

A Voice in the Wilderness

The Newsletter of St. George Orthodox Christian Church



Rev. Matthew P. Binkewicz, Pastor

Glory be to Jesus Christ! Glory be Forever!



Volume 9 Issue 415

8th Sunday of Pascha-Feast of Pentecost

Sunday, June 7, 2020



On today's great feast of Pentecost, we celebrate the Holy Spirit coming upon the followers of the risen Lord Jesus Christ, which is the birthday of His Body, the Church. After the Savior's resurrection, He ascended into heaven and sent the Holy Spirit to His disciples so that they would not be cut off from Him and the new life that He

brought to the world. The Holy Spirit is the third Person of the Holy Trinity, fully divine and eternal as are the Father and the Son. By being filled with the Holy Spirit, the Lord's followers share personally and communally in the unity, power, and blessing of the very life of God by participation in His gracious divine energies.

Unlike the period before Christ's Passion, the disciples now no longer think of themselves as students of a mere teacher, prophet, or king. They no longer struggle to accept the shocking news of His death and resurrection. Instead, they experience the new life of the Kingdom as "rivers of living water" flowing from their hearts. By the power of the Holy Spirit, they share in the eternal life of the Holy Trinity. God is not remote, distant, or removed from them; but present and
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*** 8th Sunday of Pascha ***
**** Pentecost Sunday * ***

Epistle: Acts: 2: 1-11
Gospel: John 7:37-52; 8:12

St. George Orthodox Christian Church is a community of believers who strive to live a life according to the Gospel of Christ and teachings of the Church.

We worship God in Trinity - Father+Son+Holy Spirit.

We are dedicated to living out Christ's commandment to, *Love the Lord your God with all your heart, ad with all your soul, and with all your strength, and with all your mind; and your neighbor as yourself.*

The Simple and the Clever Ones , by Metropolitan Meletios of Nikopolis

It often happens that the internal beauty of the life of repentance and the staunch battle against sin and the passions are not immediately obvious. One such instance was the case of the nun Isidora, who lived in a monastery in Egypt and whose story we read in the Lausaic History.

Isidora loved humility and simplicity and tried to live in obscurity, as far as this was possible. Alas, as often happens, the more she tried to be humble, the more the

reprobates of this world saw her as a tool of exploitation. They found her laughable.

The magnificence of internal and spiritual beauty depends on the extent to which you're able to bear up under the mockery of others. Of course, Christ advised us to be as shrewd as serpents and not simply to allow ourselves to be pushed around. When He was being interrogated by Annas and was struck by a servant, He Himself also asked why the man

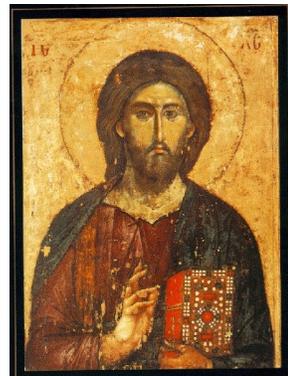
had done so.

In the end though, He gave the ultimate example of humility when He suffered all the pain of His death upon the Cross without complaint: 'When they reviled him, he did not revile them in return; when he suffered, he made no threats... by his wounds we have been healed' (*1 Peter 22-23*). His wounds were such that He had 'neither form nor comeliness', but through them He not only healed
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We invite all to worship in our services. Sunday Divine Liturgy begins at 9:30 AM

If you have any questions about the church or would like to speak with our pastor, please call Fr. Matthew at 607-280-1586

Glory be to Jesus Christ.
Glory be Forever.





Troparion to St. George

As the deliverer
of captives
and defender
of the poor,
healer of the infirm
and champion of kings,
victorious great
martyr George
intercede with Christ
our God
for our souls
salvation.

News and Notes

We welcome all who are worshipping with us today and invite you down to the church hall for our social hour.

Pray without ceasing (1 Thess. 5.17)

We ask that you keep the following in your prayers: Esther, Clement John, Mother Onufria, Olga, Lillian, Meg, Larissa, Stephen, Louise, Marcia, George, Lorraine, Evan, Ryan, Kathleen, Sandy, Samuel, Anatoly, Alexey, Abraham, Susan, Jenny, Deb, Dan, Bob, Catherine, Skip, Doug, Heidi, Bonnalee, Vicky, Corella, Gail, Mike, the homeless, the hungry, victims of abuse and violence, & those persecuted for their faith in Christ.

Thoughts on the Feast of Pentecost

“Jesus tells us that His holy Disciples will be more courageous and more understanding when they would be, as the Scripture says, Endowed with power from on high (Luke 24:49), and that when their minds would be illuminated by the torch of the Spirit they would be able to see into all things, even though no longer able to question Him bodily present among them.

The Savior does not say that they would no longer as before need the light of His guidance, but that when they received His Spirit, when He was dwelling in their hearts, they would not be wanting in any good thing, and their minds would be filled with most perfect knowledge.”

