



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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God Within Us: The Great Feast of Pentecost Week of June 3, 2012

Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Glory to Jesus Christ! Glory forever!

Being asked by the Pharisees when the kingdom of God was coming, He answered them, "The kingdom of God is not coming with signs to be observed; nor will they say, 'Lo, here it is!' or 'There!' for behold, the kingdom of God is within you." (Luke 17: 20-21)

The Great Feast of Pentecost has come upon us! As the Apostolos Lesson from the Acts of the Apostles recorded it, it was quite a day: a day of fire, wind, preaching and understanding; a day when the Lord reversed the punishment of Babel, that ancient time when the united pride of humanity had become so dangerous that the Lord broke it with division. Now, on the Day of Pentecost, the reunification of humanity was accomplished – but only in Christ. Those who were there together when the Miracle occurred were together in prayer and praise, in Divine Liturgy. They were in the "Upper Room," the room of the Great and Holy Mystical Supper; they had come together in unity to celebrate the Holy Eucharist. And the Holy Spirit came upon them like tongues of fire, resting on each of them; and all of those in the city for the Great Feast were able to hear the Word in their own language. God poured Himself out for His rebellious creation to the last drop: the Gift of the Holy Spirit is the self-giving of the Lord Himself, this time and ever thereafter not for a few, chosen prophets, mystics or seers; but for "*all flesh*". We can only stand in awe and deep humility at the extent of His self-giving for our salvation.



How strange **the icon of Pentecost** must appear to us after hearing the dynamic words of St. Luke's description of the event. In the icon, the Holy Apostles sit in peace, in quietude. The Holy Apostle to the Jews (St. Peter) and the Holy Apostle to the Gentiles (St. Paul) sit with the rest of the Twelve in a circle of unity made possible only by the Grace of the Holy Spirit; they themselves look like tongues of fire! And they are at peace, because the Spirit of God, *He that proceeds from the Father* as our Lord Jesus Christ teaches, is within them. The **God for them** (as shown in the central event of the Old Testament, the Exodus), became the **God with them**, Emmanuel (as shown in the central events of the New Testament), and now has become the **God within them**. This is what the icon shows: the Kingdom of God within them – the circle of unity is a unity of peace and self-giving and love; peace – because they know the fulfillment of their most ardent desires, the presence of God Himself.

Brothers and Sisters. I know you expect me to say these things, for I am a priest of the Living God; but listen to my words carefully! I tell you this honestly and directly and with no punches pulled: **You will never be at peace until the presence of God is within you.** You will always go from one thing to another, worrying about more *this* or *that*, more money, a better job, better health, a boss who understands, a child who obeys, a parent who is less pushy and demanding, whatever. **Only the presence of God within you, the acquisition of the All-Holy Spirit, is worth your entire life's devotion.** Everything else is wasted time and energy. Truly, as St. Seraphim of Sarov said simply and rightly: *"All of life should consist in the acquisition of the Holy Spirit."*

How do you acquire Him? You strive with every fiber of your being to stop laboring for the bread that does not satisfy; **you ask the Lord** for the Great Gift, and **you wait on Him** with the hands of your heart open. **And then you will receive.** He is not thrifty in giving; His Grace flows without limit! **And His Grace alone is sufficient for you.** And this I tell you clearly: Nothing else will make you happy, and nothing else will suffice. As St. Augustine said, *"The heart is ever restless until it finds its resting place in Thee, Lord."* **Only the God within us will ever bring us peace and satisfaction.** *That*, Brothers and Sisters, is what the icon of Pentecost shows. And *that* is what we are about: *To receive Him within ourselves, and then to pass Him on to others in lives of love and self-sacrifice.* To this end, may the Lord bless each of us!

Remember what the LORD has done for you! Give Him thanks and praise! Glory to His NAME for all things!
Pray for me, His most unworthy of priests.

In Christ our true God,

+Fr. Elias

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