



**Orthodox Mission of the
Entrance of the Theotokos
into the Temple**

**306 W. Main Street
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<http://EntranceMission.org>

***What We Have Lost*
March 6, 2022**

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

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 hath left me naked and confused! No longer will I enjoy thy delights, O 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 Thee, O compassionate Lord:// Have mercy on me who have fallen!" (Doxasticon at the chanting of the Stichera. Great Vespers. Sunday of Forgiveness)

The Sunday upcoming has long been designated as the *Sunday of Forgiveness*. Orthodox communities throughout the world begin the Season of Great Lent by carrying out the Lord's teaching to forgive one another. We do this within the community of our congregation because it is there that we are to embody the life of Christian discipleship. How can we possibly think that we will ever reach the vast populations around us outside of the Church if we cannot live in harmony and charity within our own communities? The first pillar of Great Lent, charity, is thus enacted among us, for without mutual forgiveness, charity would simply be a word rather than the highest of virtues.

We bow before one another in forgiveness not only to enact the teachings of Christ externally, but to do so from the heart, from the depths of our souls, for each of us as disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ is keenly aware of what we as human beings have lost when we ventured out on our own, turning from

our ancient dependance on the One Who created us. Thus, from the earliest of times, this Sunday which we call the “*Sunday of Forgiveness*” has also been called the Sunday of the “*Expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise*.” Having given in to the deceit of the Evil One, Adam and Eve disobeyed God and partook of the forbidden fruit, eating of that tree which open their eyes to evil. Previously innocent, they now understood that which God wanted to protect them from, the knowledge, the intimate participation, in evil. As such, for their own protection, they were expelled from paradise, for even worse would have been their eating of another tree, the tree of life. Eternal life in sin would have been even worse than what they now would know: mortal life in this world of selfishness, violence and suffering that would end in death. Thus, the Lord protected them and us from eternal hell.

Nevertheless, the image of Adam and Eve weeping as they behold the flaming sword prohibiting their return to Eden is a pathetically sad one indeed. Knowing what they have lost, they weep. For it would be many years before they would be delivered by the descent of the Lord Jesus into the Hades, the place of the dead, to be lifted up and offered life and paradise once again.

We begin Great Lent this year during a time of terrible violence. Not for many years has Europe seen such violent devastation. So many innocent people have been killed on both sides, for not only the innocent men, women and children in the Ukraine have been killed, but also the soldiers themselves who have invaded, following the orders of the politics that have sent them there. This is what we have lost: our innocence, our mutual desire to live and let live, to coexist in peace, our incessant choice to turn away from charity and to instead live in discord.

Like Adam and Eve, as we observe the state of the world and the suffering of so many innocent people in the Ukraine, we weep with them for what we have lost as human beings. We continue to turn away from God and to go our own way, and in the wake that that continued rebellion against our Creator, generation after generation, we have brought violence, suffering and death upon ourselves and so many others. We see what is happening in the world – not only in Ukraine, but virtually everywhere! - and we weep for all who suffer, on every side of every conflict. But we have the opportunity brought to us through the Grace and Mercy and Charity of our Lord to begin the process of our return to innocence. On Sunday we will enact the teaching of our Lord, not only outwardly, but inwardly, from the depths of our hearts, saying to one another within our congregational community, “Forgive me the sinner!” and then responding from the heart, “God forgives.” This is a worthy beginning to our time of repentance and fasting, and it is in fact the beginning of our reclamation, our restoration, from that which we have lost.

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