St Isaac the Syrian, Ascetical Homily 77

“Through the Holy Spirit comes our restoration to paradise, our ascension into the kingdom of heaven, our return to the adoption of sons, our liberty to call God our Father, our being made partakers of the grace of Christ, our being called children of light, our sharing in eternal glory, and, in a word, our being brought into a state of all “fulness of blessing,” both in this world and in the world to come, of all the good gifts that are in store for us, by promise hereof, through faith, beholding the reflection of their grace as though they were already present, we await the full enjoyment.”

St. Macarios the Great, Spiritual Homilies, 26

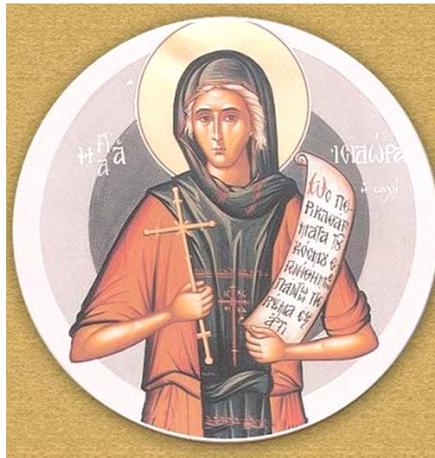
The Fool and the Clever Ones, (cont'd from p. 1)

our own wounds, but gave us the opportunity to acquire comeliness incomparably greater than our ‘ancient beauty’ [cf. *Isaiah 53*].

The key to the acquisition of such beauty is humility in imitation of Christ. One of the most dangerous passions we have is trying to gain fame and standing from the praise of other people. So when we know how to disregard the praise of others and to seek glory through our spiritual virtues, then our inner beauty increases.

The more we rejoice over praise from others, the more we become distorted internally, and we reach the point where we no longer care who it is who’s praising us. So we’re pleased with ourselves even if we’re praised by thieves, crooks and the villains of this world. Precisely because of her simplicity and humility, the nun Isidora became an object of scorn for the other sisters- strange as that may seem. Monasteries don’t house only praise-worthy spiritual strivers, but also idlers and malinger-

ers. Although some of the nuns were good, there were others who said: ‘Since the poor thing’s simple-minded and willing, let her do all the dirty work’. Even worse, there were some who mocked her for her simplicity.



Living nearby at that time was Saint Pitirum. The fact that he was virtuous, however, didn’t prevent him from being affected by the thought that he struggled as hard as he could and wondered if there were others who strove as much as he did.

In order to help him deal with these prideful thoughts, God sent him an angel who told him: ‘You’re not the best in the world. There’s a nun in the Monastery of Tabennisi who surpasses you in humility. You’ll recognize her from the crown around her head’. So he set off to go and find her, for his own benefit, to hear a word of advice and teaching.

When he entered the monastery, he asked the Abbess if he could see all the nuns, one by one. They all came but none stood out. Saint Pitirum didn’t see the inner beauty he’d been led to expect on the face of any of them. So he asked: ‘Isn’t there any other nun?’.

‘No’, said the Abbess.

‘Well, there’s one missing’, insisted the saint. ‘The one the angel indicated’. ‘Well, there’s one missing’, insisted the saint. ‘The one the angel indicated’.

The Abbess then said: ‘We do have another one, Abba, in the kitchen, but she’s a bit simple’.

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(Homily on the Feast of Pentecost, cont'd from p.1)

active in their souls. That is how they become who God created them to be in the divine image and likeness.

At Pentecost, the Holy Spirit comes upon the apostles as a group gathered together in obedience to the Lord's command. The same divine breath which first gave life to the human person comes upon them as a mighty wind. The divine glory beheld by Moses in the burning bush now rests upon each of them personally as flames of fire. The divided speech of the tower of Babel is now overcome by the miracle of speaking in different languages as a sign that everyone is invited to share in the life of the Lord. Not the possession of any nation or group, this great feast manifests the fulfillment of God's promises for the entire world and every human being.

God creates us all in His image with the calling to grow in His likeness, which means to become like Him in holiness through the power of the Holy Spirit poured out at Pentecost. Human distinctions of every kind become irrelevant here, for all that matters is that we respond with faith, humility, love, and repentance.

With the Holy Spirit present in our hearts, linking us together organically as one, our fallen, divided humanity is restored. Just as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit share a common life of love, unity, and holiness, we share a common life in Christ's Body, the Church.

As particular people, we have the responsibility to believe and obey the Lord as we seek to live faithfully each day and participate fully in the ministries of the Church. As members of Christ's Body, we are nurtured by worship, the sacraments, and spiritual instruction in our common life. Through the Church, the Holy Spirit brings us into ever greater participation in the life of God.

We receive the Holy Spirit not as isolated individuals living on our own terms, but as persons in communion, in loving relationship with Christ and with one another in His Body, the Church. The only proper way to cele-

brate Pentecost is to open ourselves as fully as possible to God's healing, transforming power in our life together in a way that overcomes all worldly distinctions.

