



**ORIGINAL SIN:**  
**THE NATURE OF MAN BEFORE AND AFTER THE FALL**  
**AND**  
**THE RESTORATION OF THAT NATURE THROUGH THE INCARNATION**

In the last lesson on “Why the Incarnation?”, we discussed the necessity of God becoming Man for the sake of offering Himself up of His own free will as the sacrifice and ransom to the Divine Justice to redeem us and bring us back to Him. Now, it would be prudent to make the story more complete by discussing what the sin did to the human nature and how that nature was restored through the Incarnation of the Divine Logos.

**INTRODUCTION:**

The creation of man occurred on the sixth and final day of God’s creation. “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” (*Gen. 1:26-31*).

Also the story of creation gives some more details as to how God created man, “And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living being” (*Gen. 2:7*).

From these verses it is clear that God created man in a way that made him unique and exalted above all other creation. What makes man unique is that “breath of life” that was given to him by God. This breath of life, i.e. the human spirit, given to man gave him special features and characteristics that made him in the image of God. Man had received not only a great honor, but a great responsibility to live according to the grace given to him. Therefore, it is of great importance that we understand how God created us in order to understand how we should live according to His will.

St. Basil discusses this by writing:

“But for me the history of the human being’s creation that has been read resolves this kind of question. For now we heard that God took ‘dust from the earth’ and ‘molded the human being’ (*Gen. 2:7*). I discovered from this word both that the human is nothing and that the human is great. If you look toward our nature alone, it is nothing and is worthy of nothing, but if you look toward the honor with which he was honored, the human is great.....”

“‘And God took.’ But how is it that one finds in the preceding words, ‘And God made the human being’ (*Gen.* 1:27), but here Scripture speaks anew of human creation. As if we had learned nothing about the human, the story says, ‘And God took dust from the earth, and God molded the human being’ (*Gen.* 2:7). Already some have said that ‘molded’ is said of the body while ‘made’ is said of the soul. Probably the idea is not outside the truth. For as it says, ‘And God made the human being, according to the image of God he created him’ (*Gen.* 1:27), it says ‘made’; but as the narrative passes to our bodily existence, it says ‘molded’. The Psalmist teaches the difference between making and molding when he says, ‘Your hands made me and molded me’ (*Ps.* 118 [=119]:73). He made the inner human being, he molded the outer. For indeed molding is suited to dust, making to that which is according to the image. As the flesh was molded, the soul was made.”

“..... Ponder how you were molded. Consider the workshop of nature. The hand that received you is God’s. May what is molded by God not be defiled by evil, not be altered by sin; may you not fall from the hand of God. You are a vessel divinely molded, having come into being from God. Glorify your Creator. For you came to be for the sake of no other thing except that you be an instrument fit for the glory of God. And for you this whole world is as it were a book that proclaims the glory of God, announcing through itself the hidden and invisible greatness of God to you who have a mind for the apprehension of truth. So be mindful of all the things that have been said” (*On the Human Condition*, 2, 2-4, p. 49-51).

In the following pages, we will further discuss in more detail how God created us, how man fell from the image that he was created in, and how God restored that image in us.

## **I. “LET US MAKE MAN IN OUR IMAGE, ACCORDING TO OUR LIKENESS” (*Gen.* 1:26):**

God created man as the pinnacle of His creation, bestowing on him the special gift of being created after His image. Before we get into the details of how man is created according to God’s image and according to His likeness, we must first understand that in no way are we like God in a physical sense because God is Spirit (*John* 4:24) nor in His essence. St. Basil the Great goes further in explaining this particular point: “In what sense are we according to the image of God? Let us purify ourselves of an ill-informed heart, an uneducated conception about God. If we came into being according to the image of God, they say, God is of the same shape as ourselves; there are eyes in God and ears, a head, hands, a behind on which to sit—for it says in Scripture that God sits [Cf. *Ps.* 46:9 (= 47:8)]—feet with which to walk. So is not God like this? Put away from your heart unseemly fantasies. Expel from your reason things not in accord with the greatness of God. God is without structure and simple. Do not imagine a shape in regard to him. Do not diminish the Great One in a Jewish way. Do not enclose God in bodily concepts, nor circumscribe him according to your own mind. He is incomprehensible in greatness. Consider what a great thing is, and add to the greatness more than you have conceived, and to the more add more, and be persuaded that your thought does not reach boundless things. Do not conceive a shape; God is understood from his power, from the simplicity of His nature, not greatness in size. He is everywhere and surpasses all; and He is intangible, invisible, who indeed escapes your grasp. He is not circumscribed by

size, nor encompassed by a shape, nor measured by power, nor enclosed by time, nor bounded by limits. **Nothing is with God as it is with us**" (*On the Human Condition*, 1, 5, p. 34).

