

The Confessor's Tongue for June 7, 2009

Holy Pentecost; Holy Trinity

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

The Feast of Pentecost

This feast is called *Trinity Day*, because the appearance of the Holy Spirit has revealed to the people in a very clear light how necessary the mystery of the Holy Trinity was for them. On this day in its prayers and hymns, the Church honors and praises all three Persons of the Holy Trinity, who participated in the descent of the Holy Spirit: God the Father, who sent the Holy Spirit, God the Son Jesus Christ, who entreats the Father to send the Holy Spirit, and God the Holy Spirit, who descended appearing as fiery tongues.

This feast was named *Pentecost* because an event in the Old Testament called the feast of Pentecost was commemorated on this day, and also because this feast necessarily comes 50 days after the Christian Pascha. Especially important is the concurrence of the time of the descent of the Holy Spirit with the time of the Old Testament feast of Pentecost. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the believers in Christ was the crowning of the redemption and salvation of man by God. During the time of Pentecost the disciples of the Lord have blossomed and have grown spiritually. Then the fullness of the gifts of the Spirit of God descended on them, and they became the first fruits of the redemptive work of Christ. Together with these revelations, the Church of Christ began on earth.

[Understanding the great gift of the Holy Spirit] inspires in the Christian the care that the sacred celebration of the present day not be contradicted by a sinful life; that each of us, asking for ourselves the renewal and multiplication of the grace of the Spirit of God and being made worthy of His graceful visitation in prayer and in the mysteries, continue to observe ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit, not offending His holy magnificence.

The day of Pentecost was the day when the Old Testament theocracy which began on Sinai and ruled the people through the written law, the law of slavery and of death, was replaced by the New Testament law, where the people are led by the Spirit of God, the spirit of adoption and freedom (Rom. 8). Thus, as the Pascha of Christ abolished the Old Testament Pascha, the New Testament Pentecost replaces the Old Testament one from which life under the law began. The event, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles, and the beneficial fruits of this great event are praised in the hymns of the church for the day of Pentecost. "Today", sings the Holy Church, "wondrous things were done before the face of all peoples in the city of David, when the Holy Spirit came down as fiery tongues", upon the disciples of Christ. Now "the Spirit of salvation purifies the hearts of the apostles". Now, "the apostles are clothed with the power from on high by Christ, for

the Comforter revives them". Now, the Holy Spirit "revealed the unlettered to be orators", the fishermen, "bridling the mouths of sophists in abundance with a word, and raising from the deep night unnumbered people". "The Essence is known in three persons, according to the true, Unapproachable, Unoriginate One, when "the light has shone, the grace of the Spirit". "When the power of the Divine Spirit came down, it divinely united in one harmony the voice divided of old (i.e. the language of the people) of those who had wickedly agreed together, as to believers it gave understanding of knowledge of the Trinity, in which we have been established"

The Holy Church uplifts the general doxology to the Most Holy Trinity and inspires us, that we, "bending the knee of souls and body", praise Thee "the Father without beginning, and the Son, likewise without beginning, and the Co-eternal and All Holy Spirit", "the Trinity One in Essence", "Identical in power and Coeternal". "Come, ye people," the Church appeals to its children, "let us worship the Godhead in three persons, the Son in the Father, with the Holy Spirit; for the Father timelessly begot the Son, co-eternal and co-reigning, and the Holy Spirit was in the Father, glorified with the Son; one power, one essence, one Godhead." But in order that our glorifications not remain fruitless, the Holy Church often appeals to the very Spirit Comforter with the prayer: "O Heavenly King, the Comforter, Spirit of Truth who art everywhere present and fillest all things. Treasury of good things, and Giver of life: Come and abide in us, and cleanse us from every stain, and save our souls, O Good One".

The sending down of the Holy Spirit to earth is so great a gift that it includes everything within it for the Christian. Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit we would not even receive the clear knowledge of the actions of the Son of God Himself on earth. Without the co-activity of the Holy Spirit the preaching of the Gospel would not have spread so quickly in the world, due to the many obstacles, insurmountable for the ordinary power of man. Without the life-creating Holy Spirit even the faithful in the name of Jesus Christ would be dead spiritually. We have the word of God because the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets and the apostles. By the appearance of the Deity, the Church is openly accessible to all the cursed on the earth, and the Holy Spirit was acquired by the sinful race of man. Everyone entering into this holy society receives rebirth into the new spiritual life, because the Holy Spirit, once having been poured out, permanently remains in the Church of Christ.

