

The Reading is from the Holy Gospel According to St. John (7:37-52; 8:12, Acts 2:1-12)

+ In the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit +

A group of Baptists recently saw an Orthodox wedding of one of our Parishioner's children, and one of these Baptists shared how amazed they were with the Orthodox service. It seems he was surprised to see just how "Christ centered" we are. Well this shouldn't come as a surprise to us. We are the original "Christ centered" Church, just as we are the first Bible believing Church, because the Bible came through us. Likewise we are the first Pentecostal Church, because we are the Church of Pentecost.

Pentecost is the sequel to the incarnation of Christ; the result of the incarnation.<sup>1</sup> This is what the Gospel is referring to when says that "The Spirit had been given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." Because it was not until the cross, the grave, the third resurrection, the ascension into heaven and the sitting down at the right hand of the Father that we were created a new and made fit to receive the Holy Spirit. Before the incarnation and life and work of Christ we were enemies of God. How could we have received the Holy Spirit? But by the cross we have been reconciled unto God, made sons of God, fit to receive the Holy Spirit.

Christ has opened up for us the possibility of receiving the Holy Spirit and being the Body of Christ. By Christ then, we have "become fit to receive the Holy Spirit and He descends [today] into the world and fills [us]...the Church" "with His presence;" "imparting to each of us the fullness of divinity," so that we might become like God.

We are made in the image and likeness of God, yes? Christ has restored in us that image, and now the Holy Spirit quickens us to that likeness of God. And this is what happens of course in Baptism and Chrismation. By Baptism we receive forgiveness of sins, put on Christ and become united with Him; truly partaking of His death and resurrection, so that we might receive

the Holy Spirit and His deifying by the oils of Chrismation. And it is precisely through the Sacrament of Chrismation that the gift of the Holy Spirit is given, and outside the Orthodox Church, the gifts of the Holy Spirit are not revealed.<sup>ii</sup>

We must be on guard then when we hear others speaking about being “baptized in the Holy Spirit.” True baptism in, with, and by the Holy Spirit comes when we are Baptized into Christ and receive Chrismation. Baptism in the Holy Spirit is not the ecstatic speaking in tongues that you see in the Pentecostal churches and movements. The ecstatic tongues that we see in First Corinthians were a gift from the Holy Spirit, but they were being misused. That is why Paul has to talk to them about.

And he teaches that such tongues were the least of God’s gifts. St. Paul says they were temporary and primarily for private and individual edification having little in common with modern charismatics, Pentecostals, or “mainline churches” where it is practiced. Those types of tongues were not seen in the Church after the first or second century. It was not until the early 1900’s that the present form of speaking in tongues showed up, and when they did they showed up outside the Orthodox Church,<sup>iii</sup> outside the Church of Pentecost. Is it any wonder then to see practitioners of tongues displaying such a divided and confusing “Babel” of doctrine concerning salvation, Christ, the Holy Trinity, the Sacraments and the Church?

Today the Person of Holy Spirit comes into the world, descending and sitting on the Apostles and disciples like fire in the form of tongues and allowing them to speak in foreign languages, which were nevertheless understood everyone in their own language. This demonstrates for us that the Gospel is for all people, nations and ethnicities. It teaches us that it is not man who reaches to God, but God who comes to dwell in man.

You see, Pentecost is the reversal of the Tower of Babel. In Genesis, “the whole earth was one language and one speech,” and the people said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city and a tower, whose top will reach to heaven; and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth.” (Gen. 11:1, 3-4). Theirs was a false unity based in humanity, and bent thus toward pride. And so God confused their languages and scattered them over the face of the earth, for true unity is found not in humanity, or by humanity, but it is found in and by the Holy Trinity.<sup>iv</sup>

Humanity still suffers for this Tower of Babel syndrome. We seek unity, security, peace, and progress by humanity and in our own efforts. But God has come down in Pentecost to unite us to Himself. We can stop building the tower of Babel, because today at Pentecost God has built us His Church. By Pentecost, by the Holy Spirit, the Church is shown to be perfect, complete, and full. The Church is not in the process of developing, emerging, or coming into its fullness, no, it is full, complete. That is what it means to say the Church is “Catholic;” it is full, complete, and perfect.

And so we are free from the rhetoric that says, “God is bigger than any church,” or that “No Church has a monopoly on God;” we can toss those pithy sayings into the garbage. Because today God has shown us that the Church, the Orthodox Church, is united to Him. Indeed the Church is His Body, full and complete; lacking nothing. And just as Christ is fully God and fully Human, so too is His Church. It is Divine, and yet can be seen and identified specifically here on earth in and as the Orthodox Church. There is not some invisible church floating out there somewhere, consisting of various people from various Christian sects, known only by God. No the Church is visible and it is us. We are it. It is a tremendous and humbling gift.

Therefore, the Holy Spirit does not act apart from Christ and the Father. He is not doing, saying, or teaching anything different from the Son and the Father. Our Country was founded on the principle of three *separate* but equal branches of govern, designed to provided checks and balances on each other, but the Church is “founded” (to use that term) on equal but *united* persons, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit; not designed, but from before the ages, in perfect check and balance with each other. One God. If we want to know what the Holy Spirit is saying we simply look at Christ and the Church, because the Holy Spirit does nothing contrary to Christ who is the head of the Church, and it is the Holy Spirit working and acting in the Church that we call Tradition. The Holy Spirit does not act “independent of Christ and His Church,”<sup>v</sup> nor is He “the common denominator of all the world’s religions,”<sup>vi</sup> or even of the so called Christian denominations. Yes, it is within the Orthodox Church that the Holy Spirit resides and acts united with the Head, Jesus Christ and the Father.

What then do we mean when we pray that the Holy Spirit is “everywhere present and fillest all things?” If we alone have the Holy Spirit how can He be everywhere and filling all things? Think of it in this way. Heat can affect the body in one of two ways. Heat can act upon us from outside of our bodies, such as with a fire or the sun, or our bodies can heat up from the inside. So it is with the Holy Spirit. He acts upon us from within our hearts and in our Church, but with others He acts upon them from the outside, always seeking to be let in mind you, but from the outside nonetheless.

But if we are still confused consider the Holy Spirit’s presence this way: We know that in winter part of the earth moves away from the sun, so that where there is winter the earth is standing further from the sun, and receives the sun’s light at an angle, and not as direct rays.<sup>vii</sup>

Nothing grows in this frozen condition; nevertheless, the rays of the sun are still the same, still fully present, but not effectual for bearing fruit.

It's the same with us and the Holy Spirit. The whole life of the Church angles us back toward God, thawing the hardness of our heart so that we might bring forth the fruits of the Holy Spirit. This is how the Holy Spirit becomes effectual in us. The Holy Spirit manifests itself in us, works in us, to the degree that in which we co-operate with God. "This is the way of deification leading to the Kingdom of God which is introduced into our hearts by the Holy Spirit..."<sup>viii</sup>

How then is our heart to be softened so that we might acquire of the Holy Spirit? First, by being the Church. The Church is One, as God is One. Our unity is then found in the Church. The Church is Catholic. It is full, and complete. The Church is Apostolic. It is faithful to the faith delivered to the Apostles once and for all time. And the Church is Holy. The Church is Holy not because of us, but because it is enlivened by the Holy Spirit. So we need to be the Church, do the things of the Church, and share in the life of the Church, by worshiping, serving others, and bearing witness, and gathering together to receive the Eucharist and to be the Church.

Secondly, for the Holy Spirit to become active in us, our hearts to be thawed; to be purified. This we do by selflessness, humility, forbearance, sacrifice, obedience, repentance, prayer, faith and faithfulness to the teachings of the Church. "This is how man becomes akin to God and how divine Grace [that is the effectual indwelling of the Holy Spirit] comes to dwell in Him."<sup>ix</sup>

By these things shall flow out of our hearts "rivers of living water"- The Holy Spirit. But by neglecting the faith of the Apostles, by seeking some spiritual experience, by dogging the hard work of purifying our hearts, and being members of the Body of Christ, the Orthodox Church, we will find ourselves not with the Holy Spirit, but with a spirit of error and deception

speaking theological nonsense. For the Holy Spirit at Pentecost demonstrates unity, the reversal of Babel. And so He does not bring about confusion of doctrine, a muddling down, or even a fear of doctrine. It is precisely by the Holy Spirit that the Church has been led in every generation into correct doctrine that we might know God. And it is in this that we are kept in the censer, pressed against the Divine flame that we might burn as sweet smelling incense to God.

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<sup>i</sup> Lossky, *Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*

<sup>ii</sup> St. Theophan the Recluse as cited by Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and Religion of the Future*, p. 123, 126

<sup>iii</sup> Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and Religion of the Future*, p. 125

<sup>iv</sup> Orthodox Study Bible, p. 16

<sup>v</sup> Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and Religion of the Future*, p. xxxi

<sup>vi</sup> Ibid.

<sup>vii</sup> St. Nikolai of Zicha, *Homilies*, vol. 1, p. 313-314

<sup>viii</sup> Lossky, 173.

<sup>ix</sup> Elder Paisios, *Spiritual Struggle*, p. 128