Man when created is neither like God in a physical sense nor in His essence. So how is it understood that man is created in the image of God, according to His likeness? The Holy Scriptures and the Fathers of the Church give us five different characteristics whereby we were created in the image of God, namely by God creating man – **1) immortal, 2) rational, 3) with a free will, 4) with the authority to rule, and 5) in goodness**. There is also an important sixth category that the Fathers describe in which man was created in God's image – **the image that He Himself would take in the fullness of time when He would take flesh and become Man:**

1) IMMORTAL:

When God created Adam and Eve and put them in the garden, He gave them a special grace that granted to them – while being mortals and having a nature as all human beings – to be immortal and be with Him forever. "For God created man for immortality and made him an image of His own eternity" (*Wisdom* 2:23). However, we know that man was mortal by nature since God told Adam after he sinned: "For dust you are, and to dust you shall return" (*Gen.* 3:19). St. Athanasius explains this when he writes: "He set them in His own paradise, and laid upon them a single prohibition. If they guarded the grace and retained the loveliness of their original innocence, then the life of paradise should be theirs, without sorrow, pain or care, and after it the assurance of immortality in heaven. But if they went astray and became vile, throwing away their birthright of beauty, then they would come under the natural law of death and live no longer in paradise, but, dying outside of it, continue in death and in corruption" (*On the Incarnation*, 1, 3).

2) RATIONAL:

When God created man, the word used for God in this verse in Hebrew is the plural, *Elohim*, referring to the Holy Trinity. This is shown in English when the pronoun "Us" is used and "Our image". So man is created after the image of the Holy Trinity. Since man is created in the image of the Word of God, the Second Person of the Holy Trinity, that means that we are created as rational beings, able to reason. St. Clement of Alexandria writes concerning this: "For the 'image of God' is his Word ... and an image of the Word is the true man, that is, the mind in man, who on this account is said to have been created 'in the image' of God and 'in his likeness,' because through his understanding heart he is made like the divine Word or Reason [*Logos*], and so rational [*logikos*]" (*Exhortation to the Greeks* 10). St. Basil the Great also writes along the same theme: "'Let Us make the human being according to Our image', that is, let Us give him the superiority of reason" (*On the Human Condition* 1, 7, p. 36). St. Athanasius also comments on this point saying: "Upon them, therefore, upon men who, as animals, were essentially impermanent, he bestowed a grace which other creatures lacked—namely, the impress of His own Image, a share in the reasonable being of the very Word Himself, so that, reflecting Him and themselves becoming reasonable and expressing the Mind of God even as he

does, though in limited degree, they might continue for ever in the blessed and only true life of the saints in paradise” (*On the Incarnation*, 1, 3).

3) FREE WILL:

As long as God created man rational, able to reason, then along with this comes a free will with the ability to choose between right and wrong, i.e. according to God’s will or contrary to it. God created man good (under #5) and God’s desire for man was for him to do good. However, there was always the possibility that man would choose to go against God’s will by submitting to his own bodily passions. This is understood from God telling Adam: “Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die” (*Gen. 2:16-17*). Of course, there were different and opposing consequences to making one choice versus the other. God explained this to Cain saying, “If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it” (*Gen. 4:7*). St. Paul also writes: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (*Rom. 6:23*).

4) AUTHORITY TO RULE:

“Let them have dominion” (*Gen. 1:26*). When God created man in His image, part of that was to have dominion over, and to rule, all the other earthly living creatures. So in a similar way that God has dominion over everything, so was man given the gift of ruling all of the other living creatures. Included within this, however, was the ability of man to rule himself and to control his own desires and passions. St. Basil explains this further: “ ‘And let them rule.’ Not, ‘Let us make the human being, and let them be angry and lustful and sorrowful,’ for the passions are not included in the image of God, but the reason is master of the passions. ‘And let them rule the fish.’ As soon as you are made, you are also made ruler. ‘And let them rule.’ ...you received it from God, not written on wooden tablets, nor on perishable leaves wasted on moths, but your nature has the divine voice inscribed in it, ‘Let them rule.’ ... First the power to rule was conferred on you. O human, you are a ruling being. And why do you serve the passions as a slave? Why do you throw away your own dignity and become a slave of sin? For what reason do you make yourself a prisoner of the devil? You were appointed ruler of creation, and you have renounced the nobility of your own nature.... **Therefore, ‘Let us make the human being, and let him rule;’ where the power to rule is, there is the image of God**” (*On the Human Condition*, 1, 8, p. 37).

