

The Confessor's Tongue for June 12, A. D. 2022

Pentecost Sunday; Apostle Jude

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.

On Holy Pentecost

Today, the tenth day following the Feast of Ascension and the fiftieth day after Holy Pascha, the Church celebrates the Great Feast of Pentecost. Indeed, the name *Pentecost* means fiftieth day.

The Christian feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit at the Jewish feast of Pentecost on Christ's mother and disciples gathered in the upper room in obedience to Christ's command to wait in Jerusalem for the coming of the Comforter. The Spirit came in power upon those gathered, empowering them to proclaim the Gospel to the world. The Church's beginning can be marked from this day.

The Jewish Pentecost was celebrated fifty days after Passover and commemorated both the spring harvest and the giving of the Law on Mt. Sinai to Moses on the fiftieth day after their departure from Egypt. Just as Christ's death fulfilled the type that was the Jewish Passover and revealed its true meaning, so too, the descent of the Holy Spirit fulfilled the meaning of the feast of Pentecost established long before in the Law. The Mosaic Old Testament Church was established when the Law was given, but this was but a type and shadow of the fullness that Messiah was to bring with His coming and the establishment of His Church.

Pentecost is also known as "Holy Trinity", because it is with the descent of the Spirit that the action of the Holy Spirit was revealed to the world, and man learned to venerate and glorify God in three Persons: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

On Pentecost, it is customary to decorate the church and its hall (and even homes) with greenery and to hold flowers during the Liturgy as an expression of our joy and thanksgiving to God for His Holy, Life-creating Spirit, who renews us and gives us birth through Baptism into new life. The decorations are also a consecration to God of the first fruits of spring.

A special feature of the services of Pentecost is the Sunday Vespers service, often served right after Liturgy on Sunday. Also known as the Service of Kneeling, it is marked by the three great "Kneeling Prayers." All the faithful solemnly kneel for the first time since Pascha to ask forgiveness and God's visitation, protection, and renewal through fresh outpourings of the Spirit.

The Monday after Pentecost is called "The Day of the Holy Spirit" and is dedicated to the glorification of the Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, each Christian is given the opportunity to renew his spiritual life by seeking a fresh outpouring of the Holy Spirit in his life. Among the Church Fathers, St. Symeon the New Theologian, who lived in the 11th century, was a zealous herald of new birth by the grace of the Spirit. According to the St.

Symeon, each Christian receives the Spirit like a divine fire at baptism but often covers up this inner spiritual treasure with the darkness of many sins by the time he is an adult. A Christian must turn to Christ, indeed must run to Him, for a new sealing of the Spirit through repentance, forgiveness, and faithful observance of God's commandments. A Christian can again experience consciously the new life of the Apostles. Such a Christian is "born from above," being granted the Holy Spirit anew and being baptized again by the Spirit as a child of God. St. Symeon writes, "Just as it is impossible for one to be saved who has not been baptized by water and the Spirit, neither is it for him who has sinned after baptism, unless he be baptized from on high and be born again. This the Savior confirmed when He said to Nicodemus, "Unless one is born from on high, he cannot enter into the kingdom of heaven" (*Catechetical Discourse 32.3*). Indeed, we need frequent renewals of the presence of the Spirit in our lives.

The importance of Pentecost can also be seen in the Church's practice of counting time from Pentecost. All the Sundays of the year from Pentecost to the beginning of Great Lent are numbered from Pentecost—up to 37. This is the time of the Church's mission in the world, empowered by the Holy Spirit. If the season of Great Lent is a season of personal repentance and the Paschal season is one of joyous celebration, Pentecost is the empowering of every believer for mission in the world, and the time after Pentecost marks the time of that mission.

The week following Pentecost is a fast-free week. We resume kneeling and doing prostrations and saying the prayer "O Heavenly King." Pentecost is celebrated for seven days through its Leavetaking on Saturday. During the feast, we say or sing the troparion before meals and during our daily prayers. We may sing the Kontakion after meals.

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!

Every one of the faithful is urged to participate in the Sunday Vespers with the Kneeling Prayers and to cultivating a renewed hunger for the presence and manifestation of the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Homily for Pentecost
St. Luke of Simferopol (Crimea)

The great feast has arrived, a feast of great joy for Christians: The Holy Spirit has descended upon the apostles, and not only upon the apostles—the Holy Spirit has come to the world to fulfill the promise made to us by our Lord Jesus Christ when He said, “I will not leave you orphans, I will send the Holy Spirit, the Comforter.” And the Holy Spirit sanctified the Earth, and He will lead the Christian race on the path of salvation to the end of the ages. The Holy Spirit came down first of all upon the apostles. And how did He come down? In the form of fiery tongues, visibly. The Holy Spirit has not descended visibly like this upon anyone else since then. What does this mean? Why was it needed that the Holy Spirit should descend upon the holy apostles in the form of fiery tongues, visible and tangible to all? Because the apostles were saints; because through them, through their preaching, the Holy Gospel would be confirmed throughout the whole world. They were the first preachers of the Gospel, the first to bring the light of Christ into the world. This is why the Holy Spirit marked them in this way, descending upon them in the form of fiery tongues. He made their hearts and minds fiery, sanctified and enlightened them, reminded them of everything they had heard earlier from the Lord Jesus Christ, and gave them strength, so that they would bring the whole world to Christ.

