

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Christ is in our midst!

He is and ever shall be!



Volume 13 Issue 619

8th Sunday of Pascha-Pentecost Sunday

May 19, 2024



Today, Pentecost, the Feast of the Holy Trinity, is a day of great rejoicing: All that Christ imparted to us through His saving Incarnation, defeat of sin and death on the cross, resurrection, and glorious ascension, has its fulfillment and culmination on this day of illumination and empowerment by the descent of the Holy Spirit. The disciples, formally confused and fearful, who cowered in the upper room for fear of the authorities, are now em-

boldened and enlightened by the descent of the Holy Spirit.

In an instant, all is changed: the disciples now courageously witness the truth, speaking with great conviction and authority—the Holy Spirit has descended upon them and replaced their heart of fear with power from on high. Now, we see Christ’s disciples take on the mantle Christ has given them as Apostles; they are in the streets, united, and preaching with one voice the Good News of new life in Christ Jesus in fulfillment of all God had promised in His great love and mercy.

The importance of Pentecost is seen in even greater light if we understand its historical context in man’s relationship with God. Humanity’s efforts at unity without God are always prideful, ego-centric, seeking to take the place of God and challenge God’s place. We
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+++ 8th Sunday of Pascha +++

+ Bishop Martyr Patrick of Prusa +

Epistle: Act 2: 1-11

Gospel: John 7:37-52, 8:12

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to Christ’s commandment, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

Homily on the Beatitudes, St. John of Kronstadt

“Always treat others as you would like them to treat you” (Matthew 7:12). God gave us talents for the common good, not only to please our own vanity; don’t they prompt us to serve our neighbors in need?

Do you see how many impulses to mercy there are? There is nothing our Lord Jesus Christ and the righteous people of the Old and New Testament impel us to stronger than mercy. So the Lord says: “But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without ex-

pecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked” (Luke 6:35).

“See how continually divinely inspired men and women instill mercy in others and how close it is to their hearts”, writes St Gregory the Theologian. “It is not as if they just mention something about the poor once or twice and then let it go at that; it is not as if some of them mention compassion and others don’t, or

that some say more about it and some less as if it were not a most necessary subject.

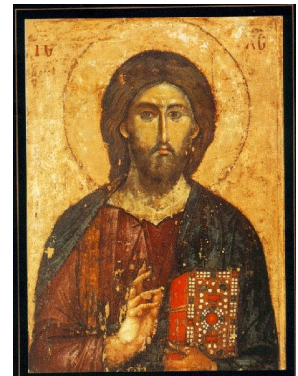
No, all of them, and each one in particular, regarding this commandment as the most important or one of the most important, zealously impels us to fulfill it, sometimes by exhortation, sometimes by threats, sometimes by reproaches, sometimes by praising the compassionate. By such constant reminders of this commandment, they seek to strengthen
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor,

please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to Jesus Christ. Glory be Forever.





As the deliverer
of captives
and defender
of the poor,
healer of the infirm
and champion of kings,
victorious great
martyr George
intercede with Christ
our God that our souls
may be saved.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are with us today and invite you to our coffee social in the church basement immediately following the Divine Liturgy.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

Please keep the following in your prayers: Mother Onufria, Larissa, Jack, Evan, Ryan, Anatoly, Alexey, Heidi, Mackenzie, Lisa, Jeff, David, Carol, Norris, Debbie, Linda, Daniel, Michael, Abraham, Karen, George, Rochelle, Brianna, Catherine, Chuck, Theresa, Sally Lou, Patti, Sophia, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Commemorating the Departed

What is revealed in the Kingdom of God to our departed relatives, what they see, hear, and feel, is undoubtedly incomparable with what we experience. But the question is: to what extent do they experience all this as joy? Are they in a state of bliss and do they really rejoice?

From everyday experience we know that when someone who is in difficult circum-

stances hears, say joy in a neighbor's house, he can react to this in different ways. Is he truly happy for his neighbor? Isn't he envious, angry, or annoyed just because joy is passing him by? Of course, it is a very relative comparison with what may be happening in eternity.

But by the grace of God, the Church that consists of people living on earth, through conciliar prayer, through charitable acts, as if by the hands of our departed close ones, for whom we pray and whom we love, intercedes with the Lord, asking, begging Him to forgive the sins of the departed and to vouchsafe them to partake of ineffable Paschal joy. The joy that each one of us longs for and that we speak about with our hearts in the Creed: "Whose Kingdom shall have no end."

If our hearts rejoice at Pascha, this is the most powerful evidence that the Lord is living and the gift of His grace is in our hearts. If we read the memorial prayers carefully, everyone will have to stand before the Lord, give an answer for the life he lived, and hear His judgment about our eternal destiny—either Paradise or hell.