5) GOODNESS:

God by His nature is the source of every good thing and virtue. When He created man in His image, He did so out of His goodness, and He filled him with every good thing and the ability to choose, by his free will, to continue in doing good. Thus, after God created man: “God saw everything that He had made, and indeed it was very good” (*Gen. 1:31*). St. Gregory of Nyssa further explains this: “He creates man for no other reason than that He is good; and being such, and having this as his reason for entering upon the creation of our nature, he would not exhibit the power of this

goodness in an imperfect form, giving our nature some one of the things at his disposal and grudging it a share in another: but the perfect form of goodness is here to be seen by his both bringing man into being from nothing and fully supplying him with all good gifts. But since the list of individual good gifts is a long one, it is out of the question to apprehend it numerically. The language of Scripture therefore expresses it concisely by a comprehensive phrase, in saying that man was made ‘in the image of God’, for this is the same as to say that he made human nature participant in all good, and this is his image, then the image finds its resemblance to the archetype in being filled with all good” (*On the Making of Man* 16.10, *NPNF* second series, vol. 5, p. 405). St. Basil also writes about this point explaining that if God created us in an upright position, it is because he intended for him to act uprightly and focus on heavenly things, not earthly: “God created you upright. He gave this special structure to you as distinct from the rest of the animals. Why? Because the activity he intended to give you is also special. For they are grazing animals, and they are structured in accord with the things toward which they aim by nature. The sheep was created to go to pasture, it has its head inclining downward, looking at the stomach and the parts below the stomach, since the fulfillment of happiness for these animals is filling the stomach and enjoying pleasure. But the human being no longer looks toward the stomach, but his head is lifted high toward things above, that he may look up to what is akin to him. His eyes do not incline toward the ground. Therefore do not make yourself go against nature; do not focus on earthly things but on heavenly things, where Christ is. ‘For if you are resurrected together with Christ,’ says Scripture, ‘seek the things above, where Christ is’ (*Col.* 3:1). Thus you were molded. That which has been molded is a lesson about the purpose for which you were born. You were born that you might see God, not that your life might be dragged down on the earth, not that you might have the pleasure of beasts, but that you might achieve heavenly citizenship. Because of this, ‘The eyes of the wise are in the head’ (*Eccl.* 2:14), as [the] wise Ecclesiastes says” (*On the Human Condition*, 2, 15, p. 61).

6) IN THE IMAGE THE WORD WOULD TAKE IN THE FULLNESS OF TIME:

One other interesting interpretation to how man was created in the “image of God” is that God created man in the image that He Himself would take in the fullness of time when the Word of God became incarnate and took flesh. St. Irenaeus writes concerning this: “In previous times man, it is true, was said to have been made according to the image of God, but he was not revealed as such. For the Word according to whose image man was made was still invisible. Therefore also man easily lost the likeness. But when the Word of God was made flesh, he confirmed both image and likeness. For on the one hand he truly showed the image by becoming what his image was. On the other hand he firmly established the likeness by the co-assimilation of man to the invisible Father through the visible Word” (*Against Heresies* 5.16.2).

At this point we must make a distinction that God created man in His image, or after His image, but our Lord Jesus Christ **IS** the image. Thus, Christ is God, whereas we are created after His image as described above. St. Paul writes: “**Christ, who is the image of God**” (*2Cor.* 4:4); “He is **the image of the invisible God**, the firstborn

over all creation” (*Col. 1:15*); “ and in another place “God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the **express image of His person...**” (*Heb. 1:1-3*).

[Further discussion on this topic will be under the section on “Deification” later in this article].

#### IS THERE A DIFFERENCE BETWEEN THE IMAGE AND LIKENESS?:

In the account of the creation of man in *Genesis 1*, it is written, “Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness” (verse 26). However, later on it is written: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him” (verse 27) omitting the word “likeness”. So for this reason, it was felt that there is a difference between man being in God’s “image” versus God’s “likeness”. It was felt that the image of God is those characteristics described above whereas being in God’s likeness will be revealed in the coming age by the grace of God. This is in accordance with what St. John the Apostle wrote: “Beloved, now we are children of God; and it has not yet been revealed what we shall be, but we know that when He is revealed, we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is” (*1John 3:2*). And this likeness will occur in us according to the image of His Son which we were called to from eternity and revealed at the time of our creation: “For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren” (*Rom. 8:29*).

So whereas we were created in the image of God, being in His likeness is a goal that will be fulfilled in eternity, going from glory to glory by the action of the Holy Spirit in us in a mystery beyond comprehension: “But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord” (*2Cor. 3:18*). However, becoming in the likeness of God begins now. St. Paul writes: “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what *is* the width and length and depth and height—to **know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God**” (*Eph. 3:14-19*). He also writes: “And He Himself gave some *to be* apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ, **till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ**” (*Eph. 4:11-13*).