All this, finally, inspires in the Christian the care that the sacred celebration of the present day not be contradicted by a sinful life; that each of us, asking for ourselves the renewal and multiplication of the

grace of the Spirit of God and being made worthy of His graceful visitation in prayer and in the mysteries, continue to observe ourselves as temples of the Holy Spirit, not offending His holy magnificence. "The present celebration", says Philaret, Metropolitan of Moscow, "is not a simple commemoration of the past, but the continuation of the apostolic preparation for the reception of this "Spirit", without ceasing "by those who wish, breathing it in". The Apostles, after continual prayers with one accord, "were filled with the Holy Spirit". And not only the Apostles, according to the explanation St. Chrysostom, but also the disciples staying with them, "altogether the number of names was about a hundred and twenty (Acts 1:15), filling them all". And for us now the Church, as in the Jerusalem "upper room" (Acts 1:13), gathered together in this temple to call the Comforter Spirit of truth to come and be installed in us".

"The soul of every feast is the presence of the one whom we celebrate. And for those who celebrate the day of the Holy Spirit what can be more desired than to have this Heavenly Comforter infused with grace visit His feast? If He would, not with fiery tongues to sit on our heads, but at least mystically with a spark of fire touch our hearts and inflame their sensitivity to the presence of God". According to the position of St. John Chrysostom, "our celebration should be in accordance with the worthiness of the gifts of blessings granted to us and to consist not in the crowning of the doors, but in the improvement of souls, not in the adornment of festal curtains, but in the adornment of the soul with the vestments of virtues so that, during such a celebration, we may be worthy of the grace of Spirit and to receive Its fruits".

"Whoever wishes to become a dweller in Christ and be filled with the Holy Spirit, for the offering of spiritual fruits", as St. Macarius the Egyptian teaches, "he should first of all firmly believe in the Lord, entirely converted to the requirements of His commandments, and renounce the world so that his mind would not be engaged in anything visible. He should also remain in continual prayer and with faith in the good will of the Lord always to await His visitation and help, and then to force himself to every good deed and to every commandment of the Lord".

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We celebrate Pentecost for seven days through its Leavetaking on Saturday. During the feast, we say or sing the festal troparion before meals and during our daily prayers.

Pentecost, Troparion, tone 8

Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God, / who hast revealed the fishermen as most wise / by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit; / through them Thou didst draw the world into Thy net. / O Lover of Man, glory to Thee!

Pentecost, Kontakion, tone 8

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations; / but when He distributed tongues of fire, He called all to unity. / Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the All-holy Spirit!

From Elder Barsanuphius of Optina

In its aspiration for the New Jerusalem, the city of the Lord, the soul at times finds consolation in music. I the world, I loved serious music, like Beethoven and Schubert. I once went to a concert. A friend of mine met me and asked: "Where are you coming from, and why are you so happy and exultant?"

"I've been to a concert. What marvellous music! What delight it leads to soul to!"

"Well, there are even higher delights, different ones. If you would only go off in that direction, it would lead you into another realm, to the realm of the delight of prayer."

And he was not lying to me. I loved to attend church, especially the All-night Vigil in our Resurrection Cathedral. I loved the semi-darkness, the gentle twinkling light of the lampadas. It was exceptionally nice to pray there.

And here you are, going to the Vigil now; pray there. Try to pray properly; try to enter into and be immersed within yourselves. You know, in each person there exists a world of unspeakable beauty, in which are hidden many pure delights and ineffable joys. Go within yourself and they will be revealed to you. However, don't expect only delights from prayer; don't despair when you don't feel any joys. In fact, it even happens that you stand and stand in church and its as if you don't have a heart inside you, but a chunk of wood, and an unplaneable one at that. Well, what of it? Thank the Lord for the chunk of wood. It means that this was what was needed. You see, another soul, having experienced lofty delights, might get a swelled head. A condition like "stony insensibility" humbles him down. We can't demand prayerful bliss from God. From us is demanded prayerful labor, but joys are sent by God when it's pleasing to God and to our benefit. And so, let us pray to Him and rely in everything on His holy will!

June Namedays

- 1 Fr. Justin Frederick (St. Justin of Cheliye)
- 26 David Riewe (David of Thessalonica)
- 29 Peter (Jerry) Bradshaw (Apostle Peter)
- 29 Peter Lickwar
- 30 James (Evan) Rivas (Apostle James)

June Birthdays

- 22 Benjamin Tolleson

Upcoming Events 2009

- 8 June, Monday 6:30 p.m. St. Tikhon's Octet
- 29 June - 3 July, Summer Camp ages 8-18 at Camp Grady Spruce
- 16-19 August, men's retreat at Holy Archangels Monastery.
- 7 September, Labor Day Picnic