

## September Reflection

### **The Tree of Life & the Holy Eucharist**

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What does the Bible teach regarding the Holy Eucharist? Why is it that Jesus teaches us that we must eat his flesh and drink his blood in order to have eternal life?

In order to understand our Lord's words in the Gospel of John, that we must "eat [his] flesh and drink [his] blood," it is necessary that we reflect on the plan of God in the beginning, the plan of God for man as he placed him in the Garden of Eden (Jn. 6:53). What was this plan? Recall, that God planted two trees in the midst of the Garden, the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil, and the Tree of Life (cf. Gen 2:9). God instructed Adam and Eve not eat from the Tree of Knowledge, for in the day that they ate of it, God warned, they would surely die (cf. Gen 2:17), but of the Tree of Life, man could freely eat, and through eating of it, man would receive "eternal life," that is, the life of God (cf. Gen. 2:16, 3:22).

It was God's plan to share his own life with his creation, and in the Tree of Life, God offered to man a communication, a participation, in the fullness of divinity. It was God's plan in the Garden of Eden for man to eat the Life of God by way of a created material tree. But Adam and Eve traded life for death and forsook the great gift of the Tree of Life. They ate from the Tree of Knowledge in disobedience to God's command and discovered, to their misery, the curse of death. The Sacred Scriptures tell us that man was cast forth from the Garden of Eden for one reason, "lest he put forth his hand and take also from the Tree of Life, and eat, and **live forever**" (Gen 3: 22).

Saint Ephrem the Syrian explains, 'If man had eaten from the tree of life in the state of fallen human nature, it would have made that state eternal, and man would have lived eternally in death, separated from his God.' Thus, God in his mercy separated man from his source of salvation, the Tree of Life, because what was made good for man had, through disobedience, become his downfall. But God does not change, and thus his plan remains for mankind to share in his own eternal life, through the tree of life.

In the fullness of time, God sent his only Son to save the world and restore man to his original state. It is to be expected, therefore, that we find on the lips of the One who was sent to reverse the curse of the Fall the words of our salvation 'eat, and you will **live forever**' (cf. Jn 6:48-59). On the mountain of Calvary, God devised a way to replant the Tree of Life and hanging upon that tree, the tree of the cross, we behold the fruit of our salvation, the flesh of the Son of God. In the Orthodox Catholic Church, the "Tree of Life" is planted in the midst of the Garden of the Faithful and each Divine Liturgy the people of God eat from this tree for their eternal salvation.

Let us approach with fear of God, with faith and with love and come to the Giver the Life and receive the fruit of the Tree of Life and eat our salvation in the Garden of the Most High.