

IF ADAM HAD REPENTED HE WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN EXILED FROM PARADISE

—by St. Symeon the New Theologian—

"And God said to Adam [after he disobeyed], Adam where are you?" (Gen. 3:9). Why did the omnipotent Creator ask this? Certainly desiring to help him understand his mistake and lead him to repentance. "Adam, where are you?" It is as if He was saying: Examine yourself; take a look at your nakedness! Consider the cloak and the glory you have been deprived. "Adam, where are you?" It is as if He was pleading with him and urging: Please, come to your senses, you poor man. Please, come out of your hiding spot. Do you think you can hide from Me? Say, "I have sinned!" Unfortunately, Adam said no such thing. Instead, he said, "I heard You walking in Paradise, and I realized that I am naked and I hid."

How did God reply? "Who told you that you are naked? Did you perhaps eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" Do you see, beloved reader, God's patience? When He asked, "Adam, where are you?" Adam did not confess his sin straightaway, but said, "I heard Your voice Lord, and I realized that I am naked and I hid." Even with such a dishonest response, God did not become mad, He did not immediately and definitively turn away from him; on the contrary, He gave him a second chance to admit his fault. "Who told you that you are naked? Did you perhaps eat from the only tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" Take note of the depth of God's wisdom and words. "Why are you announcing your nakedness, but concealing your sin?" He says to Adam. "Do you think that I am able to see only your body but unable to see your heart and thoughts as well?"

After Adam had been tricked [into eating the fruit], he was hoping that God would remain unaware of his sin, and he thought to himself roughly the following: "If I say that I am naked, since God is unaware, He will ask me why I am naked? Then I will tell him, 'I have no idea.' Thus, I will elude Him and I will enjoy my original garment once again. Even if He doesn't give me another garment, at least He will not expel me; at least He will not exile me!" This is what he was pondering (just as many people today—including myself—who hide their sins do as well). God, however, did not want him to become any more blameworthy, so He asked, "How did you realize that you are naked. Did you perhaps eat from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" It is as if he was saying: Do you really believe that you can hide from Me? Do you think I am unaware of what you did? You don't want to say, "I have sinned"? You poor man! Say, "Yes, Lord. Indeed I have transgressed Your commandment. I am at fault because I listened to the advice of the woman. I have greatly sinned by following her suggestion and disregarding your direction. Have mercy on me!" Unfortunately, Adam did not say any such thing. He did not humble himself. His heart was like steel—just as mine is. If he had said the above, he would have remained in Paradise, and with a single word alone (i.e. "I have sinned. Forgive me") he would have avoided all the

innumerable evils that he endured when he was exiled and, subsequently, when he remained in Hades for all those centuries.

And so, having left from Adam, God proceeded to Eve, wanting to show that she will also be justifiably exiled because she does not want to repent. “Why did you do this?” God asked, so she could admit, “I have sinned.” What reason did God have to speak to Eve using such words, other than to give her the chance to say, “I the lowly wretch acted thoughtlessly, O Master. I disobeyed You, my Lord. Have mercy on me!”? However, she said no such thing. Rather, she said, “the serpent deceived me.” What insensitivity! So, you decided to converse with the serpent who slandered your Master, and you preferred him instead of your God and Creator, and you believed that his words were more true, and you chose to listen to his suggestion instead of the commandment of the Lord? Since she also did not want to say, “I have sinned,” they were both exiled from God’s Paradise. But look at the depth of the compassionate Lord’s mysteries, and learn that if they had repented at this point, they would not have been exiled, they would not have been condemned, they would not have been sentenced to return to the earth from which they were made. How so? Listen.

When they were banished and began to experience hunger, thirst, cold, and to suffer all the things that we also suffer today, they sensed their misfortune and plight, but also realized their own imprudence and God’s inexplicable philanthropy. As they walked and lived outside of Paradise, they repented, cried, lamented, beat their face, pulled their hair out, and reproached themselves with sighs for their hardheartedness. This took place not only for one, two, or ten days, but—believe me—throughout the remainder of their life...When they realized from where they had fallen, they continuously lamented, wept, and appealed to the mercy and compassion of their Lord.

But what did He Who is abundant in mercy and slow to punish do? When he saw that they had humbled themselves, on the one hand He did not completely revoke His ruling—both so that it may serve as a lesson for us, and so that no one acts arrogantly toward the Creator of all—on the other hand, knowing through His omniscience that they would repent after their fall, He had appointed from the very beginning (even before He created the universe) the time and the way in which He would recall them from exile...And so, He Who had exiled them from Paradise on account of their impudence and unrepentant heart and disposition, afterwards when they repented appropriately, humbled themselves sufficiently, and wept and lamented, the Only-begotten Son and Word of the Father Himself not only became a human being like them, but He also consented to die like them. Furthermore, He descended into Hades from where He resurrected them. Wouldn’t He Who endured and suffered so many things for them in order to recall them from such a distant exile have shown mercy and compassion to them if they had repented while still in Paradise? How could He Who is by nature a lover of man and Who created them precisely to enjoy all the good things He created in Paradise possibly have done otherwise? Yes, indeed, dear reader, this is what would have happened.