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THE SUNDAYS OF LENT

Each of the Sundays of Lent in the Armenian Church is called by a proper name. During the period of Lent we will take a closer look at these Sundays and see that they embrace the whole of human life from birth to death. Last month we looked at Barekendan which, although not a day of Lent, began our Lenten period. We will now take a look at the remaining Sundays in the month of February.

SUNDAY OF EXPULSION GENESIS 2:1-24

The story and the meaning of the Second Sunday of Lent is the continuation of the Barekendan. This Sunday is dedicated to the loss of man's happiness and his "expulsion from paradise." The hymn (sharagan) of the day points up that idea sympathetically.

"O Lord, who did commit first in paradise the law of holy abstinence unto the first created, who broke it by tasting the fruit and thereby tasting the bitterness of sin and death, grant unto us that we may taste the sweetness of thy commandments. We have been smitten in our souls by the enemy with diverse wounds of sin, and in our manifold infirmities we are in need of thee, the lover of man, to relieve our pains; therefore, O Christ, that lovest man, heal us."

The real cause of man's expulsion from paradise was not because he ate from the forbidden fruit; our poor ancestors were already punished for that sin when after "eating from the fruit they knew that they were naked," which means that they knew they had lost something: their innocence, the greatest and the first loss a human being usually undergoes. They tried stupidly to cover

up this loss of innocence by "sewing fig leaves together and making themselves aprons." They felt the poisonous feeling of "fear" in their hearts and "hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden."

Are these not common and daily phenomena in human life? I suppose you could hardly find a man who has not in some way or other experienced the same event in his life: the man whose conscience is stained with evil does not like to meet God, but rather hold off from the places and persons which remind him of the presence of God. Moreover, the man of the present day, perhaps much more insolent and aggressive, far surpasses the first man's and quarrels with God and everything remindful of Him. The greatest motive of the anti-God, anti-religion and anti-clerical struggle is the result of the stupid effort of men to escape God's presence. The "naked" man does not permit himself to admit the existence of God, religion and clergy. In fact, at bottom, the loss of innocence is the greatest punishment man could suffer, because in reality he is always in the presence of God, since he is forced to combat against Him. That anti-God conflict is similar to the act of the person in mythology who was condemned to the everlasting but fruitless work of filling a holed barrel.

Every sin already contains in itself its penalty. When God forbids mankind from anything, He is not doing it in mere caprice, but because it is harmful for man. God, being the architect of the universe and of human life, knows what is harmful for man and therefore He cautions him saying: "Thou shall not commit adultery," "thou shall not kill," "thou shall not bear false witness," and other like commandments. Because, finally it is man himself who is harmed by such acts, either he who commits them or against whom they are committed.

It is also true that any sin is a kind of contempt or at least a negligence of the wisdom, knowledge and the almightiness of God. When He "says," no one should doubt it, since it is the absolute truth. What God says in the universe *is* done — "and the Lord said 'Let there be light,' and there was light." This phenomenon of God's words must be repeated in man's life with this difference only that there must be cooperation on the part of man. To be indifferent to what God says or — still worse — to disobey Him knowingly means to elevate oneself, his intelligence and his will above those of God's. This is most unpardonable on the part of man. God's verdict is clear in this respect: "I don't give my glory to others." What belongs to God only — infinite intelligence, almightiness, etc. — cannot be passed to anyone else.

One who pretends to elevate his intelligence to that of the wisdom of God, shall subject himself to the greatest punishment man can be subjected to. "The angels that did not keep their own position" but aspired for more "have been kept by Him in eternal chains in the nether gloom until the judgment of the great day" (Jude 6). And again: "How you are fallen from heaven, O Day Star, Son of Dawn. How you are cut down to the ground, you who laid the nations low.

You said in your heart, 'I will ascend to heaven; above the stars of God I will set my throne on high;... I will make myself like the most high' " (Isaiah 14:13-14)

The many kinds of sin, in the final analysis, are found to be disobedience to God's command or, knowing or unknowing contempt for God. If viewed from another angle, this means considering oneself better, wiser, and more capable than God and to elevate self over Him. This is an unpardonable guilt for the limited creature which is man; for this reason the punishment given out to him is severe and serious.

Therefore, Expulsion Sunday reminds us, besides the tragedy of the loss of innocence known to our forefathers, of the fact that each sin contains in itself its well-deserved punishment. Moreover, every sin intrinsically means the disobeying of the obvious Will of God; which will call upon the sinner still another bitter punishment, namely deprivation from happiness, offered by God, and expulsion from His presence. The goodness of God does not allow that man lose everything forever. He gives man hope and provides him with the opportunity to regain his "lost paradise."