

Homily on Pentecost

By St. Philaret of New York

Once the great holy hierarch and teacher of the Church, St. Gregory the Theologian, pronouncing his inspired discourse on the Feast of the Holy Trinity, began with these words: “We celebrate Pentecost and of the coming of the Spirit, and the appointed time for the promise, and the fulfillment of hope!” And further in this inspired discourse he says: “The Holy Spirit, then, always existed, and exists, and always will exist. He neither had a beginning, nor will He have an end; absolute Good, and Spring of Goodness; Light and Lightgiver” The Holy Church took his marvelous, profound, and poetically beautiful words into the contents of the bright, joyous, celebratory verses that we heard yesterday at the All-Night Vigil. These words belong to St. Gregory the Theologian.

Thus, we celebrate Pentecost and the coming of the Spirit.

Once the Lord Jesus Christ, at His Mystical Supper, told His disciples that He would leave them; seeing their grief, He said to them: “It is better for you if I go, for if I do not now go (to My suffering), then the Comforter would not come to you; but if I go,” the Lord said, “then I will send Him to you.”

For our salvation it was necessary that not only our sinful guilt for our sins be removed from us, but also that, at the same time, we be healed from the damage that for thousands of years was passed on from generation to generation...

Imagine a boy whose parents gave him a new, smart suit and told him to keep it. But he began to misbehave light-mindedly, was negligent, and soiled and tore it. Seeing this, he was ashamed and ran to his parents to ask forgiveness. The kind parents forgive him, relieving him of guilt. But this is not enough. The suit needs to be fixed and cleaned. So it is in the deed of our salvation. Our Lord Jesus Christ freed us from sinful guilt and the severity of sin. We know at what price. When you look at the image of His precious sufferings, and you see how **He fell** under the Cross, **remember**: this Cross of His pressed down with its weight because on the Cross hung all our terrible sins and our iniquity: mine, and yours, and that of all humanity. This **terrible weight of sins as it were pressed down and crushed our Savior, exhausting, tormenting, and bloodying him – crushing Him to the ground. He could no longer bear His Cross.** But the account has been preserved of how, when the Righteous Simon of Cyrene ran to the Cross to pick it up and help the Savior carry it, he could not budge this terrible weight from its place and, and then the Lord Himself, by His almighty power, helped him raise the Cross. Its weight was terrible, for on it were all our sins that the Lord nailed to the Cross, freeing us from them. Thus, by his *podvig* of the Cross we were freed from the grave burden of sin.

But this was not enough. Sin disfigured, distorted, and defiled man. In order to cleanse, enlighten, and sanctify him, He sent the Holy Spirit “in the form of tongues of fire” to His holy disciples and apostles, and then “Their sound hath

gone forth into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.” And it is this all-glorious event, the coming of the life-giving, all-good Comforting Spirit to people, that we celebrate today.

In one of the psalms there is a wonderful expression (this psalm is always read at the end of the Six Psalms): “My soul thirsteth after Thee like a **waterless land**.” Imagine land in which good, fertile seeds have been planted. But it has withered away without moisture and become cracked, and whatever good seeds might be planted in it, they do not grow, since there is this terrible drought, since the land has dried out without moisture. And now: “My soul thirsteth after Thee like a waterless land,” man confesses through the mouth of the Psalmist David to the All-Good God.

In man’s soul are good beginnings: the remnants of the maintenance of truth, because the Lord-Creator at creation generously endowed man with every good, and the remnants of this good are still in the soul. The seed of good is in it, but they are fruitless, because “our soul is like a waterless land.” There is in it the thirst for piety, but no moisture of grace – it has dried up, and the good Seeds remain fruitless.

This is why on this day we pray on bended knee – praying the marvelous prayers compiled by St. Basil the Great, so that the Lord on this bright, festal day might enlighten, spiritually strengthen, and cleanse us. Without the grace of His Spirit, without His power we remain waterless, dried up, and barren land.

Remember, O Christian soul, how many times you have promised your correction to God? It seems that you were sincere and had good intentions to correct yourself, for renewing your life – but where is it? All the same sins, all the same passions, all the same uncleanness!

This is why we need to pray to the Lord, especially on this bright day of Pentecost, so that the Lord might heal and strengthen us by the grace of His Holy Spirit. When it sanctifies our souls they, like earth, are at first waterless and barren, but under the influence of the irrigating moisture they bring forth fruits by the grace of God and can bring the fruits of new life – but, I repeat, only when the grace of the Holy Spirit quickens them, as reviving dried earth.

Let us, during the reading of these prayers, pray to the Lord with our whole soul, that the Lord might have mercy on us and send us correction, renewal of life, and the firm resolve to set out on the good Christian path. Amen.

Homily on Holy Spirit Day

By St. Philaret of New York

The Orthodox Church yesterday celebrated the solemn feast of the All-Holy Trinity, and today is the second part of this feast, when the Church glorifies the All-Holy and Divine Spirit, Who descended on the Apostles and filled them with spiritual power. In the Six Psalms there are the following words:

My soul thirsteth after Thee like a waterless land, that is, my soul stands before you like a land that is waterless.

Imagine land that has good seeds, but there is no water and they dry up. But if moisture falls upon them, they begin to sprout and grow. It is the same way with humans: the grace and power of the Spirit of God are as necessary for the human soul as this wonderworking moisture is for seeds. Without the grace of the Spirit of God all good beginnings, which the Lord earnestly planted in our soul, will remain fruitless and will grow only weeds.

How evil is growing in the human soul now, in our times! Never before in life has there been such filth, never have such outrages been committed, as are committed now, and there are almost no good crops! But, of course, for a Christian there is no foundation for despair, if he leads a good Christian life. Always pray, above all, that the Lord, by the power of the Holy Spirit, visited and healed, so that the soul would be roused from spiritual slumber and may bear good fruit, which the Lord has sown, and expects from every soul. Amen.