Homily on the Beatitudes, cont'd from p.1

action in our hearts".

"No service is so pleasing to God as mercy", writes St Gregory the Theologian. "Because it is most akin to the merciful and just God, to whom one ought to bring mercy rather than judgment as a gift. The righteous Giver showers his love for humanity most on those who themselves show love for humanity". Pointing out the same nature in us and the poor, and with this unity impelling us to mercy, he says: "They are of the same human nature as you. They are made of the same matter as you, or even better. But most importantly, just like us, they are gifted with the image of God, and they preserve it even better than we do, even if they may be physically sick, for all of us bear Christ in our inner person.

They have taken the same pledge of Spirit. And Christ, who took the sins of all the world onto himself, died for them just the same as he did for us; they are the heirs of Heavenly life, even though they may not be successful in this one. They are buried with

Christ, and with Him, they will rise. They suffer with Him, and with Him they will be glorified.

Don't despise your brother, don't ignore, don't shun him as something unclean, like an infection, like some-



thing disgusting or outcast. Though twisted with misfortune, he is still your member. "To you is the poor man left" (Psalter 9:35) as to God himself, even though you pass by haughtily. You are given a chance to prove your love for humanity, though

the enemy turns you away from your own happiness. Learn from the troubles of others. Give at least a tiny bit of your mercy to the poor, and it won't be small for the one in need and for God himself if this is what you could do to help.

Instead of a big gift, bring your compassion. You have nothing? Comfort the other with your tears. The best treat for the miserable is hearty compassion; the misfortune is relieved with sincere sympathy. This is what our mind, law, experience, and the fairest people teach us. The first Christians who lived at the time of the apostles and after shared everything. The rich and the wealthy willingly donated their property and money, and the Church representatives kept it to use to maintain the poor, widows, orphans, sick, imprisoned, and other needy people. "We have a treasury", wrote one of the church teachers, "for everyone to donate every month or whenever they want, as much as they can.

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Homily on Pentecost Sunday, (cont'd from p.1)

see it in the Tower of Babel, where mankind erroneously thought to exclude God. To humble man and teach him to follow God's way that alone is life, He divided the tongues. But now, at Pentecost, God offers us again a way to unity—not one of man's prideful making, but the way of God by the Holy Spirit. Christ promised before His ascension: "Nevertheless, I tell you the truth, it is to your advantage that I go away; for...when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth" (John 16:7, 13).

By the Holy Spirit we are indeed led "into all truth." And what is this truth? Pilot asks this same question of Jesus. Christ's answer, found in Jn. 14:6 is clear: "I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life." This revelation of Christ is manifested through His fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, by His power over death, His ability to heal and give life, to forgive sins, and through the witness of the changed lives of His Saints, which continue to bring into the present the message of that same Gospel that changed the world on that Pentecost day 2,000 years ago.

Pentecost is then an opportunity for the renewal of our Baptism into Christ, our new life in Christ, of our being sealed by the Holy Spirit; it's an opportunity to step forward in our faith in Christ to witness to the Truth He alone is. By the power of the Holy Spirit and our cooperation with Him, we're given the means to thirst more after God, to advance in His Kingdom, because on this day, the life in Christ is made accessible to all, manifesting to us Christ's abiding presence in our lives by the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit.

God promised Israel that through the Messiah He would "pour out His Spirit on all flesh." This prophesy is fulfilled this day, as we hear at Vespers from the Prophet Joel. Those present at Pentecost from all nations heard the good news of salvation in their own tongue: They all hear in their own language, the one thing that can unite all mankind together in true community, one not based on prideful human ambitions, or humanism, our modern 'tower of Babel,' but on communion with God Himself, He who is Life—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

Life in the Spirit *after* Pentecost is manifested then not

in chaos or confusion or individual frenetic expression, but always in order and for the sake of the Gospel, as St. Luke relates of the early post-Pentecost Church in Acts 2, "... they continued steadfastly in the Apostles' doctrine and fellowship in the breaking of the (Eucharistic) bread, and in 'the prayers'" (as it is written in the original Greek). This same order continues at the heart of Orthodox worship to this day! And despite differences in language, culture, geography, and time, the same message of "good news," of healing and salvation, of new life in communion with God in accord with His commandments, is proclaimed with the same power to change lives—the life of everyone here.



This life in unity in the Spirit is depicted in the icon of Pentecost before us. In it, we see the *heavenly* reality of the descent, what it means for us, for the faithful in the Church. The unity of common Orthodox faith is seen in the Apostles' communal gathering. The diversity of gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, teaching, prophecy, language (I Cor. 12), are depicted in the Apostles' differing gestures, the Gospel writers are shown Gospel in hand, others with scrolls, depicting their gift of teaching and preaching. The vacant space at the top signifies that Christ has ascended and is now *invisibly* present with us by the Holy Spirit, whom God the Father has sent to empower them to minister in Christ's name.

