



Orthodox Mission of the Entrance of the Theotokos into the Temple

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<http://EntranceMission.org>

The Feast of the Holy Spirit: Freely Given, Filling All Things! June 7, 2020

Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Christ is in our midst! He is and every shall be!

[17] For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh; for these are opposed to each other, to prevent you from doing what you would. [18] But if you are led by the Spirit you are not under the law. [19] Now the works of the flesh are plain: fornication, impurity, licentiousness, [20] idolatry, sorcery, enmity, strife, jealousy, anger, selfishness, dissension, party spirit, [21] envy, drunkenness, carousing, and the like. I warn you, as I warned you before, that those who do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God. [22] But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, [23] gentleness, self-control; against such there is no law. [24] And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. [25] If we live by the Spirit, let us also walk by the Spirit. (Galatians 5)

This Sunday we will celebrate one of the most important Feasts of the Church, Pentecost. It was on that day, the fiftieth day after the Resurrection, while the Apostles were gathered once again in the upper room of the Last Supper, that the promised gift of the Holy Spirit was poured out upon “all flesh,” as the Holy Prophet Joel had prophesized many hundreds of years earlier, and as the Lord Himself had promised on the night of the Last Supper and on the day of His Ascension: ... *when the Counselor comes, whom I shall send to you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness to me* (John 15:26).

The Great Feast of Pentecost is a time of transition and transformation. The transition was that of Christ’s physical presence as a man, circumscribed and present in one place at a time, to that of Christ’s presence in the Spirit, uncircumscribed, everywhere present, filling all things, as we pray before the beginning of every Divine Liturgy. The transformation was that of a small band of unlettered fishermen, huddling behind locked doors, to that of the Body of Christ, the Body of which we are all members, responsible for the conversion of billions of people throughout history to the Christian faith and for the promulgation of the Gospel of salvation, forgiveness and hope to all who will come in humble repentance.

Many Christians do not know what to make of the Holy Spirit; many think of Him as a force of magic given to those who are in some sense righteous, or who have in some way distinguished themselves as “worthy.” Orthodox Christians speak of the Spirit in an entirely different way. He is the presence of the Holy Trinity, of Christ and of the Father, “everywhere present, filling all things.” He is the outpouring of Grace, Whom we, as Orthodox Christians, define as the self-giving of God Himself, the Uncreated offered to the created realm of humanity and the world. The Spirit is poured out, waiting for us to receive, to reach out with the eyes of our hearts to see and partake of. He is not given only to those who are righteous or in some sense correct in their understanding, but He is given to draw all flesh to the presence of God Himself, to unite us with the One Who alone is righteous, and Who leads us *along the paths of righteousness*, to quote Psalm 22 (23). Through the Holy Spirit, God pours Himself out for the salvation of all who will receive Him; through the Holy Spirit, God forgives all who repent; through the Holy Spirit God sanctifies and makes holy that which is carnal; through the Holy Spirit God gives comfort to the dying, life to the dead, healing to the sick, hope to those in despair; through the Holy Spirit we are refashioned to become the kind of people whom St. Paul describes as demonstrating *love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness [and] self-control* in their lives.

While the Spirit is given freely, we can turn away from Him; we can *quench* Him. But whether we quench, refuse or openly receive Him, He is given. Thus, I believe that we may say where He is, but we should be very careful indeed before we cross the line into arrogant mis-teaching by saying where He is not. To say that the Spirit is not present is to engage in an arrogance and mis-teaching so egregious as to commit the unforgiveable sin, the sin against the Holy Spirit,

the one sin which cannot be forgiven, for blinded by its own arrogance it refuses to accept its own need for forgiveness. We Orthodox Christians therefore praise and magnify the One Who gives Himself freely to all who will receive Him; but, but we are very careful indeed not to pontificate in arrogance about where He is not. For as we pray, so it is:

O Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present and fillest all things; Treasury of Blessings and the Giver of Life: Come and abide in us and cleanse us of every stain, and save our souls, O Good One.

This is the essence of our celebration on the Great Feast of Pentecost. Let us receive the One freely given; let us open our hearts as a home for His Abiding Presence; let us share His Life-Giving Presence with love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self control. Let us be whom God has called each and every one of us to be: One with Him in the fullness of the Spirit!

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