For this reason, St. Paul describes the struggle in his service to be one where he is in labor until Christ is formed in the believers: “My little children, **for whom I labor in birth again until Christ is formed in you**” (*Gal. 4:19*). He says this in spite of saying that in baptism, these believers have already put on Christ: “For as many of you as were baptized into Christ have put on Christ” (*Gal. 3:27*); “Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him” (*Col. 3:9-10*). So this

means that there are greater levels of reaching the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

Here are some of the Fathers' sayings concerning this particular point:

**St. Basil the Great:** “‘Let us make the human being according to our image and according to our likeness’ (*Gen.* 1:26). By our creation we have the first, and by our free choice we build the second. In our initial structure co-originate and exist our coming into being according to the image of God. By free choice we are conformed to that which is according to the likeness of God. And this is what is according to free choice: the power exists in us but we bring it about by our activity. If the Lord, in anticipation, had not said in making us, ‘Let us make,’ and, ‘according to our likeness,’ if he had not given us the power to come to be according to the likeness, we would not have received the likeness to God by our own authority. Yet now he has made us with the power to become like God. And in giving us the power to become like God, he let us be artisans of the likeness to God, so that the reward for the work would be ours. Thus we would not be like images made by a painter, lying inertly, lest our likeness should bring praise to another. For when you see an image exactly shaped like the prototype, you do not praise the image, but you marvel at the painter. Accordingly, so that the marvel may become mine and not another’s, he has left it to me to become according to the likeness of God. For I have that which is according to the image in being a rational being, but I become according to the likeness in becoming Christian” (*On the Human Condition*, 1, 16, p. 43-44).

**Origen:** “In recording the first creation of man, Moses before all others says, ‘And God said, Let us make man in our own image and likeness.’ Then he adds afterwards, ‘And God made man; in the image of God made he him; male and female made he them, and he blessed them.’ Now the fact that he said ‘he made him in the image of God’ and was silent about the likeness points to nothing else but this, that man received the honor of God’s image in his first creation, whereas the perfection of God’s likeness was reserved for him at the consummation. The purpose of this was that man should acquire it for himself by his own earnest efforts to imitate God, so that while the possibility of attaining perfection was given to him in the beginning through the honor of the ‘image,’ he should in the end through the accomplishment of these works obtain for himself the perfect ‘likeness’” (*On First Principles* 3.6.1).

**St. Gregory of Nyssa:** “‘Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.’ We possess the one by creation; we acquire the other by free will. In the first structure it is given us to be born in the image of God; by free will there is formed in us the being in the likeness of God.... ‘Let us make man in our image’: Let him possess by creation what is in the image, but let him also become according to the likeness. God has given the power for this. If he had created you also in the likeness, where would your privilege be? Why have you been crowned? And if the Creator had given you everything, how would the kingdom of heaven have opened for you? But it is proper that one part is given you, while the other has been left incomplete: this is so that you might complete it yourself and might be worthy of the reward which comes from God” (*On the Origin of Man, Gregorii Nysseni Opera Supplementum*, 10, Hadwiga Horner, ed. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972; quoted in *Ancient Christian Commentary on Scripture*, Old Testament vol. I, p. 33).

## II. THE FALL OF MAN:

“And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, ‘Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die’” (*Gen. 2:16-17*). Once Adam ate from the tree, this judgment and condemnation came upon him and he did die: “So all the days that Adam lived were nine hundred and thirty years; and he died” (*Gen. 5:5*). St. Athanasius writes: “For God had made man thus (that is, as an embodied spirit), and had willed that he should remain in incorruption. But men, having turned from the contemplation of God to evil of their own devising, had come inevitably under the law of death. Instead of remaining in the state in which God had created them, they were in process of becoming corrupted entirely, and death had them completely under its dominion. For the transgression of the commandment was making them turn back again according to their nature; and as they had at the beginning come into being out of non-existence, so were they now on the way to returning, through corruption, to non-existence again. The presence and love of the Word had called them into being; inevitably, therefore when they lost the knowledge of God, they lost existence with it; for it is God alone Who exists, evil is non-being, the negation and antithesis of good” (*On the Incarnation*, 1, 4).

So the result of wrongly using the rational and free will that God gave man to commit the sin was death and the falling from the purity, holiness, goodness, incorruption, dominion, etc..., related to the image that God created man in. God created man good, but man chose out of his own free will, when tempted by the devil out of his envy for man, to disobey God. “For God created man for immortality and made him an image of His own eternity. But death entered the world by the envy of the devil...” (*Wisdom 2:23-24*). St. Basil the Great looks further into this point by saying: “There was a time when Adam was set on high, not in place but by free choice, when, having just then been given life, he looked up toward heaven and became exceedingly glad at the things he saw. He greatly loved his Benefactor, who gave him the enjoyment of eternal life, enabled him to rest amid the delights of paradise, gave him authority like that of the angels, made his way of life the same as that of the archangels, and let him hear the divine voice. As he was protected in all these things by God and enjoyed the blessings belonging to him, he quickly became full of everything. And as it were becoming insolent through satiety, he preferred what appeared delightful to the fleshly eyes to the spiritual beauty and considered the filling of the stomach more valuable than the spiritual enjoyments. And immediately he was outside paradise and outside that blessed way of life, becoming evil not from necessity but from thoughtlessness. Because of this he also sinned through wicked free choice, and he died through the sin. ‘For the wages of sin is death’ (*Rom. 6:25*). For to the extent that he withdrew from life, he likewise drew near to death. For God is life, and the privation of life is death. Therefore Adam prepared death for himself through his withdrawal from God, in accord with what is written, ‘Behold, those who remove themselves from you are destroyed’ (*Ps. 72 [= 73]:27*)” (*On the Human Condition*, 3, 7, p. 74-75).