The Holy Spirit is represented by tongues of fire. Why tongues? Because God *spoke* creation and life into being by

His Word, Who then became incarnate to enter into and redeem our human nature. God has sent us His Holy Spirit to further us in this redeemed life in Christ, to *proclaim* to the world the Good News of His salvation. God is proclaimed and manifested as Holy Trinity, a relationship of truth in perfect unity and love that we are invited into through communion. Christ proclaims in today's Gospel, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12). The Apostles and their successors in Christ's holy Church today proclaim this same truth that was proclaimed then: the freedom from enslavement to this world, and fulfillment, enlightenment, healing from sin-sickness, and new life in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit.

The Pentecost Icon

The Church celebrates the Feast of Pentecost ten days after the celebration of the Feast of the Ascension of our Lord Jesus Christ and fifty days after the celebration of the Feast of the Resurrection of our Lord. Pentecost means the “fiftieth day”. In the Old Testament, this feast was celebrated in commemoration of the Law given by God to Moses on Mount Sinai. But in the New Testament, this joyous feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles, while they waited for the promised Helper in Jerusalem.

As with all the other icons of the Orthodox Church, the icon of Pentecost teaches theology and brings us into the reality of the event depicted. The Feast of Pentecost is also called the Descent of the Holy Spirit, as it is a depiction of the event described in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles (Acts 2:1-4). The event is described as the Holy Spirit descending upon the Apostles, who were gathered in one accord, sounding as of a rushing mighty wind and appearing as a tongues of fire and settling upon the Apostles, enabling them to preach in different languages. However, the Feast is not only the commemoration of an historical event, but a celebration of a present reality: the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Likewise, the Icon for Pentecost is much more than the depiction of a past event.

The Icon can be broken down into three sections. At the top, we see a semi-circle (or a blue mandorla) with rays emanating outwards. This represents the Holy Spirit descending from heaven, with a single ray of light for each of those gathered shines down upon them to illumine them. Sometimes, the “tongues of fire” described in the account in Acts are shown at the tips of the rays, ready to descend upon the Apostles. Other times, the tongues of fire are shown already within the halos of each of the seated Apostles. Some icons of Pentecost show a dove, either within the mandorla at the top of the icon, or even descending upon those gathered in the upper chamber.

Given the appearance of the Holy Spirit in the form of a dove during the Baptism of Christ, it is understandable that this physical image of the Spirit is used in some icons of the Pentecost. However, as the Holy Spirit appeared as tongues of fire during Pentecost, it is inappropriate to depict the Holy Spirit as a dove at Pentecost, or indeed in any icon except those for the icon of The-

ophany.

The circle can also be understood to represent the one divine Essence of the Holy Spirit and the rays extending outward as the uncreated energies filling the universe. These rays symbolize that there are a diversity of gifts given by the one Spirit of God. In the same way, even though we all are baptized in the one Holy Spirit, we all are given different gifts and none of us are meant to copy anyone else. It is in the Church we see diversity in its most beautiful harmony.

In the middle of the icon, we see the twelve figures seated in a half circle in perfect harmony. This reflects the historic day of Pentecost, where “they were all in one accord in one place” (Acts 2:1). The twelve seated figures are the 12 Apostles seated in the Upper Room, experiencing the descent of the Holy Spirit represented by the nimbus above. Those holding books instead of scrolls are gospel or epistle writers. But even this should strike the viewer as a bit odd: several of the Apostles present on the icon were not actually in the room. At the top of the ring, facing each other, are Peter and Paul. Paul at this time was still a Pharisee and persecuting the early Christians. Yet because Paul was so important to the early spread of the faith, being a prolific preacher, church planter, and writer, and is ranked alongside Peter, we see Paul placed alongside Peter, while Matthias, who was elected by the other Apostles to replace Judas, is absent. Further, Luke certainly was not there either, yet he too is present among the



twelve figures, again emphasizing the eternity of Pentecost.

At the bottom of the Icon is another semi-circle, showing an old king against a dark background. He is often named as Cosmos and represents the world. He is clothed in a royal attire which tells us about the dignity God bestowed on the creation from the beginning. He is crowned as a symbol of earthly authority – i.e. he represents all the peoples of the world, rather than the whole of creation. He is depicted as seated “in darkness and the shadow of death” (Luke 1:79), and is aged to show the corruptibility and the fallen state of the world, and in isolation. Yet he also holds a blanket containing scrolls representing Apostolic teaching. Though in darkness, the descent of the Holy Spirit has not only reached the Apostles, but also all corners of the world into which the Apostles will preach the Gospel.