



Bible Study

February 25, 2015

Gen 1:24-2:3

Isaiah 2:3-11

Proverbs 2:1-22

Genesis 1:24-2:3 (NKJV) -

Then God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature according to its kind: cattle and creeping thing and beast of the earth, each according to its kind"; and it was so. And God made the beast of the earth according to its kind, cattle according to its kind, and everything that creeps on the earth according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. 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. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth." And God said, "See, I have given you every herb that yields seed which is on the face of all the earth, and every tree whose fruit yields seed; to you it shall be for food. Also, to every beast of the earth, to every bird of the air, and to everything that creeps on the earth, in which there is life, I have given every green herb for food"; and it was so. Then God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good. So the evening and the morning were the sixth day. Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

Proverbs 2:1-22 (NKJV) - My son, if you receive my words, and treasure my commands within you, so that you incline your ear to wisdom, and apply your heart to understanding; yes, if you cry out for discernment, and lift up your voice for understanding, if you seek her as silver, and search for her as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God. For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding; He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk uprightly; He guards the paths of justice, and preserves the way of His saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice, Equity and every good path. When wisdom enters your heart, and knowledge is pleasant to your soul, discretion will preserve you; understanding will keep you, to deliver you from the way of evil, from the man who speaks perverse things, from those who leave the paths of uprightness to walk in the

ways of darkness; who rejoice in doing evil, and delight in the perversity of the wicked; whose ways are crooked, and who are devious in their paths; to deliver you from the immoral woman, from the seductress who flatters with her words, who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God. For her house leads down to death, and her paths to the dead; none who go to her return, nor do they regain the paths of life—so you may walk in the way of goodness, and keep to the paths of righteousness. For the upright will dwell in the land, and the blameless will remain in it; but the wicked will be cut off from the earth, and the unfaithful will be uprooted from it.

Isaiah 2:3-11 (NKJV) - Many people shall come and say, “Come, and let us go up to the mountain of the LORD, to the house of the God of Jacob; He will teach us His ways, and we shall walk in His paths.” For out of Zion shall go forth the law, and the word of the LORD from Jerusalem. He shall judge between the nations, and rebuke many people; they shall beat their swords into plowshares, and their spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war anymore. O house of Jacob, come and let us walk in the light of the LORD. For You have forsaken Your people, the house of Jacob, because they are filled with eastern ways; they are soothsayers like the Philistines, and they are pleased with the children of foreigners. Their land is also full of silver and gold, and there is no end to their treasures; their land is also full of horses, and there is no end to their chariots. Their land is also full of idols; they worship the work of their own hands, that which their own fingers have made. People bow down, and each man humbles himself; therefore do not forgive them. Enter into the rock, and hide in the dust, from the terror of the LORD and the glory of His majesty. The lofty looks of man shall be humbled, the haughtiness of men shall be bowed down, and the LORD alone shall be exalted in that day.

Commentary -

In this first week of Great Lent, we reflect on the beginning of the journey which we are about to undertake. Every religious expression or philosophy offers its own narrative, its own story, regarding the nature and meaning of our lives as human beings. Christianity likewise tells us the story that gives the shape of our lives, though this story has been distorted in the confessions and teachings of some of our brothers and sisters in non-Orthodox versions of the Christian religion. In order to understand how we are called to live our lives, particularly during Great Lent, to understand the great work of salvation in Jesus Christ which we will come to celebrate on Great and Holy Pascha, we first have to understand who we are, and the position in which we find ourselves. For this reason, we read from the Old Testament, including its very beginning, the Book of Genesis.

We read in today's reading from Genesis of the creation of life in this world, and of the creation of humanity in particular. The Holy Trinity creates humanity in His image, as one humanity existing in a community of persons, male and female. He then gives the entire Creation to them, the plants for food; the animals and plants to rule over and to cultivate. This is the beginning of humanity, of our humanity, which we as persons share with our ancestors back to the very beginning, and which ultimate God Himself will come to share in, in the person of Jesus Christ. This is the beginning point of our story, and the Fathers make clear to us that this is not just a piece of primeval history. When we spend our time debating various scientific theories about the age and origin of various types of life on Earth, we become distracted from what God is here teaching us about ourselves.

There are those among our Christian brother and sisters, who would say that we as humans are conceived and born utterly sinful and evil. That we are wicked creatures against whom God's anger

burns, and at best we can hope that He may choose to show mercy on a few of us, not because of any difference between those chosen and the rest, but purely arbitrarily. There are those, also some of whom are among our Christian brothers and sisters, who believe that every human person is perfect and good and free to do as they like and find meaning in life where they like. Neither of these extremes is the teaching of the Holy Scriptures or of the Orthodox Faith.

Rather, what the Scriptures show us repeated again and again, in the early chapters of Genesis, again in the later chapters, in the life of King David, in the history of the whole nation of Israel, is that we as human persons were created as kings. Every one of us was born rich, not necessarily in the worldly sense, but filled with the blessings that God has poured out on us in His love for each and for every human person. Despite being born with this dignity, and this wealth; these blessings and the love of God, we have taken what we were given and squandered it. We have not pursued wisdom, but as today's reading from Proverbs outlines we have been taken captive by another mistress, a spirit of dissipation and squalor. This means that the Christian life is one of repentance, of seeking to turn around, to turn back, and ultimately return to the God who created us, who loved us, and who has never abandoned us; the God who gave up everything to come to find us and rescue us in the Person of Jesus Christ, so that we could be made whole.

Brothers and sisters in Christ, as we begin this journey of Great Lent, we sit with our father and mother outside the gates of Paradise. Let us begin by pondering just how much we have lost. We were given everything, we had it all, and we've let it all slip through our fingers. Again and again we've chosen to walk down a path that despite its promises, has led only to emptiness, loneliness, and destitution, rather than the path that leads to Life. Like the Prodigal Son, may we each begin to come to our senses, and seek to become a servant in our Father's House.

Questions to Ponder -

- 1) What did God originally give to humanity for food? How do you believe this relates to fasting during Great Lent and other parts of the Church year?
- 2) The One God, the Holy Trinity, is a communion of Three Divine Persons, and He creates humanity as a communion of persons. In today's reading from Isaiah, the mark that the Lord's teaching has gone out into all the world is the end of wars. Consider how all sin begins and ends with division, disunity, and strife with our fellow persons.
- 3) Today's reading from Proverbs tells us that if we were to diligently seek after wisdom and God's understanding, we would receive the knowledge of God in return. How often do you seek God's perspective through the teaching of the Church, the Scriptures, and the wisdom of your spiritual father when making decisions both large and small?
- 4) As people who have had and lost it all, how should this knowledge shape our thankfulness for what we still have from God, and for what we receive in the future?

Questions or Comments? FrStephen@stgeorgecharleston.org

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