St. Basil continues on to explain the envy of the devil and his desire to deceive man and for man to fall into the sin: “Why does he [Satan] fight against us? Because, being a receptacle of all evils, he also accepted the disease of malice and envied our honor. For he could not bear our life free from pain in paradise. With tricks and

contrivances he thoroughly deceived the human being, and, misusing the desire he had for likeness to God to deceive him, he showed him the tree and promised that through eating it he would be made like God. 'For if you eat,' he said, 'you will be like gods, knowing good and evil' (*Gen.* 3:5). Accordingly, he was not fashioned as our enemy, but out of jealousy he stood against us in enmity. For seeing himself thrown down from among the angels, he could not bear to see the earthly one lifted through progress to the rank of the angels" (*ibid.*, 3, 8, p. 76).

### III. THE ORIGINAL SIN THAT PASSED TO EVERY PERSON:

"The term original sin can mean two things: the sin of the origins, i.e. Adam's personal sin; and the sin deriving from the origin, i.e. transmitted to all men from birth. But unless specifically stated, it takes the second meaning and is one of the most difficult and mysterious truths of Christian teaching."

**"In the patristic era the church's awareness of it rested on biblical (*Genesis 3:1-20; Romans 5:12-19*; other texts cited are *Psalms 51:7; Job 14:4; Ephesians 2:3*), liturgical (infant baptism), and above all dogmatic bases (necessity and universality of redemption in Christ)".**

"Origen, drawing on the tradition, which he calls apostolic, of baptizing children, writes that they (the Apostles) knew that there is in everyone the stain of sin which must be washed with water and the Holy Spirit (*Comm. ep. Rom.* 5,9; cf. *Hom. in Lev.* 8,3; 12,4; *Hom. in Luc.* 14.5)" (Trapè, A., in *Ber. EEC*, vol. II, p. 781). Thus Origen writes:

"But if instead the Apostle should be understood as having called our body the body of sin, it will assuredly be taken in agreement with the understanding which David speaks of in reference to himself, 'For I was conceived in iniquities and in sins did my mother conceive me' (*Ps.* 51:5). And the Apostle himself says elsewhere, 'Who will rescue me from the body of this death?' (*Rom.* 7:24) and again he calls our body 'the body of lowliness' (*Phil.* 3:21). Moreover, he says of the Savior in a certain passage that he came 'in the likeness of the flesh of sin, so that with respect to sin he might condemn sin in the flesh' (*Rom.* 8:3). He is showing by this that our flesh is indeed a flesh of sin, but Christ's flesh is similar to the flesh of sin. For he was not conceived from the seed of a man, but the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her so that what was born from her should be called the Son of the Most High (Cf. *Luke* 1:35). In this way, then, Paul, through the inexpressible wisdom of God which was given to him (*2Pet.* 3:15), . . . . ., calls our body 'the body of sin' and 'the body of death' and 'the body of lowliness' (*Rom.* 6:6; 7:24; *Phil.* 3:21). Moreover David, practiced in the heavenly mysteries by the same Spirit, was speaking of the body, 'And you have led me down to the dust of death' (*Ps.* 22:15); and again, 'Our soul has been brought down to the dust' (*Ps.* 44:25). Jeremiah, also aware of a similar mystery through the Spirit of God, says in his Lamentations that all men are captives to the earth, naturally because of the body. He says, 'in order that he might lay low all the captives of the earth under his feet because they have turned aside a man's rights in the presence of the Most High and they have condemned a man by their judging' (*Lam.* 3:34-36)."

"Therefore our body is the body of sin, for it is not written that Adam knew his wife Eve and became the father of Cain until after the sin (Cf. *Gen.* 4:1). After all, even in the law it is commanded that sacrifices be offered for the child who was born: a pair of turtledoves or two young doves; one of which was offered for sin and the other as a

burnt offering (Cf. *Lev.* 12:8). For which sin is this one dove offered? Was a newly born child able to sin? And yet it has a sin for which sacrifices are commanded to be offered, and from which it is denied that anyone is pure, even if his life should be one day long (Cf. *Job* 14:4-5 LXX). It has to be believed, therefore, that concerning this David also said what we recorded above, ‘in sins my mother conceived me’ (*Ps.* 51:5). For according to the historical narrative no sin of his mother is declared. It is on this account as well that the Church has received the tradition from the apostles to give baptism even to little children. For they to whom the secrets of the divine mysteries were committed (Cf. *1Cor.* 4:1) were aware that in everyone was sin’s innate defilement, which needed to be washed away through water and the Spirit (Cf. *John* 3:5) ...” (Origen, *Commentary on Romans*, Book 5, chapter 9, parts 10&11).

