

ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR
The Feast of Holy Pentecost
Sunday, 8 June 2014

Dearly Beloved in the Lord:

*“Let your light so shine before men,
that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in Heaven.”*
(Matthew 5:16)

The Feast of Holy Pentecost marks the day on which the Holy Spirit Whom Christ promised to His disciples (John 15:26) came upon them. From that moment, the apostles received *“the power from on high,”* and they began to preach and bear witness to Jesus as the Risen Christ, the King and the Lord. That day in history has traditionally been known as “the birthday of the Church.”

Saint Luke records this remarkable event for us with these words:

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.” (Acts 2:1-4)

This is an incredible account ... but it must be noted, that the Feast of Pentecost is not merely the celebration of a happening which took place centuries ago. It is the celebration of what must happen and does happen to us in the Church today. We have all died and risen with Christ in baptism, and we have all received His Most Holy Spirit in Chrismation. We are all indeed *“temples of the Holy Spirit”* in whom God’s Spirit dwells (Romans 8:1). We have, by our membership in the Church, received *“the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit.”* Pentecost has happened to us ... the fire of the Holy Spirit has been ignited in each of us.

But just having that flame burn quietly within us, is not enough.

Hopefully, the following analogy will help illustrate this fact: In my kitchen I have a stove, and at the bottom of it, hidden way in the back where you can barely reach it, is a pilot light -- a little blue flame that burns continually. Now, if I want to make soup for dinner, I open the can (because I am not an ambitious cook), I dump it in a pan, I pour on some water, stir it, and I leave it alone for ten minutes.

When I come back to the stove and stick a spoon in the soup to test it, I will find it is still just lukewarm! Why? I put it on the stove. There is a flame burning in there. But, what didn’t I do? I didn’t turn on the burner; I didn’t fuel the fire! ***I have to fuel the fire!***

We are all responsible for fueling and feeding the fire that God lit in us when we were Baptized and Chrismated. If we do not feed the flame, then we will be accountable for squandering that “pilot light” -- for failing to warm ourselves, or anyone else, with the light that we were given.

What is the problem if I don't feed the flame? Isn't it enough to believe in my mind that God exists and try not to hurt anybody? Christ knows we will ask this question ... and so, He answers it through the angel in the Book of Revelation: *“I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth”* (Revelation 3:15-16). That -- is terrifying! Scripture is replete with warnings against those who would oppose God. Yet, Christ makes clear that God would rather we be against Him than be complacent ... lazy ... *lukewarm*.

But, if we do feed the flame, as Saint Seraphim of Sarov says, we can save thousands around us ... just as the Apostles did. Once afraid for their lives ... they became courageous, and went *“to the ends of the earth”* with the message of the Gospel! Once hidden behind the locked doors of the Upper Room ... they were emboldened to knock at the doors of every house they could visit to share the Good News of the Savior! They ran the race of the rest of their earthly lives, until their eyes closed to this world, fueled by the flames of Pentecost so others might have eternal life in Jesus Christ the Son of God.

One might ask, what are some of examples of how we can feed the fire that God has already lit within us?

- ❖ **By prayer** -- which is the breath of the soul. Each morning and evening, and countless times in between, we call upon the *“Heavenly King ... the Spirit of Truth,”* to *“abide in us ... and save our souls.”*
- ❖ **By reading the Scriptures** -- which opens our minds and hearts to the “love letter” God has written to us, to guide us in our daily lives.
- ❖ **By fasting** -- purifying ourselves of the appetites of the world that often control us, and ordering our lives such that the Spirit -- not the stomach -- rules within us.
- ❖ **By participating in the divine services** -- where we celebrate the events of our salvation as a “family of faith” and become inspired by the hymnography and iconography of our Church, so we “live the Liturgy” beyond its final blessing as we walk out of the church and into the struggles of home, work, and life between Liturgies.
- ❖ **By being nourished with the Holy Mysteries** -- eating the Bread of Life and drinking from the Fountain of Immortality in the Eucharist ... having purified our souls beforehand from the toxins of sin through confession and repentance.
- ❖ **By following the commandments and living the Christian life** in thought, word and deed -- so that *“our light may shine before men and they may see our good works...”*

On the other hand, the self-centered spirit of the society around us will smother the fire ... if we allow it. The pressures and demands of the world will extinguish the flame ... if we permit them to. The forces of evil and sin will overtake the Spirit in our lives ... if we do not keep careful watch over our hearts. The Scripture reminds us of Judas ... Ananias and Sapphira ... Simon Magus ... who, having

