

The Pentecost of Christ (Acts 2:1–11)

Today we celebrate the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel: ‘today I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh,’ with the Third hypostases (or person) of the Holy Trinity of God coming down to dwell not just among but *within* mankind.

As with the association of the Jewish Passover’s celebration of the release of the Children of Israel from the bondage of Egypt, Christianity celebrates Christ’s resurrection and mankind’s release from the bondage of sin and death with Pascha. Jewish Pentecost is the celebration of Moses (and the people of Israel) receiving from God the Law and their entrance into the Land of promise. Christian Pentecost is now seen (and experienced) as the way and power of God that will guide the faithful into the new land of Promise: union with God through the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.

And just as the first Passover was a shadow of the substance of the Pascha of Christ, so too the Jewish Pentecost is a shadow of the Pentecost of Christ. And I say *Pentecost of Christ* because in a real way, Pentecost is the last work of this period of Christ’s incarnation. As He came down to earth as man through the virgin Mary and assumed humanity and taught us how to find and live the kingdom of God, suffered, died, and rose from the dead and ascended into heaven; so He in this final act among that generation sends the Holy Spirit. Who now dwells among us because of the healing that humanity has experienced in Christ. And really, even more than dwell among us, the Holy Spirit will dwell *in* us.

However the indwelling didn’t begin with this humble band of fishermen. The Church teaches us through St. Gregory Palamas that all the prophets experienced this indwelling fire of God. And as that experience (through the prophets) gave us the Law, Old Testament scriptures and the nation of Israel; this experience will result in the indwelling among men and women of all nations – in all places. This experience among these men will be the foundation of the new Israel, the Church, and the spreading the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And it is crucial to also note that the fire of God, the Holy Spirit, is not on them indiscriminately, but very specifically. Each of these men have done their work and each of them have been purified and illumined. What we are seeing is deification, the act of making man, by this fire (or grace), what God is by nature. It is given to them personally as they have grown in their faith and love of Christ and His word. As they were *in* Christ and *of* Christ, they are now *in* and *of* the Holy Spirit. And in turn, as these men reveal the revelation of Christ to others (through this fire of grace) – they in turn will guard what has been given to them – and give it to others. Others who, like those before them, have prepared themselves to receive it. And make no mistake, this is and always has been (and will always be), about *preparation* rather than *worthiness*.

Neither Adam and Eve, nor anyone to come after them (except Christ) were worthy of God’s love. It was never a question of being worthy. Of achieving *spiritual maturity* as it is commonly understood. No one ever has or ever will achieve spiritual maturity, because

spiritual maturity isn't something you achieve – not something you earn or are deemed worthy to be. Spiritual maturity is partaking of the fullness of God in grace.

Man does not have, nor ever has had, virtues of his own. Man is *not* virtuous by nature, he is virtuous by association – or more accurately: he is virtuous by relation. We were created to be as God and gods not by growing in our own virtues, but by growing in our life in God and being instruments of *His* virtue – the only virtue that ever has, or ever will, exist.

This is the basis of the misconception in the West of Pentecost, and the fulfillment of the prophecy of Joel. That is, that the Holy Spirit was poured out on *all* mankind. The Holy Spirit was not poured out on all mankind at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out on the Twelve Apostles. On those Christ had *prepared* for three years. The pouring out flows from the Holy Spirit, to them – and through *them* to all mankind. That like the prophets before them that established Israel and the Scriptures, these Twelve will establish the way of the kingdom of God on the earth. Through their experience of the revelation of Jesus Christ and the deifying indwelling of the Holy Spirit they will, like the Theotokos, give birth to the body of Christ – the Church, upon the earth.

This is why everything we believe and everything we do – especially our worship as it encompasses belief and practice – has to come from these Twelve. It can not be ‘inspired’ by them or ‘in the spirit’ of them, it must be *from* them and those *they* chose to take their place – and in turn who *they* chose to take theirs. This Apostolic Succession is not about pedigree, it’s about the transmission of the revelation of Jesus Christ and the deifying work of the Holy Spirit to each successive generation of Church leaders. This is the sense in which ‘the Spirit is poured out on all flesh.’

And what is the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in this Apostolic transmission of the revelation of Jesus Christ? It is a return, not to our ‘virtuous’ original state in paradise, which ended in disaster; but in the struggle of our preparation to live in God and for God to live in us. And once we have done this in the body of Christ, His Church, we see that all we could not do on our own, we can do in Christ.

What we broke, through the deifying work of the Holy Spirit in us, we can now fix. The great example of this was noted in last night’s service several times. As man trusted in his own capabilities, his own virtue, he built the great tower of Babel (Genesis 11:1–9). Proof to all mankind that he didn’t need God, he could do anything, he could be his own god. And so God in his love and mercy toward the untold multitudes that would come after and be brutalized by these gods, (think of Hitler or Pol Pot or Stalin ruling the world), He divided man through language. But language was just the beginning. Man would be further divided by gender, race, ethnicity, region and class.

And so what we see the uniting of the languages at Pentecost is not only the reverse of the curse of Babel, it will be through these Twelve the uniting of all that was disunited. The integration of male and female, Jew and Gentile, slave and free: of all that had disintegrated in man’s relationship with other men (Gal.2:28). And more importantly, the integration (through reconciliation) of men to God (2 Cor. 5:16–19): the healing of the Fall and the way back to paradise.

So how does this apply to you? It's actually fairly simple. Here we stand in the house the Twelve built – the body of Christ. We have in this house, in this body, the commandments and worship and the ethos – the way of Christ. To whatever extent we are not integrated in this body is the extent to which we are not preparing ourselves to live in Him. And that will be the extent in which the curse is not reversed in us. It's the passions, the sin in your life. Are you closer to the disintegration and chaos of Babel than you are to Pentecost?

Conversely, your healed passions (virtues) will be the measure to which you experience the integration and joy of Pentecost. Realizing through repentance they are not your virtues. They are God's virtues. And in the humility of repentance becoming increasingly aware that they are the reality of God in us.

...And God in us *is* paradise.