

## THE PENTECOST OF CHRIST

### *Acts 2:1–11*

*“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven. And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language. Then they were all amazed and marveled, saying to one another, ‘Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.’”*

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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 the people of Israel receiving the Law and their entrance into the Land of promise. Christian Pentecost celebrates the way and power of God that will guide the faithful into the new land of Promise: union and participation in the life of Christ through the indwelling 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; in this final act on earth until His return, He 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.

Each of these Apostles 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.

I often refer to St John Chrysostom’s foundational teaching from his 59<sup>th</sup> homily on Matthew, where this father of fathers teaches that nature is unchangeable. If man were

good by nature – all men would be good – man is not good by nature. In the same way, man is neither bad by nature – if he were, all men would be bad. The saint is very clear on this point. Man is good or bad rather by what he submits his will.<sup>1</sup> Man is not by nature good or bad – he is by nature free!

But using our freedom to will to do good neither makes man good when you think about it. Otherwise the Pharisees and legalists who will to do good works – so they can feel superior to other men – would make them good. But as Jesus demonstrated with the parable of the Pharisee and the publican, that is certainly not the case.

With the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the New Covenant community we have now the fulfillment of the Law and all the Covenants leading up to this time. Now **Man is good by He whom he wills to submit – he is good by relation. And to be precise, by participation.** We were created to be ‘like’ God not by growing in **our own** virtues, but by going deeper in participating in the life of God and being instruments of *His* virtue – the only virtue that exists.

Could this be made any clearer than the Apostle Paul’s teaching in Galatians?<sup>2</sup> *I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.* Or in his letter to the Philippians:<sup>3</sup> *work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure.*

There is a misconception of Pentecost in the West regarding Joel’s prophecy that the Holy Spirit was poured out to *all* mankind. The text couldn’t be clearer that the Holy Spirit was **not** poured out to all mankind at Pentecost. The Holy Spirit was poured out to the Twelve Apostles. On those Christ had *prepared* for forty days after His resurrection and daily for three years before that.

The pouring out flows from the Holy Spirit, onto the Apostles – and through *them* to all mankind. These twelve will continue the work Jesus started and establish the kingdom of God on earth. Not as a utopian city or empire the West has tried so hard over the centuries to create – and always failed. But as a family of repentant and healed sinners bringing the apostolic healing of the soul to this sick world. This is why everything we believe and everything we do has to come from the Twelve.

And what is the result of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit? It is a return, not to our ‘virtuous’ original state in paradise, which ended in disaster; but in our participation in the life of God – and God’s participation in our life. ...What we broke, now through the 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.<sup>4</sup> A Proof and testimony to all that man doesn’t need God, he could do anything, he could be his own god. And so God in his love and mercy toward mankind divided him through

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<sup>1</sup> Homily on Matt. 18:7

<sup>2</sup> 2:20

<sup>3</sup> 2:12b, 13

<sup>4</sup> Genesis 11:1-9

language...and man took it from there and further divided himself by race, gender, ethnicity, nationality, class, ...and the fracturing continues.

The uniting of the languages at Pentecost is not only the reverse of the curse of Babel, through these Twelve it will be 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,<sup>5</sup> and within himself. It is the uniting and integration of men back to God:<sup>6</sup> the healing of the Fall.

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: the participation in the life of Christ through the healing of our souls. To whatever extent we are not integrated in this body is the extent to which we are not healed. And that will be the extent in which the curse is not reversed *in* us. It's the passions, the sin in your life. So again, we have to ask ourselves: do our lives reflect the unity and peace of Pentecost or the disunity and chaos of Babel?

Are we here *for* God – or are we here *with* and *in* God. Take heart, if we're not we can get there by our very being here. Because the Holy Spirit did not descend on Pentecost to bring us the first Christian club.

This was the plan from the very beginning. We can't go back to paradise,

...so He brought paradise to us.

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<sup>5</sup> Galatians 2:28

<sup>6</sup> 2 Corinthians 5:16-19