St. Athanasius is also very clear about this point when he writes: “For as when Adam had transgressed, his sin reached unto all men...” (*Orat. c. Ar.* 1, 51, *NPNF* second series, vol. 4, p. 336).

Peter Phan, in his book, *Grace and the Human Condition*, (*Message of the Fathers of the Church*, vol. 15, pp. 150-151), gives us some quotes from St. Cyril of Alexandria where he repeatedly says that we have inherited Adam’s sin and the consequences along with it:

“The first sin did not adversely affect Adam only; Cyril explicitly affirms that the whole human race is affected by it and its consequences as well: ‘We have become joint heirs of the evils that befall the first man’ (*Commentary on Isaiah*, 2, 1). Our reason and free will, though not totally destroyed, are weakened, and we have lost our dominion over the earth, our incorruptibility, our holiness, and our divine adoptive sonship....

“We must inquire how Adam, our first forefather, transmitted to us the penalty imposed upon him for his transgression. He had heard ‘Earth thou art and to the earth shalt thou return’ (*Gen.* 3:19), and from being incorruptible he became corruptible and was made subject to the chains of death. But since he produced children after falling into this state we, his descendants, are corruptible, coming from a corruptible source. Thus it is that we are heirs of Adam’s curse; for surely we have not been visited with punishment as though we disobeyed with him the divine command which he received, but because ... become mortal he transmitted the curse to the seed he fathered. We are mortal because we come from a mortal source.... (*Doctrinal Questions and Answers*, 6 from Pusey, *In Ioannem*, 3, 560; trans. SCA 14. 151, W.J. Burghardt).

“In his *Commentary on the Romans* (*Rom.* 5:18-19), Cyril is no less explicit on the existence of ‘original sin’ in us: ‘Human nature has, therefore, contracted the malady of sin through the disobedience of one man, Adam. It is in this way that the many have been made sinners—not as though they had transgressed with Adam (for they did not yet exist), but because they are of his nature, the nature that fell beneath the law of sin....”

“Cyril, of course, was not interested in the fallen state of human nature as such; like Paul, he spoke of sin only to celebrate the victory of Christ over it and its consequences. Again and again he proclaims that the Logos, by his Incarnation, has repaired the ravages of sin, given back to humanity its divine image, and by sending his Spirit, restored reason, freedom, dominion, incorruptibility, holiness and adoptive sonship which Adam had lost.”

“We say that the very ugly image of the earthly man is visible in certain forms like the filth that is sin, the feebleness that is death and corruption, the impurity involved in fleshly lust and in an earth-bound mind. In like fashion, we think, the image of the heavenly man, Christ, is conspicuous in cleanness and purity, in total incorruption and life and sanctification. But it would have been impossible for us to be restored to our original beauty, once we had fallen from it through the transgression of the first man, had we not achieved that inexpressible communion and union with God. For that is the way in which human nature was adorned in the beginning. Union with God, however, is impossible to achieve for anyone save through participation in the Holy Spirit, instilling in us his own proper sanctification and refashioning to his own life the nature that fell subject to corruption, and thus restoring to God and to God’s likeness what had been deprived of this glory. For the perfect image of the Father is the Son, and natural likeness of the Son is the Holy Spirit. The Spirit, therefore, refashioning as it were to himself the human souls, engraves on them God’s likeness, and seals the representation of the supreme essence (*Commentary on the Gospel of John*, 11, 11 from Pusey, 2. 730-731, trans. SCA 14. 72, W.J. Burghardt).”

A modern day analogy that can help us understand the transmission of the original sin is that of the transmission of the HIV virus, the cause of AIDS, from a mother to her baby. In this analogy, a woman that later becomes pregnant, has contracted HIV due to inappropriate sexual behavior. The mother that has HIV does not just transmit the result of HIV to her baby – she transmits the virus itself that causes the disease in the baby. One could ask, “What did the baby do to deserve getting HIV?” The baby clearly did not do anything to deserve HIV. However, the mother had a responsibility to take the appropriate precautions and not commit the sin in order not to contract HIV.

It is the same with the original sin. Since all came from Adam, we have all inherited that sin.

