



BASILDON ORTHODOX COMMUNITY BULLETIN

No. 12 ~ PENTECOST 2016



ALL SAINTS ORTHODOX CHURCH
North Benfleet Hall Road
Basildon,
Essex SS12 9JR

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SUNDAY - DIVINE LITURGY, preceded by ORTHROS.

WEDNESDAY - THIRD & SIXTH HOUR, and CATECHESIS.

LAST SATURDAY IN THE MONTH - ESPERINOS.

A WORD OF ST. ISAAC THE SYRIAN

What is a merciful heart? It is a heart on fire for the whole of creation, for men, for the birds, for animals, for demons, and for every created thing; and by the recollection and sight of them the eyes of a merciful man pour forth abundant tears. By the strong and vehement mercy that grips such a man's heart, and by such great compassion, the heart is humbled and one cannot bear to hear or to see any injury or slight sorrow in any in creation. For this reason, such a man offers up tearful prayer continually even for irrational beasts, for the enemies of the truth, and for those who harm him, that they be protected and receive mercy. And in like manner such a man prays for the family of reptiles because of the great compassion that burns without measure in a heart that is in the likeness of God.

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PARISH NEWS

- - We enjoyed a very productive work day and music workshop on Saturday 25th June. Our thanks to all who attended and worked so hard !
- - A very happy Feast of All Saints (our PATRONAL FEAST) on Sunday 26th June.
- - Remnants of medieval wall-paintings have been discovered on the western wall of the Holy Temple, a rare survivor from before the blasphemous desecrations of the protestants.
- - A survey of the tower has been commissioned. We hope to have some news soon, so watch this space!

Please pray for –

- - the catechumen EZEKIEL as he prepares for Holy Baptism.
- - Baby ISAAC and family as they prepare for Holy Baptism.
- Our new Committee members and Trustees.

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THE OECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW ON THE COSMIC IMPACT OF SIN

For the Orthodox tradition, sin has a cosmic dimension and cosmological impact. The theology of the Orthodox Church recognizes the natural creation as inseparable from the identity and destiny of humanity, inasmuch as every human action leaves a lasting imprint on the body of the earth. This means that human attitudes and behaviour towards other people directly impact on and reflect human attitudes and behavior toward creation.

This is why we use the term metanoia, which signifies a shift of mind, a total change of heart, to determine the transformation of our attitudes and actions toward our world. This is very important because, during the last century, a century of immense scientific progress, we also experienced the biggest destruction of the natural environment. Science will inform us about the world; but it cannot reach the depth of our soul and mind. Today, we know; and yet we still continue to act against our knowledge. Knowledge has unfortunately not resulted in metanoia.

[From an address given to the Oxford Union, 4th November 2015.]

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HOMILY ON HOLY PENTECOST

Beloved Christians,

Today we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples at Holy Pentecost, fifty days after our Lord's glorious Resurrection.

In today's Gospel [John 7:37-52, 8:12] we hear that 'rivers of living waters will flow out of the hearts' of those who believe in Christ. This underlines that the Spirit works inwardly, effecting salvation within our hearts. It is there, in our heart, that we are brought to salvation and divinised and where we become a throne for the Holy Trinity.

In the Old Testament the prophets could act with grace, in union with God, but only *temporarily*, and they could not impart the Spirit to others. In the post-Pentecost Church, the apostles, and their heirs the bishops and priests, *can* impart grace; and union with God can be *forever*. For this to become possible, Christ needed first to be glorified. In a sense Christ's life and death and resurrection are a preparation for the descent of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is perceived, in His uncreated energies, as a violent wind and as fire. He, in Himself, remains unknown and unrevealed. The Father's image is found in Christ, Christ's image is known in the Holy Spirit, but the Holy Spirit is not imaged in another, He remains hidden. In the Old Testament the Father is revealed, in the New Testament Christ is revealed but the Holy Spirit's divinity is only hinted at. He dwells among us, His presence is known, preparation is necessary for His reception, but He Himself remains hidden.