But doesn't the Holy Spirit come down upon all who are worthy to receive Him? Wasn't St. Seraphim of Sarov filled with the Holy Spirit? The Holy Spirit came down upon him not in the form of fiery tongues but in such a way that it took possession of all his thoughts, desires, feelings, and longings. He filled St. Seraphim. Thus did the Holy Spirit fill many, many saints, and thus did the Holy Spirit fill also all of us unworthy contemporary Christians, for in the Sacrament of Chrismation and Baptism we are all given the grace of the Holy Spirit. All are given this grace, all have received it, but not all have preserved it. Many have lost this treasure, lost the grace of the Holy Spirit. For could the Holy Spirit possibly abide in an impure heart that is filled with sin? As smoke chases away the bees, as stench repels all people, so does the stench of the human heart repel the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit lives only in pure hearts, and only to them does he grant He Divine grace, His holy gifts, for He is the “Treasury of good things”—all the true and most precious goods that the human heart could possibly possess. Could the impure heart receive them? Could the heart that is sinful and deprived of mercy and love possibly receive the grace of the Holy Spirit? But how can we acquire a pure heart? How can we refrain from shameful sins? How can we refrain from the temptations of the enemy of our salvation, from the temptations of the world? How can we guard ourselves from them? We need to tirelessly,

always, throughout our days and every hour remember that the Holy Spirit does not live in an impure heart.

We must not succumb to temptation, and when the unclean spirit, the enemy of our salvation whispers in our ear the longing for earthly prosperity, when he draws us a picture of a glorious, comfortable life, when he arouses our pride, a desire for honor and glory, we must not accept these devilish whisperings, we must not accept the temptations of the world. When these temptations come to the heart we should understand right away that this is a temptation. We should immediately, with all the strength of our minds and hearts reject these temptations, not look at the seductive pictures that the unclean spirit draws for us to tempt us; we should not succumb to his suggestions. And if we fail to do that, if we look at these picture of glory and earthly prosperity, if we think more and more about them, then woe to us—for then the temptation will take possession of our hearts.

Great ascetics of piety, who knew how to observe the movements of their hearts, have said that if a person accepts these seductive images, he meshes with them; his soul becomes attached to them and unites with them. The holy fathers call upon us to fear uniting ourselves with all impure images. If we follow this instruction, we will not be stricken with that onerous and terrible woe—the Holy Spirit will not leave us. We must not admire, not delight in Satan's seductions, we should not mesh ourselves with them, but should arm ourselves against them with holy anger. The apostle Paul spoke profound words that we should all firmly remember: “Be angry, and sin not” (Eph. 4:26). There is holy anger—that anger with which Jesus's heart was inflamed when He cast out the money-changers from the temple with a whip, and when He said to the holy apostle Peter, Get thee behind me, Satan! How could the Lord Jesus Christ say such words to the holy apostle who loved Him with all his heart? He said it in anger. That is how it should be. The Lord could not but be angry with the apostle Peter when the latter was trying to persuade Him not to go to His death on the Cross. This is the holy anger that should be fill every Christian's heart when he feels the whispered words against the path of Christ.

Then may the Lord save us from remaining cold or lukewarm. May He give us holy anger to drive away the tempter. This is what we need. We need to also remember all our lives that the Lord Jesus Christ has called us to become God's children, and to strive all our lives for the light of Christ. We must dedicate our whole lives to the Lord Jesus Christ. We must strive with every fiber of our souls to never anger the Lord in any way, and to pray that He would help us who are weak in spirit. And the Lord will help us. And the Holy Spirit will come to our hearts and illumine them, and give us the strength to walk the path of salvation. May the Holy Spirit come down into our hearts. May the Holy Spirit console us and all who sorrow. This is what this great feast of Pentecost teaches us.

The All Night Vigil: Gospel to Canons

Following the reading of the Gospel at the Resurrectional Vigil, the choir leads the faithful in singing "Having beheld the Resurrection of Christ" as the priest stands on the ambon, holding the Gospel Book before his face. At the words, "Come, all ye faithful," he descends and brings the Gospel into the center of the nave to be venerated.

