

Homily on the Sunday of Holy Pentecost

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Sunday, June 7, 2020

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. One God. Amen.

In today's Epistle we read how the Apostles had assembled to celebrate Pentecost in the upper room and had sat down to break bread. The Holy Spirit descended on them in the form of tongues of fire, swirling around them and settling on each of them. God then filled them with Himself; fulfilling the promise of Christ that the Comforter would come and always be within them.

When the Apostles left the upper room to address the Jews of Jerusalem who had gathered outside, each of those assembled heard the Apostles speak to them **IN THEIR OWN NATIVE LANGUAGE**; the Holy Spirit succeeding in translating the words of the disciples into all the languages of those gathered at the same time! This from a group of men who had minimal education and who had never travelled outside of Israel!

After this revelation of the Holy Trinity they each went off to spread the Good News of Christ's Resurrection and His opening of the Gates of Salvation to mankind.

The Feast of Holy Pentecost is celebrated each year on the fiftieth day after the Great and Holy Feast of Pascha (Easter) and ten days after the Feast of the Ascension of Christ. This Feast is always celebrated on a Sunday.

It also celebrates the establishment of the Church through the preaching of the Apostles and the baptism of the thousands who on that day believed in the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Feast is also seen as the culmination of the revelation of the Holy Trinity.

In the liturgical services of the Feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated together with the full revelation of the divine Trinity: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. The fullness of the Godhead is manifested with the Spirit's coming to man, and the Church hymns celebrate this manifestation as the final act of God disclosing and donating Himself to the world he created. Hence, Pentecost Sunday is also called Trinity Day in the Orthodox tradition.

Often on this day the icon of the Holy Trinity—especially the icon with the three angelic figures who appeared to Abraham, the forefather of the Christian faith—is placed in the centre of the church. This icon is used together with the traditional Pentecostal icon which shows the tongues of fire hovering over Mary, Saint Paul and the Eleven Apostles, the original prototype of the Church, who are themselves sitting in unity surrounding a symbolic image of the world.

Pentecost in the Old Testament was the feast which occurred fifty days after Passover. As the Passover feast celebrated the exodus of the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, so Pentecost celebrated God's gift of the ten commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

In the new covenant of the Messiah, the Passover event takes on its new meaning as the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, the "exodus" of men from this sinful world to the Kingdom of God. Also, the

Pentecostal Feast is fulfilled and made new by the coming of the “New Law,” the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ.

The Holy Spirit is, of course, the third Person of the Holy Trinity, fully divine, proceeding from the Father, and eternal just like the Father and the Son. By being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Lord’s followers participate personally and jointly in the unity, power, and blessing of the very life of God by grace.

From now on the disciples no longer consider themselves disciples of a mere teacher, prophet, or king. They no longer struggle to accept the good news of His resurrection. Instead, they experience the new life of the Kingdom as “rivers of living water” flowing from their hearts.

By the Spirit, they participate by grace in the life of the Holy Trinity. God is not remote, distant, or removed from them, but present in their souls. By God’s presence in their hearts, they become truly who He created them to be in His divine image and likeness.

God has given the grace of the Holy Spirit to all, but not everybody has treasured it, and many among us have lost this grace. Do we really think that it would be possible for the Holy Spirit to reside and remain in a dark heart filled with the sins of racism, ethnophilitism, bigotry, and so on? Stench of any kind tends to repel people, and so the Holy Spirit is repelled by the stench of a dark and sinful heart. God only gives His Divine grace, His holy gifts to those who have a pure heart, for He is the “Treasury of good things”; all the true and most precious goods that the human heart could possibly ever possess. An impure heart could never receive them. And if it did, they would not dwell there for long.

Pentecost is the final fulfilment of the mission of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ and the first beginning of the messianic age of the Kingdom of God mystically present in this world in the Church of Christ.

Once again it must be noted that the feast of Pentecost is not simply the celebration of an event which took place centuries ago. It is the celebration of what must happen and does happen to us in the Church today. We all have died and risen with the Messiah-King, and we all have received his Most Holy Spirit. We are the “temples of the Holy Spirit.” God’s Spirit dwells in us (Rom 8; 1 Cor 2–3, 12; 2 Cor 3; Gal 5; Eph 2–3). We, by our own membership in the Church, have received “the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit” in the sacrament of chrismation. Pentecost has happened to us.

The Divine Liturgy of Pentecost recalls our baptism into Christ with verse 3: 27 from Galatians again replacing the Thrice-Holy Hymn. Special verses from the psalms also replace the usual antiphonal psalms of the liturgy. The epistle and gospel readings tell of the Spirit’s coming to men. The kontakion sings of the reversal of Babel as God unites the nations into the unity of his Spirit. The troparion proclaims the gathering of the whole universe into God’s net through the work of the inspired apostles. The hymns “O Heavenly King, O Comforter” and “We have seen the True Light” are sung for the first time since Easter, calling the Holy Spirit to “come and abide in us,” and proclaiming that “we have received the heavenly Spirit.”

Our church building is decorated with flowers and the green leaves of summer to show that God’s divine Breath comes to renew all creation as the “life-creating Spirit.”

God does this because He loves us. He is acting as a loving Father would, and although we have free will, he wants us to submit to His will and He wants us to work with Him, in order to change us. For us to do this, we must cooperate with God and allow Him to work in us and allow Him to shape our will to His will.

Of course, if we do not want this and refuse to cooperate with Him, He will not force us to cooperate with Him nor will He force us to submit to Him. If we do not want this, He will just withdraw from us. And that would be a real drama.

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit took up residence within the human soul for the first time. This is the Feast of Pentecost, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, and the transformation which was begun at Pascha is further fulfilled in the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. And the Holy Spirit within us, Himself, has the effect of transforming and shaping the soul into more perfectly taking on His own image and likeness.

With the Holy Spirit present in our hearts, linking us together organically as one, our fallen, divided humanity is restored. Just as Father, Son, and Spirit share a common life of love, unity, and holiness, we share a common life in Christ's Body, the Church, but physically and spiritually. We have the responsibility to believe, repent, and obey the Lord as we participate in the ministries of the Church and live faithfully each day.

As members of Christ's Body, we are nurtured by worship, the sacraments, and spiritual instruction in our common life. The holy Tradition of the Church is the presence of the Holy Spirit, guiding Christ's Body into ever greater knowledge of and participation in the life of the Holy Trinity.

It is up to us whether we want to dedicate our whole lives to Christ. And it is up to us to spend every waking minute of our lives in not angering God, and to ask Him to help us in times when our faith is weak. And the Lord will always be there to help us.

And the Holy Spirit will come into our hearts and illumine our hearts. The Holy Spirit will help us so that we can keep on the path of salvation. May the Holy Spirit come down into our hearts. And may we and all who are sorrowing be consoled by the Holy Spirit. This is what this great Feast of Pentecost is all about.

Amen.