



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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✠ June 3, 2012 ✠

Pentecost

Martyr Lucillian at Byzantium (270)

St. Kevin, Hermit & Abbot of Glendalough (618)

Fast-Free Week

The holy Spirit was, is,
and ever shall be
without beginning,
without an end,
forever united and numbered
with the Father and the Son.
He is Life, and Life-creating,
the Light, and the
Giver of Light,
Good in Himself,
the Fountain of goodness,
Through Whom the Father is
known and the Son glorified!
All acknowledge One Power,
One order, One worship
of the Holy Trinity!

⇒ **Yard Sale ~ This Friday & Saturday, June 8 and 9 - 8:00am till...**

~ Vespers of Pentecost

Looking Ahead: June 28 and 29 – The Feast of Sts. Peter and Paul

⇒ We will have a special guest visitor for the Feast – Abbot Fr. Gerasim Eliel – who is the recommended candidate for the Episcopacy for the Diocese of the South by the Diocesan Council, likely to be elected in July in Miami. Fr. Gerasim served as a monk at St. Herman's in Platina, CA for many years and was instrumental in many of the wonderful publications from St. Herman's Press. He also lived in Alaska for periods of time. He just completed his MDiv degree at St. Vladimir's Seminary as Valedictorian. We have great hope for his future with us!

HOMILY ~ About the Testimony of the Spirit of God

"The Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, He shall testify to Me" (St John 15:26).

God's Son sent God the Holy Spirit into the world to testify about Him until the end of time. "He will testify to Me." How will God the Spirit testify about God the Son? God the Spirit will testify in many ways:

By attracting the souls of men to Christ's Church;

By revealing to them the meaning of the Holy Scripture;

By leading their minds to the commandments of Christ;

By giving warmth, freshness, power and gentleness to the words of Christ;

By converting repentant sinners into righteous ones;

By fulfilling all the promises and prophecies of Christ upon men and upon nations and upon God's Church;

By strengthening the Church of Christ and holding it firm against all the tempest of times and all the evils of Hades and men throughout the ages of ages.

The Spirit which works in these and many other similar ways is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, Good, Life creating and All-powerful.

Not one of Christ's words goes against the Spirit of God nor does the Spirit of God go against a single word of Christ. That is why when the Spirit of God pleases to enter into the heart of man, He becomes alive and becomes a true witness to all that Christ said and did. Then, man believes joyfully and unwaveringly. For how would he not believe the greatest and the most enduring Eyewitness and Participator of all the words, all the miracles and all the works of Christ?

That is why, brethren, let us pray before all and above all that this Eyewitness and Participator, the Holy Spirit and All-powerful, settle in our hearts so that our faith may become alive, unwavering and joy-creating. O God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, come and abide in us!

~ St. Nikolai of Serbia, from the Prologue of Ochrid

His Logos and His Spirit

✠ "Since God, as sovereign King of all, is primordial Intellect, He possesses within Himself His Logos and His Spirit, coessential and coeternal with Him. He is never without the Logos and the Spirit because the divine nature is one and indivisible; nor is He to be confused with Them, for the three hypostases in God are distinct and unconfusable. Hence in naturally begetting the Logos from His essence, the Father is not severed from Him, since He is Himself indivisible.

The coeternal Logos, not severed from His Begetter possesses the Spirit, who proceeds eternally from the Father (cf. Jn. 15:26) and shares with the Logos the same unoriginate nature. For the nature of both Logos and Spirit is one and undivided, even though by virtue of the distinction of hypostases the one God is divided into persons and is glorified as the Trinity of Father, Son and Holy Spirit. Yet the persons, since They constitute one nature and one God, are never separated from the coeternal essence and nature."

St. Nekitas Stethatos, Disciple of St. Symeon

The Grace of the Spirit

✠ For the Grace of the Spirit, when it has entered into the mind and has been established, springs up more than any fountain, fails not, becomes not empty, stays not. To signify therefore at once its unailing supply and unlimited operation, He has called it "a well" and "rivers," not one river but numberless.

-St. John Chrysostom

✠ **Give me ears to hear Thee, eyes to see Thee, taste to partake of Thee, sense of smell to inhale Thee. Give me feet to walk unto Thee; lips to speak of Thee, heart to fear and love Thee. Teach me Thy ways, O Lord, and I shall walk in Thy truth. For Thou art the way, the truth and the life.**

~ St. Tikhon of Zadonsk, 1724 - 1783

✠ **"DO NOT LOOK at what other people are doing (as an example), but heed what the word of God teaches."**

~ St. Tikhon

✠ Righteous judgment must relate to us ourselves, but not to others, and not according to our outward actions must we judge ourselves, but according to our inner condition or feeling.

