

The Feast of Pentecost: The Spirit and the Church

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After the fifty days from Pascha to Pentecost, after Holy Communion in the Divine Liturgy, we again begin to sing the hymn, “We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith and we worship the undivided Trinity, for the Trinity has saved us.” This hymn is one of the stichera sung at Psalm 140 of Pentecost Vespers. It was added to the Divine Liturgy in the 17th century because it sums up the whole meaning of our salvation, achieved only through union with our God.

The Feast of Pentecost is considered the day of the Holy Trinity. The hymns of the Feast repeat this many times: “We sing a hymn of praise to You, the eternal Father, and to Your Son, equal to You and to Your All-Holy spirit, coeternal with You;” “Let us sing a hymn of praise to the consubstantial Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit;” “Come, all you nations of the world, let us adore God in three holy persons;” “The Father is light, and the Word is light, the Holy Spirit also is light.”



This feast is an expression of the realities present in creation. The first is that whenever God, one in the Holy Trinity, acts among His creatures, the Father, Son and the Holy Spirit act together. The second is that we are saved by union with God through the sacramental mysteries, each of which unites us to the Trinity. Jesus promised, “When the Spirit of Truth comes, He will guide you to all truth.” (John 16:13) The coming of the Spirit is the manifestation of the Trinity, “When the ADVOCATE comes whom I will send you from the FATHER, the SPIRIT OF TRUTH that proceeds from the FATHER, He will testify to ME.” (John 15:26) The Spirit is the fullness of the revelation of the Trinity, and the Spirit unites us to the Trinity.

Our union with God must be accomplished through our whole nature, both soul and body. We have been created by God as creatures that are both material and spiritual, so that the resurrection of the body is necessary for the fullness of our human life. At the same time, we cannot, in any way, unite ourselves to God, for God, being infinitely greater than we, must be the one who takes us up into His life. For our part, we must be open to receive this union, both in soul and body, through spiritual awareness, worship in faith, active prayer, willing cooperation with God's love, witness in community and acceptance of the sacramental mysteries, which affect, touch and act upon both our souls and bodies. Through water and oil, through bread and wine, through human touch and fragrant oil (chrism), we see, hear, sense and touch the mysteries of God, one in the Holy Trinity, as He brings us into His life and defies us. In Christ, the Anointed One, God becomes our Father, “*Abba*,” and by the power of the Spirit, “the Father is known and the Son glorified, and all people have come to know the one power, and the one substance, and the same adoration of the Holy Trinity.” (Sticheron at the Praises, Pentecost Sunday Matins)

The hymn that we sing after Communion in every Liturgy reminds us of the sacramental mysteries, which unite us with the Trinity. “We have seen the true light” tells us of the mystery of enlightenment, which is Baptism. In Baptism, we turned from the darkness of sin into the light of Christ. In the Liturgy of Saint Basil, we pray that the Father is “revealed through [Christ] who is our

hope, . . . the Living Word, True God, Eternal Wisdom, Life, Sanctification. Power and the True Light, through whom the Spirit has been revealed.” Through the Baptism in water, as in “a living Spring mystically gushing forth, (from the Office of Pentecost) we are Baptized into the life of “the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit.” Here the living Spring is the Spirit promised by Christ, “whoever believes in Me, as Scripture says: Rivers of living water will flow from within him,” (John 7:38) for when the Spirit acts, He lifts us up into the life of the Trinity.

“We have received the heavenly Spirit” reminds us of the mystery of Chrismation, in which “we are sealed with the gift of the Holy Spirit.” Baptism operates through the power of the Spirit, just as through the power of the Spirit, bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ, nourishing and deifying both soul and body, now united to Father, Son and Spirit through the Son made flesh by the power of the Spirit.” (Luke 1:25)

“We have found the true faith,” then, tells us about the mystery of Communion. Today, the Catholic and Orthodox Churches insist that there can be intercommunion only among those who share the same faith. Faith is expressed in words, dogmas and tradition. Faith as words, in turn, finds completion and perfection in the Word of God, Who is the Person of Jesus Christ. In Him we become children of God and from Him the Spirit of Truth is sent, guiding us into all truth (John 15:26; 16:13). It might be said that, just as we cannot communicate together without the same faith, likewise, we cannot have the same faith unless we communicate together in the same Lord, Jesus Christ. Jesus taught, “You search the scriptures, because you think you have eternal life through them; even they testify on My behalf. But you do not want to come to Me to have life.” (John 5:39-40) Words are necessary, but faith must be completed by action. We must live in Christ and see Christ in one another. The Spirit does not speak in words, but leads us to the Word. The Spirit, in fact, gives us all words, filling the apostles and enabling them to speak that they may be understood in all languages. This is the Pentecost experience, and the liturgical texts of Pentecost tell us how the Spirit has overcome the Tower of Babel to restore unity. We pray then, that, in our time, we can overcome divisions among Christians and unite in one faith and one Lord.