#### a) Distinguishing Between the Original Sin and the Actual Sins that We Commit:

As we can already see, the Eastern Fathers clearly explained the original sin that every human being inherited from Adam. However, there are numerous verses in the Holy Scriptures and quotes from the Fathers discussing the actual sins that we commit as a result of the weakness of the flesh and our free will.

These two categories, the original sin that is inherited from Adam which we are born with, and the actual sins that we commit ourselves, are distinct. This thought is clear in the sayings of the early monastic fathers who made a distinction between the original sin that is inherited from Adam, and the actual sins that every human being commits of their own free will.

The following is a quote recorded from the answer given by one of the Egyptian monastic fathers of the 5<sup>th</sup> century, Abba Chaeremon, to a question posed by Abba Germanus. The question was related to why the merit of good deeds may not be ascribed to the exertions of the man who does them. Abba Chaeremon goes on to explain that without God’s help not only perfect chastity but all good of every kind cannot be

performed. Within this explanation, he explains God's providence and that His desire is for all men to be saved because He created man to live forever and not to perish. He calls to salvation all men without exception due to the original sin that passed to all men:

**“The grace of Christ then is at hand every day, which, while it ‘willeth all men to be saved and to come to knowledge of the truth,’ calleth all without any exception, saying: ‘Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will refresh you.’ (Matt. 11:28). But if He calls not all generally but only some, it follows that not all are heavy laden either with original or actual sin, and that this saying is not a true one: ‘For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God;’ nor can we believe that ‘death passed on all men.’ (Rom. 3:23; 5:12)”** (John Cassian, *Conferences*, XIII:VII, in *NPNF* second series, vol. 11, p. 425).

b) The Necessity of Baptism, Even of Infants, Because of the Original Sin:

The Church took great care to baptize those who believed in Christ from the very beginning of Christianity after the commandment of Christ: “Most assuredly, I say to you, unless one is born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter the kingdom of God” (*John* 3:5) and also, “He who believes and is baptized will be saved...” (*Mark* 16:16). Due to the necessity of baptism for salvation, this practice included infants as well as suggested in several verses in the Holy Scriptures (cf. *Acts* 2:38-41; 10:48; 16:15, 33; 18:8; *1Cor.* 10:2) and confirmed in the writings of the Fathers of the Church. This was due to the belief in the contraction of the original sin by every human being since all came from Adam. We will discuss the sacrament and doctrine of baptism in a coming lesson dedicated to this topic, by the grace of God.

There are many quotes concerning infant baptism, but we would like to focus here on those that relate the necessity of infant baptism to the original sin as in the quote given above from Origen's commentary on *Romans*.

St. Cyprian of Carthage in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century writes in his *Epistle 58* to Fidus on the baptism of infants that there was a decision from a council of 66 bishops including himself (St. Cyprian) stating that no one ought to be hindered by baptism: “In respect of the case of infants, which you say ought not to be baptized within the second or third day after birth, and that the law of ancient circumcision should be regarded, so that you think that one who is just born should not be baptized and sanctified within the eighth day, we all thought very differently in our council. For in this course which you thought was to be taken, no one agreed; but we all rather judge that the mercy and grace of God is not to be refused to any one born of man... Spiritual circumcision ought not to be hindered by carnal circumcision... we ought to shrink from hindering an infant, who, being lately born, has not sinned, except in that, being born after the flesh according to Adam, he has contracted the contagion of the ancient death at its earliest birth, who approaches the more easily on this very account to the reception of the forgiveness of sins—that to him are remitted, not his own sins, but the sins of another” (Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. II, p. 378-379 quoting Cyprian, *Ep.* 58, *ANF*, vol. 5, p. 353-354).

St. Didymus the Blind, the head of the catechetical school of Alexandria appointed by St. Athanasius in the 4<sup>th</sup> century, wrote that “all the children of Adam have inherited it [‘the sin of old’] by transmission ... through the intercourse of their parents. This is why Jesus, born of a Virgin, has not been stained with it (*Contra Manichaeos* 8; quoted in Quasten, *Patrology*, vol. III, p. 97).

Kidd writes concerning St. Isidore of Pelusium, an Alexandrian Father from the 5th century: “We may mention here two other letters of Isidore, as of special interest, referring to the doctrine of Baptism. It is not only for forgiveness of sins, to purify men’s souls from the stain contracted by Adam’s sin, but for a new birth; and both Baptism and the Eucharist (Baptism being at that time never administered, even to infants, without Communion) necessary to salvation” (Kidd, *History of the Church to A.D. 461*, vol. III, p. 264-265).