After the singing of this glorious hymn, one of the most festive moments of Matins, the reader chants Psalm 50. Thus, in the midst of celebrating the "joy come into the world," we realize how far short we fall the gift that brings joy. We remember that the proper response to the proclamation of the Gospel is to repent, as John the Baptist and Christ preached, "Repent, for the Kingdom of God is at hand." Thus we cry out in David's words, "Have mercy, on me, O Lord," so that we might more fully receive the Kingdom.

Psalm 50 is followed by the singing of a few brief hymns that reiterate the prayer of the Psalm and then the great Prayer of Intercession, which begins with the words, "O God, save Thy people." The prayer asks God to look upon His world "in mercy and compassion," to send down upon us His "rich mercies," and to "exalt the horn of Orthodox Christians." The "horn" is a Biblical symbol of power and victory, so the prayer essentially asks God to grant us victory in the struggle against sin and the devil. These requests are made "through the intercessions of the Theotokos" and a long list of saints, which can vary according to local custom. This prayer clearly shows the oneness of the Church. We who are yet on earth join in prayer with those already in Heaven. Those in Heaven pray with and for those of us still struggling on earth. Together the saints in Heaven and on earth, along with the Holy Angels, glorify the One God in Three Persons

This prayer is followed by the canons, during which the people normally come to venerate the Gospel and receive the priest's blessing.

A canon is essentially a musical composition. It was created to be a symphony of sorts. Typically today, only the first troparion of each Ode, known as the *Irmos*, is sung, and the rest is chanted by readers, but originally, it was all sung.

Music in worship is essential. Singing is the real communication between God and Man. Speech, on the other hand, is a fallen function of man in a world that has fallen. The Logos, the Word, combined with music, has great power. Instrumental music is not used in the Church because instruments make music without the Word, and even when the Word is added to instrumental music, the instruments tend to overwhelm the Word. In any case, the Church considers the human voice to be the highest, most glorious instrument for making music. All this points to why the Gospel is not read in a conversational voice, and, in fact, why all the services in the Church are sung or chanted and not spoken. Only the sermon

is spoken. The whole Liturgy of the Church is musical in nature, echoing the Angelic choirs of Heaven.

At every Matins service, multiple canons are sung. At a Resurrectional Matins, typically four canons are appointed: one for the Resurrection, one for the Cross and Resurrection, one for the Theotokos, and one for the Saint(s) of the day.

Each canon consists of nine "odes". Each ode is based on a Biblical passage and contains additional hymns called troparia between which are interspersed exclamations appropriate to the canon, such as "Glory to Thy holy Resurrection, O Lord!" "Most Holy Theotokos, save us!" or "Venerable Father Maximus, pray to God for us!" The second ode was eventually dropped because of its length and because it had importance only when the canon was sung. After the third and sixth odes, Little Litanies occur and special hymns. Between the eighth and ninth odes, the Magnificat is sung, which is actually the Biblical passage upon which the ninth ode is based (Luke 1:46-55, 68-79): Mary's song of joy to God when she met her cousin Elizabeth after the Annunciation. It is accompanied by a great censing of the church. The Magnificat is sung at nearly every Matins service except at the Twelve Great Feasts.

The ninth ode of every canon is always dedicated to the Theotokos. The other odes are dedicated to various Old Testament Saints, to whom reference is often made in the *irmos* of the ode. The first ode (Exodus 15:1-9) is dedicated to Moses and the crossing of the Red Sea; the second, (when it is used: Deuteronomy 32:1-43) also to Moses; the third (I Kings 2:1-10) to Hannah, mother of the Prophet Samuel, the fourth (Habbakuk 3:2-19) to the Prophet Habakkuk, the fifth (Isaiah 26:9-20) to the Prophet Isaiah, the sixth (Jonah 2:3-10) to the Prophet Jonah, the seventh (Daniel 3:26-56 LXX) and eighth (Daniel 3:57-88 LXX) to the Three Holy Children, popularly known by their Babylonian names: Shadrach, Meschach, and Abednego. Though some theme from the Biblical Ode is contained in each *irmos*, the Biblical odes themselves are not now used except on weekdays during Great Lent.

The canons contain rich theological material that expresses the inner meaning of the feasts of the Church and the lives of the Saints. The troparia sung at Liturgy interspersed between the Beatitudes are normally taken from the third and sixth odes of one or more of the canons for Matins.

The canon is often a difficult time for those at the Vigil. There is no movement, the Royal Doors are closed, the church is in darkness, and only the choir and reader are doing anything. This, however, is a time for the faithful to be vigilant and keep watch by attentively listening to the troparia and singing the exclamations between them. There is much Biblical interpretation conveyed during the canon to those who listen. It is normal to stand during the canons, but sickness or fatigue may have us do otherwise.

The most noted composers of canons were Saints John of Damascus, Cosmas of Maiouma, and Andrew

of Crete, who wrote the Great Canon of Repentance used in Great Lent.

