



THE HOLY FEAST OF PENTECOST, 2011

In the Name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

Today, the great Feast of Pentecost, and tomorrow, called the Day of the Holy Spirit, are the two occasions in the liturgical year of the Orthodox Church when we particularly focus on the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, the Holy Spirit.

In Orthodox Christianity we believe that our Lord Jesus Christ is the founder and sole Head of the Church, and that the Church is upheld or sustained, informed, led, and inspired by the Holy Spirit. It is the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth, as the Savior promised us.

BUT WHO, OR WHAT, IS THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Our Orthodox Faith does not begin with philosophical or theological speculation, but is grounded in the personal self-revelation of God. That is the foundation, the bottom line, so-to-speak. We do not begin with rational deductions, but with God's revelation of Himself to man. As we say in the services, "'God is the Lord and He has revealed Himself to us."

AND WHAT DID GOD REVEAL ABOUT HIMSELF?

Beginning in the Old Testament He manifested Himself as a Trinity when He appeared to Abraham in a grove of oak trees in the form of three angels. (This Old Testament "Theophany" is most beautifully captured in the icon by the medieval Russian iconographer, Rublev.) And then, in the New Testament, this "Trinity" of Being becomes more distinct and we experience it as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. This Doctrine of the Holy Trinity is central to our Orthodox Faith. It affirms that there is only One God, in whom there are three distinct Persons. This is an infinite and immortal mystery which can never be fully comprehended by us finite mortals, but we firmly believe that we can actually participate in the Trinity through the life of the Church, and especially through our celebration of the Eucharist, the Divine Liturgy.





Every opening prayer in the Orthodox Church is directed to the Holy Spirit. But the prayer is so familiar to us that we tend to sort of skim through it on automatic pilot. We shouldn't. We should say the prayer slowly and with attention: "O Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things..." and so forth. The Holy Spirit is truly and fully God in His essence, having the same divine nature as the Father and the Son, while at the same time being a distinct Person. We know that the whole purpose of our life here on earth is to acquire the Holy Spirit and be filled with Him. The Holy Fathers testify to this, and, as recently as St. Seraphim of Sarov in the 19th century, we have a full and beautiful exposition of this and how it is to be done.

It is God the Holy Spirit who is the "power" or the divine energy behind the Sacraments or Holy Mysteries of the Church. In the sacrament of **Baptism**, the priest calls upon the Holy Spirit to sanctify the water used in the Baptism. And then, the sacrament of **Chrismation** is the actual giving of the gifts of the Holy Spirit to the soul or nous of the person who has just been baptized. It is because our bodies were anointed and sealed with the Holy Spirit in Chrismation that we must always see our bodies as Temples of the Holy Spirit, always to be modestly dressed, and not to cremate our bodies when we die, or defile them with carnal sins or poor stewardship.



The Eucharist—the greatest of the Holy Mysteries--is also accomplished by the priest, who calls upon the Holy Spirit to come down and sanctify the bread and the wine, changing them into the precious Body and Blood of our Lord Jesus Christ. When a priest is ordained, the bishop calls down the Holy Spirit to hallow the new priest and set him aside for service at the holy altar. And so forth, through all of the sacraments.



Before Christ left this world He established His Church on the rock of St. Peter's faith in Him as the Son of God, and He gave clear authority to this Church, and to this Church only. And then, on the first Pentecost Day, in the Upper Room (where the Last Supper had taken place),



the Holy Spirit descended in a great wind and under the form of fire to completely fill up, for all time, the Church—yes, filling the Church up *with divine power and strength* to grow, to save, and to sanctify human beings through Christ, the Head of the Church.

As we sing in one of the hymns for this Feast: "Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God, who has shown forth the fishermen as supremely wise by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit, and through them didst draw the world into Thy net. O befrienders of man, glory to Thee."

This is why the Holy Fathers testify with one voice that only the man or woman who truly has the Holy Spirit can honestly be called "spiritual." And it is only a "spiritual man" who can become a saint—that is, be saved through union with God, for such a person is partaking, in varying degrees, of the deifying grace of God, and he is bringing forth the fruits of virtue in through the Holy Spirit.

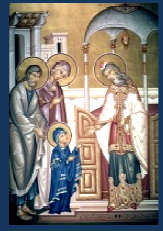
Thus, because of God the Holy Spirit in the Church and in our lives, "spirituality" for us is not an abstract thing, but something very concrete; it is not speculative or divorced from real life. It is not something we can study in school or read and books and think that now we "have" it. This is why we Orthodox only grant the formal title of "theologian" to one who is filled with the Holy Spirit and therefore a saint, and not to anyone who happens to have theological degree.

Brothers and sisters: this Feast of Pentecost, when the Church adorns herself in green branches—first, to commemorate the oak tree under which the Holy Trinity appeared to the Patriarch Abraham, and second, to remind us that the Holy Spirit brings new and fresh life to all—on this great Feast there is another reminder, and it is this: you and I, all of us, unworthy sinners though we be, are called by God the Word—Jesus Christ—and the Holy Spirit, to this same holiness or sanctity. We are called to rise up in sainthood, as so very many of our

June 12, 2011

Sunday Sermon

Fr Ambrose Young
Entrance of the Theotokos Skete



forefathers in the Faith have already done. We cannot do this by ourselves, we poor, weak, stumbling ones. But by the power of the Holy Spirit, God, we certainly can move ahead and beyond what we are now, today.

May we all be inspired by this Feast of God the Holy Spirit. May it enliven us as we slog through our sometimes difficult days. And may it give new vigor and meaning to our prayers when we say:

"Glory to the Father, and to the Son, AND TO THE HOLY SPIRIT, both now and ever, and unto the ages of ages. Amen."