No area of our lives is off limits from the sanctifying presence of the Holy Spirit, unless we refuse to open it to Him. That would be tragic, of course, for because of Pentecost we may become radiant with the divine glory as His living temples in every dimension of our existence. That is how we too may experience "rivers of living water" that quench the thirst of our dry, parched souls. This Pentecost, let us all become wide open to the healing power and presence of God, Who alone can sat-

isfy our deepest desires and make us shine brilliantly with the light of His eternal glory.

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(The Simple and the Clever Ones, cont'd from p.2)

'Bring her here', said the saint. So they went and found her washing the monastery's large pots which were grimy and sticky. They had to drag her away, because she had obviously realized why they wanted her, perhaps because God had revealed the reason.

As soon as he saw her, the saint discerned the spiritual beauty of her humility, which was confirmed by the 'crown' she wore on her head: a piece of rag instead of a cowl! He fell at her feet [addressed her as 'Amma'] and asked for her blessing. She also fell at his feet and said: 'You bless me, master'.

The other nuns were astonished and said: 'Elder, you're making a big mistake. She's a fool'. The saint then addressed them and said: 'You're the ones who are fools. She's better than all of you and me, too. I pray that God will find me worthy to be with her on the Day of Judgment'.

['This blessed woman was unable to bear the glory, praise and apologies from all the community, considering them a burden, and secretly left the monastery. And to this day, no-one knows where she went, where she hid and where she passed away'].

Glory to God for all things. Amen.



An Explanation of the Pentecost Icon

As with all icons of the Eastern Orthodox Church, the Pentecost icon teaches theology and brings us into the reality of the event depicted. Below are a few reflections on the symbolism and meaning of this icon.

The Position of the figures represents harmony in which no apostle is better than another. The inverse perspective prevents the apostles who are near the back of the semicircle from being painted as smaller, which would happen in the rendering of most normal paintings. In actuality, they are depicted slightly larger, particularly Peter and Paul as the chief apostles. But even then, they are among equals.

There is also no discord or chaos, which contrasts with some of the Western paintings of this event, which can be a bit dramatic. There is no sign of appearing drunk, which they were accused of that morning. Everything is sober and harmonious.

While it is not a typical iconographic meaning, the towering architecture here reminds me of the Tower of Babel. Men of old thought they could reach divinity and become gods on their own by building a tower up into heaven. But God scattered them with different languages (tongues). Pentecost, however, shows that the Holy Spirit has been sent to unite all people in the new spiritual building of the Church, and through this new building we can reach heaven and become adopted children of God, no matter our race or language.

Who are the figures in the icon? On the left, starting from the top, we have Peter, Matthew, Luke, and other disciples. On the right, we have Paul, John, Mark, and other disciples. Paul, Luke, and Mark were not part of the twelve disciples, but because they played a significant role in preaching the Gospel to all humanity they are depicted as being in unity and harmony with the twelve.

Of course, Paul was not present during this event, but the reality of Pentecost transcends time and space, and in some sense, Paul was later mystically joined to this moment. He is also included to show that he was in complete harmony with the other Apostles.

In many icons the four evangelists are depicted holding books and the remainder are holding scrolls. The books symbolize the writings of the four gospels, the scrolls show that even those who did not write lengthy gospels still proclaimed the gospel message to the world.

Why is the head of the semicircle of Apostles empty? Because it is the seat of our Lord Jesus Christ, who is invisibly present. As he said before ascending, "Behold, I am with you even to the end of the age." He continues to keep that promise, being invisibly present in the church, guiding us through the Holy Spirit.

The twelve rays coming from the semicircle at the top and the tongues of fire, sometimes shown above each Apostle, represent the Holy Spirit coming upon all of those depicted. The twelve symbolize that there are a diversity of gifts given by the one Spirit of God. In the same way, each of the twelve Apostles are seated in slightly different ways: there is harmony, but not conformity. We are all given different gifts by the same Spirit, but none of us are meant to be a copy of anyone else. It is in the Church that we see diversity in its most beautiful harmony.

Something that stumps many people: who is the kingly figure at the bottom of the Pentecost icon? It is Cosmos. In the most ancient Pentecost icons, the crowd from Acts two was depicted at the bottom. However, that was quickly replaced by Cosmos, who personifies all people of all nations.

A 17th century description reads, "The man sits in a dark place, since the whole world had formerly been without faith; he is bowed down with years, for he he was made old by the sin of Adam; his red garment signifies the devil's blood sacrifices; the royal crown signifies sin, which ruled the world [as a tyrant]; the white cloth in his hands with the twelve scrolls means the twelve Apostles, who brought light to the whole world with their teaching."

Ouspensky later writes that this icon is "an image of the inner life of the Church." How so? It shows that Christ sits at the head of our Church, invisibly guiding us; we have descended directly from the Apostles; we have been given the gift of the Holy Spirit by God through the Apostles; we celebrate our own participation in Pentecost through Chrismation and the mysteries of the Church because these things transcend time and space; while we always work toward harmony and unity with one another, we have a diversity of gifts and talents and there is no forced uniformity; people of all nations, tribes, and tongues are united together in the new spiritual building of the Church that transforms us from being lowly earthly creatures to heavenly ones.