The fire of Pentecost is a love which both cleanses and illumines our heart: *katharsis - photis – theosis* is the trajectory of the process of our salvation - *cleansing* through Baptism, *enlightenment* by the Spirit, *union* with God. We see this process at work in Holy Scripture, in how the holy apostles reacted at the Holy Transfiguration of Christ - they fell to the ground in fear. But, here at Pentecost, there is a change, a *progression*: the apostles remain standing, they have been elevated, they have risen towards God. St Gregory of Sinai says that, '*everyone baptized into Christ should pass progressively through all the stages of Christ's own life, for in baptism he receives the power so to progress, and through the commandments he can discover and learn how to accomplish*

such progression.' Each generation is called to witness the grace of Pentecost. Through attentiveness, discipline, peace and repentance, in the quiet lives of the Saints, we discern the presence of the Holy Spirit. The Saint is detached from material and carnal urges, free from worldly cares. This is why gentleness is feared by the demons. Evagrius Pontikos tells us that anyone who controls his anger has already gained control over demons. Repetitive tasks, prayer, fasting, prostrations, and reading of the psalms enable the Holy Spirit to descend upon us. Stillness and prayer give birth to the Holy Spirit in a pure illumined heart, so that in humility we may ascend to God.

We are saved by partaking in God's own life. In the Church with our fellow man, with the angels and saints, we become Sons of God with the Holy Spirit resting upon us. To acquire the fruits of the Holy Spirit - love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control - we must avoid all the things of death - lust, greed, anger, selfish ambition, envy, dissensions. St. Symeon the New Theologian says that the presence of the Holy Spirit banishes the passions as darkness is banished by light. The Church is a Pentecostal phenomenon and for us Orthodox Christians every day is a Pentecost because the Holy Spirit has never ceased to be poured out upon the Church in the Church's sacramental *μυστήρια*. Holy Tradition is the Life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. The Spirit is active in Holy Communion and in Confession; in Baptism we experience the death and paschal resurrection in Christ so that the Holy Spirit may descend upon us at Chrismation; Chrismation is our personal Pentecost. In the Divine Liturgy, where the descent of the *Παράκλητος*, the Comforter, manifests the moment of Pentecost, there is a *double epiklesis*- on the Holy Gifts *and* upon the people here present. The Church is eternal and uncreated, Pentecost allows the Church to move forward into a new stage of her existence. Christ is the noetic light of the world [Jn. 9:5], and because of the descent of the Holy Spirit, we too become participants, we are granted *τὸ φῶς τῆς ζωῆς* - the 'light of life', we too become the light of the world [Mt. 5:14]. And thereby we also participate in the God-given task of transfiguring the world around us. This attainment of grace can, according to the revelation of St Seraphim of Sarov, save thousands around us.

This *charisma* of course is made possible only through Christ's voluntary sacrifice of Himself for our sins and for the life of the world- again the culmination of a process. Christ draws us to Himself, in love, fulfilled by the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit makes Christ's life our life. Christ takes on our human nature and in drawing us to Himself (Jn. 12:31) and in His Ascension He takes our nature to the right hand of God. He ascends to the Father and we ascend with Him. The Holy Spirit is sent to bring us into a loving and living communion with Christ God. In His loving self-sacrifice Christ is an ikon of man's freedom, man's God-given freedom, in which man is at full liberty to accept or to reject, to choose salvation or to walk away. According to one contemporary British hesychast, Hieromonk Silouan of Shropshire, '*Resurrection beckons. Ascension calls. Pentecost invites.*'

This brings us to one final and not unimportant aspect of Pentecost, the volitional coming

together of the Apostles *‘with one accord in one place’*. Such divine unity, as we also see in Eph 1:10, is significant and unique. This is contrasted with the ‘dispersion of the Greeks’ [Jn. 7:35] and the machinations of the Pharisees mentioned in today’s Gospel. The Holy Spirit descended not upon all mankind or upon numerous groups or sects or entire races or nations, but upon one specific group; this functional aspect – this *particularity* - is not to be overlooked. The Church, the *ἐκκλησία*, is not dispersed, fragmented or sectarian, but ‘gathered together’, the Church is ‘one and holy’, it is the sole *locus* of our rebirth into Christ. Correct glorification generates salvation, *‘Glory to God in the highest’* generates *‘peace on earth’* by way of an axis of uncreated light. The Church, upon which the divine and uncreated fire of Pentecost is constantly poured out, is the only true preparation for eternity. And in the Church Christ pours His love into our heart. And so it is to the Church that we must cling if we are to acquire the Spirit of God and to participate in God’s energies, in His life.

