

Paradise. He gave them freedom and the commandment to actualize it, symbolized in the prohibition to eat of the tree of knowledge of good and evil: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat" (Gn 2:16-17). Saint Gregory the Theologian interprets this commandment in the following way:

[God] gave him a Law as material for his free will to act upon. This Law was a commandment as to what plants he might partake of, and which one he might not touch. This latter was the tree of knowledge; not, however, because it was evil from the beginning when planted; nor was it forbidden because God grudged it to humankind ... But it would have been good if partaken of at the proper time; for the tree was, according to my theory, Contemplation, which it is only safe for those who have reached maturity of habit to enter upon; but which is not good for those who are still somewhat simple and greedy.<sup>116</sup>

136 The Creator, having fashioned humanity freely out of love, calls us to love—the highest creative expression of a person. For this God grants us freedom. Human love flows from God as from a wellspring, for "God is love" (1 Jn 4:8). Freedom belongs to God's image in humankind; therefore, his grace does not abolish our freedom.<sup>117</sup>

137 The most profound dimension of human freedom consists in being able to freely choose God and to be with him. This is the good. Yet with this same freedom, we can also reject our relationship with God—and this is evil. To be free is to possess the capacity for unfettered self-determination.<sup>118</sup> Evil, in fact, does not belong to creation; it only appears when humanity renounces the choice for good, and thus abuses its freedom. As God's gift, freedom is strengthened through every free choice of the good. On the other hand, it is limited when humanity becomes dependent upon evil<sup>119</sup> which is a consequence of its renouncing the good.

138 A human being is responsible for his or her free choice: "You may freely eat of every tree of the garden; 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 die" (Gn 2:16-17). This commandment of God does not limit human freedom nor does it interfere in our choice. God gives the commandment as a gift to strengthen us in all that is good. By breaking the commandment, a human being rejects God and by this very means introduces sin

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<sup>116</sup> GREGORY THE THEOLOGIAN, Oration 45: On Holy Pascha, 8: PG 36, 632.

<sup>117</sup> See JOHN CHRYSOSTOM, Homilies on the Gospel of Matthew, Homily 45, 1: PG 58, 471.

<sup>118</sup> See GREGORY OF NYSSAN, On the Making of Man, 16; PG 44, 184.

<sup>119</sup> See GREGORY OF NYSSAN, Great Catechism, 5: PG 45, 21.

into the world, and through sin death (see Rom 5:12). By eating of the fruit of the "tree of knowledge of good and evil," one forfeits access to the "tree of life" and loses ties to God: "Communion with God is life and light ... But separation from God is death."<sup>120</sup>

- 139 When Adam and Eve transgressed the commandment, they severed their bond with God. Their choice became the cause of death, and the "tree of knowledge of good and evil" became its instrument. The cross was also such an instrument of death, prepared on Golgotha for the Son of God, Jesus Christ. However, by accepting death on the cross, he transformed the instrument of death, the cross, into a "tree of life:" "Truly, O Christ, the tree of life has blossomed. For the cross, planted in the earth, fed with blood and water from your pure side, has put forth life for us."<sup>121</sup> It has become a life-giving cross.
- 140 The Church witnesses liturgically to this in the Feast of the Exaltation of the Precious and Life-Giving Cross (September 14/27), when we contemplate the Life-Giving Cross in the light of Holy Pascha: "To your Cross, O Master, we bow in veneration; and we glorify your holy Resurrection." The Lord voluntarily took upon himself the sin of the world and transfigured the cross of death into a sign of the Resurrection, having trampled death by death, and granted us eternal life.

But when he disobeyed you, the true God, who created him,  
and when he had been led astray by the deception of the serpent,  
and been slain by his own transgressions,  
you banished him from Paradise into this world by your just judgment, O God,  
and returned him to the earth, from which he had been taken.  
(1inaphora of the Liturgy of Saint Basil the Great)

## **b. The Fall**

- 141 God created everything good (see Gn 1:31). According to the testimony of Holy Scripture, evil appears later—through the rejection of good. Evil does not appear as a new reality: "Evil does not exist by nature, nor is anyone naturally evil, for God made nothing that was not good."<sup>122</sup> Evil is the limitation and corruption of that which already exists: "Evil

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<sup>120</sup> IRENAEUS OF LYONS, *Against Heresies*, V, 27, 2: PG 7, 1196.

<sup>121</sup> See Octoechos, Tone 6, Sunday Matins, Canon of the Resurrection, Ode 4; and Octoechos, Tone 2, Sunday Matins, Canon of the Resurrection, Ode 9.

<sup>122</sup> DIADOCHOS OF PHOTIKI, *On Spiritual Knowledge and Discrimination*, 3: PG 65, 1168.