



Food

Genesis 9

Abouna Angelos
St. Raphael & St. John Coptic Orthodox Church
Chapel Hill, NC

March 13, 2019

God said, “Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food. (Genesis 1:29)

“My God, who opens Your hand and fills all living things with Your bounty, to You I commit my soul; care for me and provide for the needs of my body and soul forever. Have mercy upon Your creatures and upon me, a manifold sinner.”

—St. Nerses the “Grace-filled” (1102–1173)

Introduction

Food is an integral part of Genesis (chapters 1, 2, 3, and 9), and food is an essential element that we see all over the Bible. In Chapter 1, God said “Be fruitful and multiply.”

And God blessed them, and God said unto them, Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth, and subdue it: and have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over every living thing that moves upon the earth. And God said, Behold, I have given you every herb bearing seed, which is upon the face of all the earth, and every tree, in the which is the fruit of a tree yielding seed; to you it shall be for food. (Genesis 1:28-29)

The True Food

In chapter 1 we are vegan, with nothing about eating meat. Food has to have seed. The herbs and the trees all have seed. The most important of all herbs that have seed is: wheat. The most important of all trees that have seed is: grapes. Grapes permeate every single corner of the earth. Some types grow in cold climates, some in hot. The vine is everywhere. Wheat and grapes are available everywhere. If it is meant for man to eat an herb and a fruit, it is wheat and grape. Hence the eucharistic images.

Here man has dominion, but chapter 9 adds fear and dread.

So God blessed Noah and his sons, and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth. And the fear of you and the dread of you shall be on every beast of the earth, on every bird of the air, on all that move on the earth, and on all the fish of the sea. They are given into your hand. Every moving thing that lives shall be food for you. I have given you all things, even as the green herbs. But you shall not eat flesh with its life, that is, its blood. (Genesis 9:1-4)

When were the herbs and fruits created?

Day 1: Light

Day 2: Firmament

Day 3: Land and:

Grass that has seed: wheat, corn, barely, flax, etc.

Trees that have seed: grape, date, banana, etc.

What is the significance of the herbs and fruits in comparison with the animals? It is the first life on earth. When does the first life appear? On the third day.

These are strong eucharistic images. The grass and the trees are first living things on earth. Now, keep your finger on Genesis 1, and let us go to Jesus on this subject in John 12.

And Jesus answered them, "The hour has come for the Son of Man to be glorified. Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit. (John 12:23-24)

Eucharistic Image

This is a eucharistic image. He is giving us an image about Him being the Bread of Heaven, the Bread of Life. Let's go from John 12 to John 15.

"I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit. "You are already clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. "Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, neither can you, unless you abide in Me. "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit; for without Me you can do nothing. "If anyone does not abide in Me, he is cast out as a branch and is withered; and they gather them and throw them into the fire, and they are burned. "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, you will ask what you desire, and it shall be done for you. (John 15:1-7)

Notice the two images, "grain of wheat" and "true vine." These are images from Genesis 1: the grass (the herbs from the ground on the third day) and the trees (the fruit, the grapevine, which comes from earth on third day). This was the original food given to humans. However, Christ is going to give us that *new fruit* that comes from the ground that is his Body and his Blood. *He* becomes the *new food* for new people.

Creation Bubbling With Life

When we fast forward, we see that these are the types of food that bring life to the existence of man. Man will live by eating this blessed food from the blessed ground. Everything God had done is just bubbling with life. Man was given everything he needed to sustain his life, blessed foods from a blessed earth.¹

The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil

In chapter 2 we get the commandment, Do not eat of the tree of the knoweldge of good and evil.²

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." (Genesis 2:16-17)

Beware of a common misconception here. Did God say, "I am going to kill you if you eat it"? Did He make a wierd rule, that, "If you eat of it, I am going to kill you"? For example, imagine a parent

¹In Narnia, the newly-created land is also bubbling and brimming with life. C.S. Lewis, in *The Magicians Nephew*, tells a story where, in Narnia at the beginning of creation, the witch hits Aslan with a bar of iron. Aslan hardly notices it, but that bar of iron falls into the ground and sinks to the bottom. In Narnia, they hear the creak of it. It grows into a lamppost. Now Uncle Andrew, the magician, is self-centered and materialistic. He thinks, Wow, I can plant a tank or machine gun and bring them back to England and be very rich. Aslan is thinking, The land I created is brimming with life. The song I sung is brimming with existence and blessing everything. He is talking about that pure land created by the Creator, brimming with energy and life.