At this Holy Pentecost, let us joyfully reaffirm our faith in Christ and keep the Holy Spirit at the centre of our life. The Divine Liturgy, our prayers and fasting, are not ‘optional’, these should become the very axis and the unmissable events and the most longed for and most deeply loved things in our week, and throughout our earthly life. Amen.

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The ikon of Pentecost on the front cover of this issue is taken from the Rabbula Gospels, a sixth-century illuminated Syriac Gospel Book. One of the finest works of Christian artistic creation, it was completed in AD586 at the Monastery of St. John of Zagba, in the hinterland between Antioch and Apamea. It is signed by its scribe, Rabbula, about whom nothing else is known.

In the ikon we see a blue arch representing the realm of the heavens, above which we see the trees of the garden of paradise. The Holy Spirit, in the bodily form of a dove, descends from the heavens, and rests above the head of the Holy Theotokos. The apostles are gathered together, the Theotokos stands in their midst, tongues of uncreated flame rest upon their heads.

The presence of the Theotokos is not mentioned in Acts, but this ikon – the oldest surviving depiction of Pentecost – attests to the ancient tradition that She was present. That She who is the Mother of the infant Church would be absent at Holy Pentecost seems quite unthinkable.

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COHERENCE *VERSUS* BABBLING

It is important to point out that the Pentecostal ‘speaking in tongues’ is not *speaking gibberish*, but is articulate and coherent speech. This is differentiated from the Corinthian form. At Corinth there was a problem. There, speaking gibberish was considered to be a great gift. In His first Epistle to the Corinthians St. Paul informs the local Church there that this is not the case. We must make a clear distinction between what was happening later at Corinth and what occurred at Pentecost. At Pentecost the Apostles received the gift of speaking in other languages, the Greek says *λαλεῖν ἐτέραις γλώσσαις*, to speak ‘in other

languages'; that is, in articulate and lucid translation. At Corinth this was not the case, where the babblings were understandable, if at all, only to God. Corinth was a city greatly in thrall to Greek paganism, where whirling dances, bizarre happenings, strange utterances, seizures, possessions and frenzies would have been commonplace, and no doubt would have been big business. Ecstasy, ἔκστασις, a feminine noun literally meaning 'out of the body', and other such experiences, were far more common to the pagan dionysian orgies than to the Christian life. St. Paul is polite, one might say almost sarcastic in tone, but he remains firm and dismissive of 'speaking in tongues'. And in any case, the practice seems to have not been widespread or long-lived, and by the mid-second century it seems to have disappeared altogether. Despite its apparent reappearance in some (so-called) "charismatic" groups, speaking in tongues is not found in genuine Orthodox spiritual experience or worship. Following the teaching of St. Paul the Holy Church has always placed a higher value on coherence and intelligibility than on the ecstatic.

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A WORD FROM AN ANCIENT ENGLISH BOOK OF HOMILIES

Let us be mindful now of our daily sins, and all our acts, which are contrary to God's loving will. Let us with all our power make amends for them with fasts and prayers, with acts of charity and with true repentance. True repentance means sincere confession of all sins and an earnest attempt to make amendment for them. Let us weep now, and remember the Lord's words: 'Blessed are they that weep now, for they shall afterwards be comforted'. These assure us that we may with true repentance merit eternal bliss. Let us be mindful of God's commandments and of our soul's need while we can. Let us earnestly beseech the Lord to deliver us from eternal death, and to bring us to the joy of His glory, where there is eternal bliss in His everlasting Kingdom.

- from the *Blickling Homilies* [10th cent.]

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+ GLORY TO GOD FOR ALL THINGS +