenten abstinence and fasting. Adam and Eve’s lack of self control proved disastrous for all creation: the very beings that God appointed to have dominion over creation and to be His mediator with creation fell from their exalted post. The humans created to have dominion over the rest of creation, listen to a created animal about how to become like God, instead of listening to the Creator! They freely and willfully submit themselves to creation rather than exercising dominion over it. The end result is the humans become subject to their own physical limits and to death. The humans attempted to grasp hold of divinity, but fell from their highly exalted closeness to God and ended up just being one more part of God’s created order – mortal like all other creatures and unable to lift creation up to God, except in sacrifice!

Adam cried lamenting: Woe is me!

The Serpent and the Woman have deprived me of my boldness before God,
AND I HAVE BECOME AN EXILE FROM THE JOY OF PARADISE THROUGH EATING FROM THE TREE.
WOE IS ME! I CAN NO MORE ENDURE THE SHAME!
I ONCE WAS KING OF ALL GOD’S CREATURES ON EARTH;
NOW I HAVE BECOME A PRISONER,
LED ASTRAY BY EVIL COUNSEL.
I WAS ONCE CLOTHED IN THE GLORY OF IMMORTALITY,
NOW I MUST WRAP MYSELF IN THE SKINS OF MORTALITY,
AS ONE MISERABLE, AND CONDEMNED TO DIE.
WOE IS ME! WHO WILL SHARE MY SORROW WITH ME?
BUT, LORD AND LOVER OF MANKIND,
YOU HAVE FASHIONED ME FROM THE EARTH AND ARE CLOTHED IN COMPASSION:
CALL ME BACK FROM THE BONDAGE OF THE ENEMY AND SAVE ME!

Adam and all of humanity cannot lift themselves to heaven – even repentance cannot achieve that end. The Fall of humanity through willful disobedience stripped humans of what enabled them to be in God’s presence. Unable to save themselves, humans who wished independence from God found themselves in complete need of God’s mercies. Great Lent is that time in which we commemorate our fall and experience our fallen condition through fasting, self denial, humility, forgiveness, repentance, begging for God’s mercy, through charity and through the symbols and imagery of exile, nakedness, shame, dependence on God and the cross.

“But God proves his love for us in that while we still were sinners Christ died for us” (Romans 5:8).
Keeping Great Lent neither earns nor maintains God’s love for us. Rather it reveals to us the true nature of our condition, in order to humble us, for only then do we realize the true extent of God’s love for His creation and the meaning of God’s grace.