²Catechumens' fast. God was training his kids. Kids do not always do as they are told.

saying, “If you come near this box or touch this gun, I am going to kill you!” Is that what God is saying? No. He is stating that something will happen, as if it is the logic of the creation itself.

Stumbling Block or Crowning?

The question that may lead to a misconception is: Why would He create a tree that is in the center of the garden that would cause man to die? If I am a father, and I do not want my son to shoot himself with my gun, why would I put it on the dining room table? What is this tree about? When you eat it, it gives the knowledge of good and evil. In order to answer this question properly, we need to understand what is meant by “good” and “evil.”

What are “good” (“tov”) and “evil” (“rah”)? They are not about physical life.³ “Tov” or “good” is what I like, prefer, or choose. It is very broad. If I say, Red and green are tov, and black is rah, then is black sin? No, but I don’t like it. Eating dirt is rah. Eating bread is tov. Is that sin or righteousness? No, but it is just what we like. Living in the city for me is rah. Living on the mountain is tov. For someone else, it is vice versa. So good and evil should be understood in the broadest sense possible.⁴

³Hint: “bakr tov” means “good morning,” and “laila tov” means “good night.”

⁴There is a story of a young boy whose mother describes this horrific scene. Her boy is crawling around, and there are lizards around. She found him sucking on something and enjoying it. She said, “Honey what are you eating? Share it with me!” She said, “I tried to open his mouth, and, as I opened his mouth, I saw two eyes open, looking back at me!” She pulled the lizard out, and the boy thought, this was the most precious thing for him. To the boy it was tov. To the mother it was rah. You cannot get more contrast than that!

So, then, what is this tree? It will give the person the ability to be able to take into his hands his own choices. Basically that is it. This idea of making choices (good and evil, tov and rah) is linked to the image and likeness of God. We were created in the *image* of God; we have the potential to make choices. To make choices *that God would have us make* is to be in the *likeness* of God.

Apparently, the tasting of this food (the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil) would make man independently able to make choices for himself.

The Likeness of God

Now back to the question of why God had that tree there. My feeling is that God planned eventually to give it to man to eat of it, after a course of training, at which time it would become man's crowning ceremony, as if to say, "I have given you enough training; now you may go on your own and make your own choices. Alternatively, you may take it early—and this is also a choice: to be independent of me, the cost of which would be your life, and if you make that choice, I still have a plan to save you from it."

When Jesus came back, He showed us it is possible to be in the image of God, especially when he said, "I did not come to do my will but the will of Him who sent me."

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 6:38)

Behold, The Man!

Now, man was created in the *image* of God, *destined to be in His likeness*. The likeness did not come right away with Adam and Eve because the temptation came and cut that off. Then Pilate says, “Ecce Homo,” “Ἴδοὺ ὁ ἄνθρωπος,” “Behold, the man!”

What is he pointing to? Man should have been in the likeness of God. Man should have been the perfect being from the beginning. It seems, on the surface, that Pilate is giving the Jews a mutilated human being, but that Likeness of God has been achieved in God!

Hence fasting. If food was a reason to be tripped up and scandalized in God, then maybe the way back is going to involve abstinence and fasting. If this tree is my downfall, then I am not going to eat. I am going to fast with Christ for 40 days.

As the eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil was a trip-up for Adam and Eve, the golden calf was also a trip-up for the Israelites—so the rabbis would say.

Futility

Moving forward, we encounter the account of the deluge. Man continued to deteriorate. In chapter 6, the vitality of man is brought very low.

Now it came to pass, when men began to multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that

the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful; and they took wives for themselves of all whom they chose. And the LORD said, "My Spirit shall not strive with man forever, for he is indeed flesh; yet his days shall be one hundred and twenty years." (Genesis 6:1-3)

In chapter 3, God talks to Adam, saying:

"Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; In toil you shall eat of it All the days of your life. (Genesis 3:17)

Why does He curse the ground (and not Adam)? What would happen if Adam were to continue to live in this miserable status, living forever? There would be no renewal of his nature. There would be no place for Christ to come to renew his nature (cf. John 12).

"Cursed is the ground" means: now everything that was bubbling with life is going to be cut short. Not only human life is cut short but also the live-giving ground is cut short.

God is has to give us animals for our food. Why can't we eat corn chowder when we get sick? Why chicken soup? Because now our life is getting ever sicker. So whatever was able to sustain us in the first blessedness is gone. We got away from the blessed ground that God created. We need more ground to sustain us. Hence the eating of animals. It was savage if you consider what was before. The animals came to fear and dread man because came to be preying on them.

We did not always have this estranged relationship. The serpent came and spoke to Eve as her friend. It seems that it was no surprise to her that the serpent was talking to her. It was more of a primitive language (not like the language of today) similar to how animals deal with each other, how whales, birds, elephants deal with each other, more body language than anything else. They had a friendly relationship with animals, but they became our food.⁵

For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope; (Romans 8:20)

The term “futility” is a medical term. It is “futile” to do a CAT scan because he is going to die.

When was the creation subjected to futility? When God cursed the ground, the earth become futile. When He subjected the animals to be man’s food, the earth became futile. Both of them were not meant to do that. They were both supposed to be free.

Because we ate of the tree, animals are subjected to us. Today we do not really see animals when they are killed. These animals are subjected to being food for humans.⁶

⁵A student asked, Were the animals all vegetarian? Answer: We do not know for sure, but fossils from dinosaurs who died 65 million years ago show that death was there for animals. I do not want to jump to conclusions that contradict science. Q: Ok, animals were not immortal, but were they prey and predator with each other? A: I cannot go there, because I cannot venture into speculation or make assumptions. I am just talking about the relationship between humans and animals.

⁶In Egypt, there was a place I used to pass by regularly where they used to slaughter camels every week. One day, I clearly saw this one camel make a U-turn and start running the other way. It was running for its life, like it was being chased by ghosts. It kind of knew where it was going—it knew its life was going to end.

Animals would prefer to live out their lives in peace, like pets, but they were subjected to futility.⁷ What did animal life do for us? Sustain us for a few years? Then what? We die anyway—kind of futile.

Life

Who is going to give us substantial life, true life? The Way, the Truth, and the Life came to earth to provide for us eternal food. The only person who was willingly subjected, gave Himself up for us willingly, so that we could live. He was like an animal that was willingly and sacrificially giving Himself up for us.

“Do not labor for the food which perishes, but for the food which endures to everlasting life, which the Son of Man will give you, because God the Father has set His seal on Him.”
(John 6:27)

“I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst.”
(John 6:35)

“Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day. For My flesh is food indeed, and My blood is drink indeed. He who eats My flesh and drinks My blood abides in Me, and I in him. As the living Father sent Me, and I live because of the Father, so he who feeds on Me will live because of Me. This is the bread

⁷They were subjected to futility—in hope, and that hope gives me hope.

which came down from heaven---not as your fathers ate the manna,⁸ and are dead. He who eats this bread will live forever." (John 6:54-58)

The plants and animals are from the earth which is cursed, the earth that is futile.

"For I have come down from heaven, not to do My own will, but the will of Him who sent Me. (John 6:38)

We just talked about the tree of knowledge. There is a crashing of so many images here from everywhere.⁹

"This is the will of the Father who sent Me, that of all He has given Me I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day. (John 6:39)

Jesus is saying, "I am the only person here who is life. I have to give them my own flesh and blood because that is the only source of life that is going to let them live forever." He subjects himself to the same predicament as the creation. He goes as the lamb among the lamb, the oxen among the oxen; he gives man his life.