St. Ambrose of Optina

✠ Have pity and you will not condemn. ~ **St. Anatoly of Optina**

✠ "If, therefore, as a result of some necessity or bodily condition, such as illness or something of that kind, it happens that we are unable to practice the aforementioned bodily virtues, we have forgiveness from the Lord, Who knows the reasons for our actions. But if we fail to practice the virtues of the soul, we shall have no excuse; for these are not subject to constraint."

St. Maximos the Confessor

✠ "IN REGARD to our relations with our neighbors, according to God's commandments we must always show love. Toward those who live near us, let us show love in word and deed insofar as it never violates our love for God. And toward those who are far away from us, we should stretch out spiritually our love toward them as we drive away from our hearts every kind of evil opinion of them. We should bow our souls reverently before them and fulfill the desire to serve them sincerely. If the Lord sees us acting thus, He will forgive us our sins and He will accept our prayers as a worthy sacrifice, and shower upon us His mercies."

St. Nilus Sorsky (+ 1508)

How to Save the Soul

by St. Theophan the Recluse

What does one say to the person who asks: "How can I save my soul?"

This: Repent, and being strengthened by the power of Grace in the Holy Mysteries, walk in the path of God's commandments, under the direction which the Holy Church gives you through its God-given priesthood. All of this must be done in a spirit of sincere faith which has no reservations.

What then is faith?

Faith is the sincere confession that God, Who is worshipped in the Trinity, Who created all things and provides for all, saves us who are fallen, through the power of the death on the Cross of the Incarnate Son of God, by the Grace of the Most Holy Spirit in His Holy Church. The beginnings of renewal, which are established in this life, will appear in all their glory in the future age, in a way that the mind cannot comprehend nor the tongue express.

O our God, how great are Thy promises!

How then does one walk in the path of the commandments unswervingly?

This cannot be answered in one word, for life is a complex matter. Here is what is necessary:

- a) Repent, and turn to the Lord, admit your sins, weep for them, with heartfelt contrition, and confess them before your spiritual father. Vow in word and in your heart before the face of the Lord not to offend Him further with your sins.
- b) Then by abiding in God in mind and heart, endeavor to fulfill in body the duties and affairs which your station in life imposes upon you.
- c) In this labor most of all guard your heart from evil thoughts and feelings—pride, vainglory, anger, judging of others, hatred, envy, scorn, despondency, attachment to things and people, scattered thoughts, anxiety, all sensual pleasures and everything that separates the mind and heart from God.
- d) In order to stand firm in this labor, resolve beforehand not to: withdraw from what you recognize to be necessary, even if it may, mean death. To achieve this, when you first resolve to do so, offer your life to God in order to live not for your own sake, but for God alone.
- e) A support for life in this manner is a humble offering of one's self to the will of God, and not depending on one's self the spiritual arena in which this life is accomplished is patience or an unswerving stand in the ranks of redeemed life, with a cheerful endurance of all the labors and unpleasantness that are linked with this.
- f) A support for patience is faith, or the assurance that, working in this way for God, you are His servant and He is your Master, Who sees your efforts, is gladdened by them and values them; hope that the help of God which is ever protecting you, is always ready and waiting for you, and will descend upon you in your time of need, that God will not forsake you to the end of your life, and preserving you as one faithful to His commandments here, among all temptations, He will lead you through death to His eternal Kingdom. Love, which meditates day and night upon the beloved Lord, in every way strives to do only what is pleasing to Him, and avoids everything that might offend Him in thought, word and deed.

g) The weapons of such a life are: prayers in church and at home, especially mental prayer, fasting according to one's strength and the rules of the Church, vigilance, solitude, physical labors, frequent confession of sins, Holy Communion, reading of the Word of God and the writings of the Holy Fathers, conversations with God-fearing people, frequent consultation with one's spiritual father about all the events of one's internal and external life. The foundation of all these labors in measure, time and place is wisdom, with the counsel of those who are experienced.

h) Guard yourself with fear. For this remember the end—death, judgment, hell, the heavenly Kingdom. Most of all be attentive to yourself: preserve a sober mind and an untroubled heart.

i) Set as a final goal the kindling of the fire of the Spirit, so that the spiritual fire will burn in your heart and, gathering up all your strength into one, will begin to build your inner man and finally burn up the tares of your sins and passions. Arrange your life in this manner, and with God's grace you will be saved.
From *Orthodox Life*, Vol. 27., No. 6 (Nov.-Dec., 1977)

At the Crossroads

✘ Man stands at the crossroads between righteousness and sin, and chooses whichever path he wishes. But after that the path which he has chosen to follow, and the guides assigned to it, whether angels and saints or demons and sinners, will lead him to the end of it, even if he has no wish to go there. The good guides lead him toward God and the Kingdom of Heaven, the evil guides toward the devil and age long punishment. But nothing and no one is to blame for his destruction except his own free will. For God is the God of salvation, bestowing on us, along with being and well-being, the knowledge and strength that we cannot have **without the Grace of God**. Not even the devil can destroy a man, compelling him to choose wrongly, or reducing him to impotence or enforced ignorance, or anything else: he can only suggest evil to him.

St. Peter of Damascus

Free Access

✘ From the time of man's fall, the devil has had free access to him. The devil is entitled to this access, for, through disobedience to him man has voluntarily submitted to his authority and rejected obedience to God. However, God has redeemed man. To the redeemed man He has given the freedom to submit either to God or to the devil; and that this freedom may manifest itself without any compulsion, the devil has been permitted access to man. It is quite natural that the devil makes every effort to keep man in his former subjection to him, or yet to enslave him even more thoroughly. To achieve this, he implements his primordial and customary weapon—falsehood. He strives to deceive and delude us, counting on our state of self-delusion. He stimulates our passions, our sick inclinations. He invests their pernicious demands with an attractive appearance and strives to entice us to indulge them. However, he that is faithful to the Word of God will not permit himself to do so; he will restrain the passions and thus repulse the enemy's assaults (see James 4:7); struggling against his own self-deception under the guidance of the Gospel, subduing his passions, and thus gradually destroying the influence of the fallen spirits on himself, he will by stages pass from the state of deception to the realm of truth and freedom (see John 8:32), the fullness of which will be given through the overshadowing of **Divine Grace**.

St. Ignatius Brianchaninov

The Humble

✘ Not all souls are equally strong. Some are sturdy as stone, others frail as smoke. Those like smoke are the proud souls. As the wind bears smoke hither and thither, so does the enemy sway them whichever way he will, for either they have no patience, or else they are easily deceived. But the humble soul keeps the Lord's commandments and stands firm in them like a rock buffeted by the waves. The humble have surrendered themselves to the will of God and their minds are fixed on Him, and **the Lord gives them the Grace of the Holy Spirit.**" **St. Silouan the Athonite**

Pentecost: The Descent of the Holy Spirit

Fr. Thomas Hopko

In the Old Testament, Pentecost was the feast which occurred fifty days after Passover. As the Passover feast celebrated the exodus of the Israelites from the slavery of 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. And in the New Testament as well, the Pentecostal Feast is fulfilled and made new by the coming of the "new law," the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Disciples.

"When the day of Pentecost had come they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed as resting upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit... (Acts 2:1-4).

The Holy Spirit that Christ had promised to His Disciples came on the day of Pentecost. The Apostles received "the power from on high," and they began to preach and bear witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, the King and the Lord. This moment has traditionally been called the birthday of the Church.

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's self-disclosure and self-donation to the world of His creation. For this reason Pentecost Sunday is also called Trinity Day in the Orthodox Tradition. Often on this day the icon of the Holy Trinity – particularly that of the three angelic figures who appeared to Abraham, the forefather of the Christian faith – is placed in the center of the church. This icon is used with the traditional Pentecostal icon which shows the tongues of fire hovering over Mary and the Twelve Apostles, the original prototype of the Church, who are themselves sitting in unity surrounding a symbolic image of "Cosmos," the world.

On Pentecost we have the final fulfillment of the mission of Jesus Christ and the first beginning of the messianic age of the Kingdom of God mystically present in this world in the Church of the Messiah. For this reason the fiftieth day stands as the beginning of the era which is beyond the limitations of this world, fifty being that number which stands for eternal and heavenly fulfillment in Jewish and Christian mystical piety: seven times seven, plus one.

Thus, Pentecost is called an apocalyptic day, which means the day of final Revelation. It is also called an eschatological day, which means the day of the final and perfect end (in Greek *eschaton* means the end). For when the Messiah comes and the Lord's Day is at hand, the "last days" are inaugurated in which "God declares: I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh." This is the ancient prophecy to which the Apostle Peter refers in the first sermon of the Christian Church which was preached on the first Sunday of Pentecost (Acts 2:17; Joel 2:28-32). The Kneeling Vespers of Pentecost features three long prayers at which the faithful kneel for the first time since Pascha. The Monday after Pentecost is the Feast of the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church, and the Sunday after Pentecost is the Feast of All Saints. This is the logical liturgical sequence since the coming of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled in men by their becoming Saints, and this is the very purpose of the creation and salvation of the world. "Thus says the Lord: Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I your God am holy." (Leviticus 11:44-45; I Peter 1:15-16).

- Taken from "Worship" (Volume II) of The Orthodox Faith, by Protopresbyter Thomas Hopko

To See God

Too often we fail to see God. We miss out on seeing the sacred that He has placed right in front of us.

Helen Keller, whose only ability to "see" was through touch once, wrote:

I, who cannot see, find hundreds of things to interest me through mere touch.

I feel the delicate symmetry of a leaf.

I pass my hands lovingly about the smooth skin of a silver birch, or the rough shaggy bark of a pine....

I feel the delightful, velvety texture of a flower, and discover its remarkable convolutions; and something of the miracle... is revealed to me.

At times my heart cries out with longing to see these things. If I can get so much pleasure from mere touch, how much more beauty must be revealed by sight.

Yet, those who have eyes apparently see little. The panorama of color and action which fills the world is taken for granted....

It is a great pity that, in the world of light, the gift of sight is used only as a mere convenience rather than as a means of adding fullness to life."

The gift of sight is being able to "see" what's around us, and more importantly, spiritually seeing our Risen Lord. On a flight to New England a few of years ago, as we began our final approach, I glanced out of the window. The late afternoon sun highlighted fall's vivid colors across the mountains and valleys. I put away my magazine, and took in the breathtaking canvas that only our Creator-God could paint. Unfortunately, the urgency of life, and the pressure of deadlines have caused us to miss many "God-moments".

Romans Chapter 1 contains a profound truth. "For what can be known about God is plain to them, because God has shown it to them. Ever since the creation of the world His eternal power and divine nature, invisible though they are, have been understood and seen through the things He has made." (Rom. 1:19-20)

In short, in these two verses, St. Paul encourages us to approach life with a "spirit of expectation" — to see Him through His invisible attributes — His Eternal Power and His Divine Nature. They are clearly evident and visible in His creation.

"The heavens declare the Glory of God, and the sky above proclaims His handiwork." (Psalm 19:1)

Has the pace of life robbed you of enjoying His handiwork? Are your daily pressures stealing His eternal power from your soul? Has pain left you feeling that His divine nature could never fill your hurting heart?

If so, slow down. No — STOP! Whatever you are doing, right now, just stop.

Go outside and experience His creation with your family and friends. Enjoy His handiwork.

Psalm 46:10 says, "Be still and know that I am God" — because He is. Allow the precious gift of sight to add fullness to your life. It just might turn your life around.

Very Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis, Atlanta

The Disappearance of Church

Fr. Stephen Freeman, Glory to God for All Things Blog

One of the larger crises facing modern Christians is the disappearance of the Christian Church. Protestant denominations are not the same thing as “the Church” and have never had a self-understanding that could properly be called “Church.” Historically they have been, more or less, Christian organizations with certain “Churchly” aspects. The first crisis of Protestantism was the existence of other Protestants. In England (where the standard Protestant expression was Anglicanism), the question became, “What do we do about presbyters (clergy) ordained outside of the Anglican Church?” Various answers were presented. Some demanded re-ordination – others not. So long as various groups stayed within their own original boundaries (Lutherans in Germany, Calvinists in Switzerland, Holland and Scotland, Zwinglians in their corner of Switzerland, etc.) everyone could pretend that they were the “Protestant Church.” A crisis was born in the realization that Sola Scriptura (and other Reformation principles) created more problems than it solved. Various solutions arose. The American solution became the primary model: let the Church disappear as an important category in theology. Thus the “invisible Church” was born. The Church exists “invisibly” and is only known to God. All ecclesiastical boundaries are simply man-made notions, with no theological significance. Thus, the Church, instituted by Christ and of primary importance in the New Testament (to whom were the Epistles written?), becomes a non-entity, or a Second-Storey entity at best.

Today this crisis has moved past the temporal manifestation of denominations. Mainline Churches are becoming akin to shopping malls – impressive in their time and all the more sad as they stand empty or irrelevant. Why someone might be Anglican or Presbyterian, etc., is now nothing more than a taste preference. The current manifestation of Protestant “Church” is well-represented by so-called mega churches. Driven by the marketing of Christianity, these organizations are self-defined in a manner that embraces the market as never before. They are today’s upscale malls in comparison to earlier years’ empty shells. Their own emptiness is inevitable.

At the same time that the Church has become glaringly obsolete in Protestant circles, authority itself has disappeared. There is no Protestant theological system that can command sufficient loyalty to support a local mega church. There exists an “evangelical consensus” in American society. Like every consensus, such agreement is simply part of the ephemera of popular culture. Its significance is only as a barometer or wind vane.

The tragedy in this crisis is primarily spiritual – for the Church is not an optional Christian reality. There is no authentic Christianity apart from Church. As difficult as it may be for some to accept – the Church is what the Christian life looks like. It is possible to “extract” a form of Christianity from within the New Testament and make of it a private practice – but this is a misuse of Scripture. The New Testament is the Church’s book from beginning to end.

The churchless Christianity of the modern world creates distortions within the spiritual life. These distortions are so wide-spread that they are frequently found within the lives of those within the Church itself. Authentic Christian life is inherently communal, and cannot be lived apart from the “other.” “My brother is my salvation,” in the words of the fathers.

The Jesus of popular salvation narratives is sometimes a stranger to the Church. “To accept Jesus as Lord and Savior,” as part of a private spirituality can be a very serious distortion of the Jesus revealed to us in Scripture. It is not necessarily a conscious rejection of Christ as He is revealed in Scripture. However, the cultural version of the private Jesus frequently has little relation with Christ as classically taught.

The weakness of a Churchless Christianity can also be seen in its inability to engage the culture. Private spirituality is culturally meaningless. Only a community of practice can transform a culture (though this is not necessarily a primary goal of the Church). But with the absence of a transforming Christian practice, an already secular culture will only pass more deeply into the twilight of a secular order.

In short summary: the Christian Crisis is the growing disappearance of the Church as anything more than a loose affiliation of individual believers. It is the triumph of consumerism over ecclesiology. Those communities where Church remains essential (Orthodox, Roman Catholics) will not (and do not) escape the struggle engendered by the crisis. The willingness of Christians to embrace a community of practices – will be the great test of our time.

G.K. Chesterton wrote "In every age the Church would perish, if it were perishable."

"And in the power of the Resurrection, the Church will survive the hatred of Hollywood, the malice of the media, and the mendacious wickedness of the abortion industry."

- R.C. Bishop Daniel Jenky of Peoria, IL

HOMILY ~ About the Children of God

"The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Romans 8:16).

He who has the Spirit of God in himself - only he has the witness that he is the child of God. Without the Spirit of God there is no such witness. Not even the entire universe can give this witness. The universe, alone, without the Spirit of God - what else does it witness to us other than that we are its slaves, its victims, which it unmercifully swallows? In essence, the pagans thought that also. The opponents of God today, do they not think likewise? They do think so. For indeed, it is difficult to take that thought away from man who did not recognize the Spirit of Christ, the Spirit of God, the Witness of Heaven.

The same Apostle says: "For you have not received the spirit of bondage" (Romans 8:15). What is this spirit of bondage? It is every other spirit except the Spirit of God, Who Christ the Lord sends to those who love Him. The spirit of bondage is the spirit of materialism, the spirit of fortune-telling, the spirit of naturalism, the spirit of pessimism, the spirit of despair, the spirit of vice. Only the Spirit of God is the All Holy Spirit of adoption and freedom.

O what happiness, O what peace, O what joy when the Spirit of God cuddles in the cleansed heart of man as a sparrow does in its nest! Then our hope opens hundreds of doors in the prison of the universe and our embrace, wider than the universe, stretches out to the One Who is greater and more merciful than the universe. To Whom? To the Father! And then we cry out: "Abba, Father!" (Romans 8:15).

The witness of God, which comes through the eyes, can even lead us to doubt that we are the children of God. But, the witness which comes to us from the heart, from the Spirit of God, does not leave even the slightest doubt. God witnesses about God. What kind of doubt can there be? God the Holy Spirit caresses us in the heart of our very being. Can there be any kind of doubt there? No; for then we know and feel completely confident that God is the Father and we, the children of God. No one's servants, no one's slaves, rather the children of God.

O Lord God, Holy Spirit come abide in us and remain with us as a Witness of the Trinity and the Kingdom, as a Witness of the immortal Paradise!