The *African Code*, 419 A.D., a ratification of canons from the previous 16 councils in North Africa and adopted in the East and the West, includes under Canon 110: “Likewise it seemed good that whosoever denies that infants newly from their mother’s wombs should be baptized, or says that baptism is for remission of sins, but they derive from Adam no original sin, which needs to be removed by the laver of regeneration, from whence the conclusion follows, that in them the form of baptism for the remission of sins, is to be understood as false and not true, let him be anathema. For no otherwise can be understood what the Apostle says, ‘By one man sin is come into the world, and death through sin, and so death passed upon all men in that all have sinned’, than the Catholic Church everywhere diffused has always understood it. For on account of this rule of faith (*regulam fidei*) even infants, who could have committed as yet no sin themselves, therefore are truly baptized for the remission of sins, in order that what in them is the result of generation may be cleansed by regeneration.”

“[Also it seemed good, that if anyone should that the saying of the Lord, ‘In my Father’s house are many mansion’ is to be understood as meaning that in the kingdom of heaven there will be a certain middle place, or some place somewhere, in which infants live in happiness who have gone forth from this life without baptism, without which they cannot enter the kingdom of heaven, which is eternal life, let him be anathema. For after our Lord has said: ‘Except a man be born again of water and of the Holy Spirit he shall not enter the kingdom of heaven,’ what Catholic can doubt that he who has not merited to be coheir with Christ shall become a sharer with the devil: for he who fails of the right hand without doubt shall receive the left hand portion.]” (*NPNF* second series, vol. 14, p. 496-497).

#### **IV. OUR LORD JESUS CHRIST IS ALONE WITHOUT SIN:**

When the Holy Scriptures teach us that our Lord Jesus Christ is without sin, the reference here is both in terms of not just any actual sin, but also the original sin. Thus, as discussed in the previous lesson, He is the sinless sacrifice that atones for the sins of the entire world over all generations. In terms of Him having never committed sin, St. Paul writes: “For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, **yet without sin**” (*Heb.* 4:15).

As for the original sin, the account of the annunciation of the birth of our Lord Jesus Christ by the Archangel Gabriel to the Holy Virgin Mary records for us that he told her: “the Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you; therefore, also, that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God”. Thus, the Holy Spirit coming upon the Virgin Mary prevented the passing of the original sin. This is confirmed in Origen’s commentary on the epistle of St. Paul to the Romans: “Moreover, he says of the Savior in a certain passage that he came ‘in the likeness of the flesh of sin, so that with respect to sin he might condemn sin in the flesh’ (*Rom.* 8:3). He

is showing by this that our flesh is indeed a flesh of sin, but Christ's flesh is similar to the flesh of sin. For he was not conceived from the seed of a man, but the Holy Spirit came upon Mary and the power of the Most High overshadowed her so that what was born from her should be called the Son of the Most High (Cf. *Luke 1:35*)" (*Commentary on Romans*, Book 5, chapter 9, part 10).

## V. THE RANSOM TO ATONE FOR THIS SIN:

As we explained in the previous lesson, our Lord Jesus Christ offered Himself as the True Sacrifice for the forgiveness of sins. He offered Himself in order to be the ransom to fulfill the Divine Justice proclaimed on Adam and spread to all men "you shall surely die". There are multiple verses in the Holy Scriptures and quotes from the Fathers describing our Lord Jesus Christ as this ransom: "I will ransom them from the power of the grave; I will redeem them from death. O Death, I will be your plagues! O Grave, I will be your destruction! Pity is hidden from My eyes" (*Hosea 13:14*). "Just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (*Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45*). "For there is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who gave Himself a ransom for all" (*1Tim. 2:5-6*). St. Athanasius writes about this: "The Word perceived that corruption could not be got rid of otherwise than through death; yet He Himself, as the Word, being immortal and the Father's Son, was such as could not die. For this reason, therefore, He assumed a body capable of death, in order that it, through belonging to the Word Who is above all, might become in dying a sufficient exchange for all, and, itself remaining incorruptible through His indwelling, might thereafter put an end to corruption for all others as well, by the grace of the resurrection" (*On the Incarnation*, 2, 9). Also, he writes concerning our Lord Jesus Christ, "Who was made the Ransom for the sins of all" (*ibid.*, 6, 40).

St. Cyril also writes that this ransom was in order to fulfill the Divine Justice in order to atone for the original sin that we inherited: "**Christ, therefore, ransomed from the curse of the law those who had being subject to it, had been unable to keep its enactments. And in what way did He ransom them? By fulfilling it. And to put it in another way: in order that He might expiate the guilt of Adam's transgression,** He showed Himself obedient and submissive in every respect to God the Father in our stead; for it is written, 'That as through the disobedience of the One man, the many were made sinners, so also through the obedience of the One, the many shall be made just' (*Rom. 5:19*)" (*Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke*, Homily 3, The Feast of the Circumcision, pp. 55-56).

Furthermore, in the Divine Liturgy of St. Gregory the Theologian, St. Gregory writes: "Our Master, our Savior, the Good Lover of Mankind, the Life-giver to our souls, God Who gave Himself up a **ransom** on our behalf because of our sins..."