

## FORGIVENESS SUNDAY

Today is Forgiveness Sunday but also when we remember Adam's expulsion from Paradise. Adam and Eve had lived in close relationship with God; we don't know for how long. They were close to God, in whom they lived and moved and had their being. They and God were one; God in them and them in God. They lived in Paradise but Paradise was not just a place but the state in which they lived with God. Now, something had gone wrong and they were cast out. We read that Adam sat and wept saying, "What have I done". He was not only reflecting on his disobedience but on the loss of union with God. Now he was no longer in Paradise, he had lost the joy, the life, the fullness, the mutual love. All was now changed, the loss of Paradise.

From Adam to us, we have lost Paradise - we are no longer there. Yes, there are moments, when flowers, trees, beauty, surround us as we walk through nature. David Attenborough reminds us of the wonders of the world around us. When we see and experience the nature around us of which we are part, we have a glimpse of Paradise. The beauty, the innocence, the radiance of colour and brilliance of light is a reflection of ourselves - what we are, what we should be, even a restoration of Life in Paradise.

So, Great Lent is to bring us nearer to this. It begins with our life in Christ for he is the one who said to the dying but repentant thief, "Today shall you be with me in Paradise". This is the promise to all of us, not only when we experience death, but as we move into the next phase of our life which begins now. Great Lent helps us be aware that in God we live and move and have our being, as did Adam and Eve. It helps us to know that only in God is there fullness of life.

St Sophrony, as I have already spoken of, tells us that there is a place within us which can only be filled by God. If this space remains unfilled, we are only half alive. The purpose of Great Lent is to bring us back to life of greater fullness. Yes, we have restriction of food, increase of prayer which leads to union with God, forgiving and being forgiven which leads to restoration of relationship, almsgiving, which is reaching out to others. This is all part of the *via positiva, the positive way*. So our Lent observance is a wonderful time, a wonderful opportunity to be restored in fullness of life; God in whom we live and move and have our being; we in God and He in us. Adam has been restored to Paradise through the event of Our Lord's Passion and Pascha and Pascha will bring such restoration for us if we observe the beauty of this Holy Season.

But, Here is the big question:

Do we live and move and have our being in God?

Or, do we live and move and have our being in our self; or in our achievements; or in our work?

Do we live and look for fullness in our earthly life or in our heavenly life and in God?

This is a challenging question in this Holy Season.

Today, our mutual forgiveness is the beginning of our turning to God in Great Lent, God in us and we in God, restoration, the vocation of our Christian Life.

Fr David