Jesus becomes a servant, under futility, to bring eternity, to break that futility, by becoming himself the food; as he subjected the creatures to it, he endures that slaughter as a lamb.

God put a condition when He commanded Adam, "otherwise you are going to eat and eat [sic] and die."

⁸By the way "manna" is from a tree in Iraq. Any iraqi will tell you that.

⁹Hint: the knowledge of good and evil.

Jesus gave the sign: that He will give resurrection at the last day.

“And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day.” (John 6:40)

Jesus himself resurrects—his own flesh and blood will resurrect. Everybody will be resurrected, but not everybody will be resurrected in his blood, in Him.

Human or Divine Understanding

The Enlightenment had to ask why and how about everything. Nothing could be taken at face value. When they asked the Catholic Church, the See of St. Peter of Rome, how do you explain this mystery, the Reformation happened in Europe.

Trust in the LORD with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; (Proverbs 3:5)

The peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:7)

This was a hard thing to understand for many of the followers of Jesus. They had a very hard time, and some turned away.

When Jesus knew in Himself that His disciples complained about this, He said to them, “Does this offend you? “What

then if you should see the Son of Man ascend where He was before? (John 6:61-62)

From that time many of His disciples went back and walked with Him no more. (John 6:66)

This saying about flesh and blood turned many away from Him.

Then Jesus said to the twelve, "Do you also want to go away?" (John 6:67)

"If you want to go, go."

But Simon Peter answered Him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life. (John 6:68)

Does that say that Peter understood? No. He *trusted* Him. What is the Lord demanding from him? Trust even if you do not understand. Jesus is saying you will not understand, but do you have a better rabbi who can understand and tell you? Peter is saying, we cannot explain it, but we are with you; we take it by faith.

Catholic and Reformed Views

When the priest offers me with his hand the Body of Christ, what am I smelling and tasting? I am tasting bread, smelling bread, in my mouth, but it is not based on my senses, but on the Word of Christ, that I treat it truly as the Body of Christ. This

concept was controversial, from the beginning. The people of the Enlightenment said, We cannot take that—there is not faith, there is science, there is examination.

So the Catholic Church created “trans-substantiation,” meaning that grains of wheat changed into muscle fibers and cells. Our church does not accept that as such. Yes, it is the Body of Christ. As to how it is changed and to what it is changed, we *do not* examine, question, explain, or interpret. We take it as a mystery by faith. If it means body and blood to Christ, we say yes.

When the Reformation people heard that explanation, they took it to mean the literal transformation of the bread into muscles and blood and fat. However, clearly it is not. This a controversy.

As orthodox we say, Yes I believe, but as to how, as to whether it is muscle, we do not know. All we know is that it is the true body and blood of Christ. That is what St. Peter said, and that is what we say. We take Christ’s words literally. We do not know how it is happening. Beyond reading the Bible, we can only speculate, but we choose not to.

The protestants say, why do you take this literally and not take, “I am the door” literally? The answer to that is John chapter 6. Also, notice that not one church on earth as a sacrament where you go through a door, but every church on earth has the mystery of the holy eucharist.¹⁰ From the book of Acts, every assembly had the breaking of the bread.

¹⁰At a lecture in the early 2000s at St. Vladimir Seminary on the topic of the Anaphora prayers, Fr. Daniel Findikyan said scholars believe the Anaphora prayers (that are prayed in all Apostolic churches) started being prayed much in their current forms, as early as the year 50 and no later than the year 150.

For I received from the Lord that which I also delivered to you: that the Lord Jesus on the same night in which He was betrayed took bread; and when He had given thanks, He broke it and said, "Take, eat; this is My body which is broken for you; do this in remembrance of Me." In the same manner He also took the cup after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. This do, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death till He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23-26)

Next Time

Next time we will cover clean and unclean food, blood, and sacrifices. We will also see food as nourishment, food as sacrifice, food as separation (between people).