

WEEKLY MEDITATION

O 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. (Vespers of Forgiveness Sunday)

Today is Forgiveness Sunday. The Church highlights the theme of forgiveness as we enter into the Lenten season because we need to understand that without mutual forgiveness there can be no spiritual change or growth. In fact, without striving to forgive and asking for forgiveness from God and one another there can be no salvation. The Lord says that divine mercy will be shown only to the merciful and divine forgiveness only to the forgiving.

Most of us have experienced the sweetness of being forgiven. It is a kind of paradise, a brief taste of heaven. It is like paradise to be in a right relationship with God and with one another, especially those with whom we have a difficult relationship. To shed all that is calculating and defensive and guilty and to savor a moment of relief, of honesty and openness, to have a clear conscience, is to regain - even if briefly - an almost child-like innocence and purity.

It is no mistake that in addition to the theme of forgiveness, this Sunday also commemorates the expulsion of Adam and Eve from paradise. The primordial fall from grace of our first parents is the source of our own sense of exile and alienation, of the division and separation we experience in our relationships with God and one another. We have only at times a passing glimpse, a brief taste, of the paradise for which we were created and which is our true spiritual home. Mutual forgiveness is one of these critical moments. May our Lenten journey be marked, God-willing, by several such moments - moments when the veil is lifted and the distance that separates us from paradise - from the Lord and from one another - is diminished, moments of recognition and sweetness that point towards the true homeland our heart's desire.

Fr. Andrew

