



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
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ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR THE FEAST OF HOLY PENTECOST

Prot. No. 01-003/2021
Sunday, June 20, 2021

Beloved Members of our Diocesan Family:
Christ is in our midst! – He is and ever shall be!

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

Today we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, the Birthday of our Holy Orthodox Church! It is also the holy day that enables us to understand God as the Holy Trinity. But most importantly, it is the liturgical commemoration of the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire!

One might ask the questions: Just exactly who is the Holy Spirit? What do we know about Him? The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Holy Trinity, of the same essence and of equal rank as the Father and the Son. We find that the Holy Spirit as God is revealed in many verses of Holy Scripture; for example: *“Go, make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit ...”* (Matthew 28:19) ... *“Why has Satan filled your hearts to lie to the Holy Spirit ... you have not lied to men, but to God”* (Acts 5: 3-4) ... *“There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit ... the same Lord ... it is the same God”* (I Cor. 12:5) ... *“The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God the Father, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with all of you”* (II Cor. 13:13) ... *“And the Spirit is the witness, because the Spirit is the truth”* (I John 5: 7-8).

The Godhead of the Holy Spirit comes directly from the Father. Just as the Son is begotten of the Father, so the Holy Spirit proceeds from the Father. Christ said, *“When the Comforter (the Holy Spirit) comes, Whom I will 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 Church has proclaimed that the Holy Spirit is of the same essence with the Father and the Son in the Holy Trinity. The Church has enshrined this truth in the Nicene-Constantinopolitan Creed, pronounced by the Second Ecumenical Council in 381 and affirmed aloud by the faithful during the Divine Liturgy. The Creed states: *“And (I believe) in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the Giver of Life, Who proceeds from the Father, Who together with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified, Who spoke by the prophets.”*

The Holy Spirit abides in the Church, protects and preserves Her truths, and sanctifies Her members. The Holy Spirit is the Power and Comforter of the believers, as Christ promised. Being the Third Person of the Holy Trinity does not mean that the Holy Spirit is not equal in essence to the Father and the Son. Rather, the Spirit is the life-giving energy and power making the Church *“the pillar and ground of the truth”* (I Tim. 3:15). The Holy Spirit was the divine instrument in the Incarnation of the Son of God, in the Birth of Jesus Christ as the God-Man: *“The Holy Spirit will come upon you (the Virgin Mary) and the power of the Most High will overshadow you; therefore, the Child to be born of you will be called Holy, the Son of God”* (Luke 1:35).

He is the One Who, as the Comforter, gives us strength -- the strength to live even in seasons of separation from God, the strength to stand firm in our faith in times of challenge, the strength to follow the commandments when we face temptation. It is He Who gives us the vigor of soul, the determination to do the good, and the power to act accordingly. But this, again, will only happen if we turn to him and cry: Come! Come and abide in us! Cleanse us from every impurity! Be our Comforter ... our Advocate ... our strength!

He is the One Who gives us already now, the joy of knowing how close we are to the Lord, despite what seems to be the huge distance between God and us; the One Who, in unutterable groanings, speaks to God from the depth of our being; the One Who, because we are Christ's own people, unites us to our Lord as His brothers and sisters in humanity – and these are His own words: we are the children of the Father! The joy of this! ... the wonder of this! ... the dignity of this! ... ah, yes indeed, the responsibility of this!

Even within our deeply fallen world, which is to such a great extent alienated from God, the Holy Spirit is already the beginning of eternal life. His presence is a decisive fact. He beats against the rocks like the sea; He breaks our resistance. He is the joy of eternity knocking at the door of our soul, seeking Himself to enter into our lives, reminding us of God our Father, of Christ our Savior, and of our greatness and dignity before God ... showing us that all things are possible through the power of Christ Who sustains us.

And so, let us responsively, gratefully and joyfully keep this Feast of Holy Pentecost. And may the Holy Spirit Himself, Who came in the form of tongues of fire upon the Apostles, come also to us – perhaps like a fire that sets us aglow and makes us like a burning bush, or touches us like the still, small voice which the Prophet Elijah heard in the wilderness ... the voice with which God spoke, in His quiet humility, in His surrender to us, in His love for us.

Indeed, on this great day, may we experience the Triune God, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, One God in Three Persons, the One Who loves us more than we love ourselves.

With my humble prayers, my archpastoral blessing and my sincere love,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Archbishop Michael".

Archbishop of New York and the Diocese of New York and New Jersey