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great 18

Some brothers were coming from Scetis to see Abba Anthony. When they were getting into a boat to go there, they found an old man who also wanted to go there. The brothers did not know him. They sat in the boat, occupied in turns with the words of the Fathers, Scripture, and their manual work. As for the old man, he remained silent. When they arrived on shore, they found that the old man was going to the cell of Abba Anthony too. When they reached the place, Anthony said to them, 'You found this old man a good companion for the journey?' Then he said to the old man, 'You have brought many good brethren with you, father.' The old man said, 'No doubt they are good, but they do not have a door to their house, and anyone who wishes can enter the stable and loose the ass.' He meant that the brethren said whatever came into their mouths.

Saying 18 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: In the armed forces there is a saying which was originally coined by the US War Office for use on the home front in World War Two: "Loose lips sink ships." The careless revelation of knowledge that others do not need to know can lead to disaster.

Christians may be likened to ships on the stormy sea of life seeking their calm haven in Christ. A careless use of the tongue can lead to spiritual shipwreck rather than safe arrival at our destination. King Solomon in his Proverbs (10:19) writes, "In the multitude of words there wanteth not sin: but he that refraineth his lips is wise." Many Christians have had the experience of being filled with grace through Confession and Holy Communion only to have it depart after allowing words of judgment or complaint to escape their lips. A perfect man has bridled his tongue (James 3), and even a fool, when he keeps quiet, may be counted wise, but not bridling the tongue opens the stable door to let loose the ass within.

Certainly sinful words do our souls harm and grieve the Holy Spirit in us, but even good words to excess can lead to harm. For example, talking with others about spiritual blessings and gifts can lead to their loss and the assault of temptations. Telling others of our victory over a particular sin may open the door to being tempted by that sin again. Even in speaking about God and the Scriptures, one can speak to excess, and one's good words become bad thereby. As Solomon says in Ecclesiastes (3:7), "There is a time to keep silence and a time to speak." Notice which comes first: silence. Only by avoiding sinful and excessive words, by refraining our lips, do we learn wisdom to speak to the profit of others and ourselves.

What is more, talk tends to displace prayer and the remembrance of God. "Be still and know that I am God," says the Lord, but we fill our lives with noise and chatter. Consider how our lives would be different if the time we now typically spend talking to others (including blogging, texting, etc.) we spent

consciously praying to God instead, and the amount of time we now typically spend in prayer was all we had for chatter.

300 Ascetical & Theological Chapters

St. Justin of Chelije

First Century

13. 2 Corinthians 6:16 "Ye are the church of the living God", *naos*, temple *kbaram*. "My house will be called a house of prayer, but ye have made it a den of thieves" (Mt. 21:13). Thou art a church: the soul constantly on her knees (in prayer), the whole being in constant service of God; if prayer will stop, then how shall I live tomorrow? You enter into the robbers' payment, the den into which the Church is transformed. The church is for prayer, not for robbery. Culture, civilization, robs the soul, for she brings into the soul the material kingdom of things: money, food, pigeons, books (Nehemiah 2:14), and from the house from which it makes a den of thieves. The things we bring into the soul, O Lord, into Thy house, we conduct the robbers' payment . . . Thy goods we cut out and on everything we have stuck the label, our image—human, robbers'. Lord, may Thy kingdom come and may it drive out the robbers from my soul.

14. "Lord, grant me tears and remembrance of death"—the prayer of the holy Chrysostom. *Oxford 1917*

15. "Every soul is enlivened by the Holy Spirit, and is exalted in purity, illumined, the threefold unity in a sacred mystery." [*From my youth, Matins*] The soul enlivened and cleansed by the Spirit is imaged in the image of the Holy Trinity. *Oxford 1917*

16. Concerning the constant propagation of grace through all the members of the body and soul and the expulsion of sinfulness, see St. Macarius of Egypt, "Concerning the Preservation of the Heart."

17. "Therefore, in all our doings and before everything when this touches the approach to the things of God it is necessary to begin with prayer." Dionysius the Aereopagite, "On the Names of God" III.1 *Oxford, 1918*.

18. "Rejoice, O Theotokos, bright perception of grace" around this prayerful exclamation are concentrated all cries of a rational personality infected and permeated with sin when it prayerfully cries out for help. To break out from blessing-less and therefore dark perception and to be implanted in blessed Gospel perception. The virginity of the mind of the most holy Virgin . . . Here is rest, here is the calm after the storm...ignorance confirming its own essence in self-abasement and humble prayerful cry: "Most-sweet Jesus, cleansing of my mind." "Grant peace to my life, Birthgiver of peace, for thou art the Theotokos." 3 October 1920, *Skopje*

Upcoming Events 2022

20-28 June: Apostles' Fast

21 June: Tuesday, 6:30 p.m. Holy Unction

GLORY BE TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS!