

Pentecost Con't

In the three readings of the Old Testament (Numbers 11:16-17, 24-29; Joel 2:23-32; Ezekiel 36:24-28) we hear the prophecies concerning the Holy Spirit. We are taught that the entire history of mankind was directed towards the day on which God "would pour out His Spirit upon all flesh." This day has come! All hope, all promises, all expectations have been fulfilled. At the end of the Aposticha hymns, for the first time since Easter, we sing the hymn: "O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth..." the one with which we inaugurate all our services, all prayers, which is, as it were, the life-breath of the Church, and whose coming to us, whose "descent" upon us in this festal Vigil, is indeed the very experience of the Holy Spirit "coming and abiding in us."

Having reached its climax, the Vigil continues as an explosion of joy and light for "verily the light of the Comforter has come and illumined the world." In the Gospel reading (John 20:19-23) the feast is interpreted to us as the feast of the Church, of her divine nature, power and authority. The Lord sends His disciples into the world, as He Himself was sent by His Father. Later, in the antiphons of the Liturgy, we proclaim the universality of the apostles' preaching, the cosmical significance of the feast, the sanctification of the whole world, the true manifestation of God's Kingdom.

THE VESPERS OF PENTECOST

The liturgical peculiarity of Pentecost is a very special Vespers of the day itself. Usually this service follows immediately the Divine Liturgy, is "added" to it as its own fulfillment. The service begins as a solemn "summing up" of the entire celebration, as its liturgical synthesis. We hold flowers in our hands symbolizing the joy of the eternal spring, inaugurated by the coming of the Holy Spirit. After the festal Entrance, this joy reaches its climax in the singing of the Great Prokeimenon:

"Who is so great a God as our God?"

Then, having reached this climax, we are invited to kneel. This is our first kneeling since Easter. It signifies that after these fifty days of Paschal joy and fulness, of experiencing the Kingdom of God, the Church now is about to begin her pilgrimage through time and history. It is evening again, and the night approaches, during which temptations and failures await us, when, more than anything else, we need Divine help, that presence and power of the Holy Spirit, who has already revealed to us the joyful End, who now will help us in our effort towards fulfillment and salvation.

All this is revealed in the three prayers which the celebrant reads now as we all kneel and listen to him. In the first prayer, we bring to God our repentance, our increased appeal for forgiveness of sins, the first condition for entering into the Kingdom of God.

In the second prayer, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us, to teach us to pray and to follow the true path in the dark and difficult night of our earthly existence. Finally, in the third prayer, we remember all those who have achieved their earthly journey, but who are united with us in the eternal God of Love.

The joy of Easter has been completed and we again have to wait for the dawn of the Eternal Day. Yet, knowing our weakness, humbling ourselves by kneeling, we also know the joy and the power of the Holy Spirit who has come. We know that God is with us, that in Him is our victory.

Thus is completed the feast of Pentecost and we enter "the ordinary time" of the year. Yet, every Sunday now will be called "after Pentecost"—and this means that it is from the power and light of these fifty days that we shall receive our own power, the Divine help in our daily struggle. At Pentecost we decorate our churches with flowers and green branches—for the Church "never grows old, but is always young." It is an evergreen, ever-living Tree of grace and life, of joy and comfort. For the Holy Spirit—"the Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life—comes and abides in us, and cleanses us from all impurity," and fills our life with meaning, love, faith and hope.

Father Alexander Schmemann (1974)

THE FATHERS WISDOM TO US

A certain monk told me that when he was very sick, his mother said to his father, "How our little boy is suffering. I would gladly give myself to be cut up into pieces if that would ease his suffering." Such is the love of God for people. He pitied people so much that he wanted to suffer for them, like their own mother, and even more. But no one can understand this great love without the grace of the Holy Spirit.

~ St. Silouan the Athonite ~

"Each person must bear the weaknesses of others. Who is perfect? Who can boast that he has kept his heart undefiled? Hence, we are all sick, and whoever condemns his brother does not perceive that he himself is sick, because a sick person does not condemn another sick person."

~ Elder Ephraim of Philotheou ~

THE INNOCENCE OF CHILDREN

Jesus' Dad's Name

A Sunday school teacher asked her class, "What was Jesus' mother's name?" One child answered, "Mary." The teacher then asked, "Who knows what Jesus' father's name was?" A little kid said, "Verge." Confused, the teacher asked, "Where did you get that?"

The kid said, "Well, you know, they are always talking about Verge n' Mary."

❖ 3-year-old Reese: "Our Father, Who does art in heaven, Harold is His name. Amen." ❖

❖ A little boy was overheard praying: "Lord, if you can't make me a better boy, don't worry about it. I'm having a real good time like I am." ❖

❖ After the christening of his baby brother in church, Jason sobbed all the way home in the back seat of the car. His father asked him three times what was wrong. Finally, the boy replied, "That preacher said he wanted us brought up in a Christian home, and I wanted to stay with you guys." ❖

❖ I had been teaching my three-year old daughter, Caitlin, the Lord's Prayer for several evenings at bedtime. She would repeat after me the lines from the prayer. Finally, she decided to go solo. I listened with pride as she carefully enunciated each word, right up to the end of the prayer: "Lead us not into temptation," she prayed, "but deliver us from E-mail." ❖

❖ One particular four-year-old prayed, "And forgive us our trash baskets as we forgive those who put trash in our baskets." ❖

❖ A Sunday school teacher asked her children as they were on the way to church service, "And why is it necessary to be quiet in church?" One bright little girl replied, "Because people are sleeping." ❖

❖ Six-year-old Angie and her four-year-old brother, Joel, were sitting together in church. Joel giggled, sang, and talked out loud. Finally, his big sister had had enough. "You're not supposed to talk out loud in church." "Why? Who's going to stop me?" Joel asked. Angie pointed to the back of the church and said, "See those two men standing by the door? They're hushers." ❖

❖ A mother was preparing pancakes for her sons, Kevin 5, and Ryan 3. The boys began to argue over who would get the first pancake. Their mother saw the opportunity for a moral lesson . "If Jesus were sitting here, He would say, 'Let my brother have the first pancake, I can wait.' Kevin turned to his younger brother and said, "Ryan, you be Jesus!" ❖

❖ A father was at the beach with his children when the four-year-old son ran up to him, grabbed his hand, and led him to the shore where a seagull lay dead in the sand. "Daddy, what happened to him?" the son asked. "He died and went to Heaven," the Dad replied. The boy thought a moment and then said, "Did God throw him back down?" ❖

❖ A wife invited some people to dinner. At the table, she turned to their six-year-old daughter and said, "Would you like to say the blessing?" "I wouldn't know what to say," the girl replied. "Just say what you hear Mommy say," the wife answered. The daughter bowed her head and said, "Lord, why on earth did I invite all these people to dinner?" ❖

❖ If you can start the day without caffeine, If you can always be cheerful, ignoring aches and pains, If you can resist complaining and boring people with your troubles, If you can eat the same food every day and be grateful for it, If you can understand when your loved ones are too busy to give you any time, If you can take criticism and blame without resentment, If you can conquer tension without medical help, If you can relax without alcohol, If you can sleep without the aid of drugs, Then You Are Probably The Family Dog! And you thought I was going to get all spiritual ❖

