

The Confessor's Tongue for May 23, 2010

Eighth Sunday of Pascha: Pentecost—Holy Trinity

In honor of St. Maximus the Confessor, whose tongue and right hand were cut off in an attempt by compromising authorities to silence his uncompromising confession of Christ's full humanity & divinity.

Holy Pentecost—Holy Trinity

On the eight Sunday of Pascha, we celebrate the Feast of Pentecost, one of the Twelve Great Feasts, on which we celebrate the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Holy Apostles, as recorded in the second chapter of Acts. By this the Church is established and empowered to proclaim the Gospel to the world.

Pentecost for the Jews was one of the three great annual feasts (Exodus. 23:14, 16, 17; Deut. 16:16). By the day of Pentecost the Jews had finished the harvest, which began with the feast of Passover, according to that, the fiftieth day after the first day of Passover was actually the feast of the ending of the harvest, in which under the law they should offer to God a thanksgiving sacrifice from fruits of the earth. (Exodus. 23:16; Num. 28:26). Over time this feast began to incorporate and commemorate the giving of the Sinai law received by the Hebrews within 50 days after their exodus from Egypt. For the Jews this feast was solemn and joyful (Deut. 16:11), and for this feast they flocked to Jerusalem in great numbers. Each of them considered it a sacred duty to visit the Holy City, in order to bring the sacrifice from the gathered harvest in gratitude to God, established by the law, (Lev. 23:17, 30), and it was considered obligatory not only for Palestinian Jews, but also for those outside of Palestine living in countries all over in the then known world. Therefore in Jerusalem for the feast of Pentecost it was possible to meet those who arrived from Rome, Egypt, Crete, Mesopotamia, from all areas of Asia Minor and Western Asia, from "all of the people under Heaven", not only Jews, but also proselytes, i.e. those converted from paganism (Acts 2:5, 9:11, 20:16).

The sending down of the Holy Spirit to earth is so great a gift that it includes everything within it for the Christian. Without the enlightenment of the Holy Spirit we would not even receive the clear knowledge of the actions of the Son of God Himself on earth. Without the co-activity of the Holy Spirit the preaching of the Gospel would not have spread so quickly in the world, due to the many obstacles, insurmountable for the ordinary power of man. Without the life-creating Holy Spirit even the faithful in the name of Jesus Christ would be dead spiritually. We have the Word of God because the Holy Spirit spoke through the prophets and the apostles. Everyone entering into the holy society of the Church receives the rebirth into the new spiritual life, because the Holy Spirit, once having been poured out, permanently remains in the Church of Christ.

Three times Christ gave the Holy Spirit to the disciples: it is implicit before His suffering (Mt. 10:1,20), it is clearer after His Resurrection through breathing (John 20:22), and now He has sent Him in essence; it is better (to say), He Himself has descended, more perfectly enlightening and

illuminating them, and through them converting all the ends of the world.

But we must not represent this descent of the Holy of Spirit anthropomorphically. The Holy Spirit, as God, is omnipresent. He has no place from which to descend and nowhere to go. He is everywhere and fills all things. To descend, to come may be only a limiting of the essence, but not of God. All these expressions, as St. Chrysostom notes, are used about God according to need, for in human language there are no words for expressing Divine actions in their very essence. All these expressions mean nothing other than the new appearance of the power of God, the special revelation of His presence. Where the power of God opens itself, where He perceptibly appears as His presence, there, according to our weak understanding and still weaker expression, it is as if God comes.

So, the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, actually speaking, is not the descent of the Spirit on them, but the appearance of His power in them, opening in them His special presence.

The Holy Spirit also acted before in human generation. The Holy Spirit, as the Church wisely sings, "always was, and is, and will be". He was even in the Old Testament, in the patriarchs, in the prophets and in any pure soul; without Him no truly good work was ever accomplished.

But the appearance of His power in the apostles was most crucial and beneficial for the entire human race. In the eternal council of God concerning the salvation of the race of man it is necessary, that the Son of God, after the fulfillment of his most magnificent work on earth, has risen to Heaven and that, according to the departure of the Savior to Heaven, the Holy Spirit has come to make what was begun by the Savior, to enable the apostles to preach the Gospel to the whole world, to prepare the hearts of the people for the acceptance of the Gospel message, to instill in their life service to the Redeemer, to inform them of a new spiritual force in the fulfillment of a new law of grace, is briefly: to enable the human race make those Divine Gifts their own, which they acquired by the suffering of the Son of God.

Therefore the descent of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles is His solemn entrance to the high post of Consecrator of the sinful human race. It is a solemn sanctification of a new, worldwide, eternal Church; after this sanctification the Consecrator already began to visibly and continually act in it. And by this fact alone it reveals how important and beneficial the descent of the Holy Spirit on the apostles is for the entire human race. If He did not descend upon them, the work of our Savior would remain unfinished, the Apostles would not be able to preach about Him to the entire world, the world would not know their Savior, there would not be a Christian faith in the

world and all of us would remain in the darkness of idol worship.

This feast is also called *Trinity Day*, because the appearance of the Holy Spirit has revealed to the people in a very clear light, how necessary the mystery of the Holy Trinity was for them and therefore, even for the Holy Church, teaching us "in the Orthodox way" piously to confess the All-holy Trinity, for on this day in its prayers and hymns it honors and praises all three Persons of the Holy Trinity, who participated in the descent of the Holy Spirit: God the Father, who sent the Holy Spirit, God the Son Jesus Christ, who treats the Father to send the Holy Spirit, and God the Holy Spirit, who descended appearing as fiery tongues.

We celebrate Pentecost for seven days through its Leavetaking on Saturday. During the feast, we say or sing the festal troparion before meals and during our daily prayers. (see *bulletin*)

The Sayings of St. Anthony the Great

A hunter in the desert came to find Abba Anthony enjoying himself with the brethren and he was shocked.

Wanting to show him that it was necessary sometimes to meet the needs of the brethren, the old man said to him, 'Put an arrow in your bow and shoot it.' So he did. The old man then said, 'Shoot another,' and he did so. Then the old man said, 'Shoot yet again,' and the hunter replied, 'If I bend my bow so much, I will break it.' Then the old man said to him,

'It is the same with the work of God. If we stretch the brethren beyond measure, they will soon break. Sometimes it is necessary to come down to meet their needs.' When he heard these words, the hunter was pierced by compunction and, greatly edified by the old man, he went away. As for the brethren, they went home strengthened.

Saying 13 in *The Sayings of the Desert Fathers*

Commentary: This same wisdom is found in the cycles of fasting and feasting in the Church. At times we are called to make a considerable ascetic effort in prayer, fasting, and almsgiving during the four fasts of the year, but especially during Great Lent. But at the end of each comes a festive season and a relaxation of ascetical effort. We could not bear it if we had to try to live life at the level of effort demanded by Great Lent. Like the overstressed bow, we would break.

Spiritual life has its seasons of great effort, and its seasons of relative relaxation (though we should not conceive of this 'relaxation' as though it were a sort of 'spiritual vacation', which we can never take and is always harmful, for our adversary the devil prowls about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour). As Solomon writes in Ecclesiastes, "To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under heaven....A time to weep, and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance....A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away....A time to keep silence, and a time to speak..." (Ecc 3:1-8). Though this life generally is a time for us to lose our life that we may find it, to give that we may receive, to weep and cultivate repentance so that

we may rejoice in the age to come, yet even this life in this fallen world and evil generation has its joys, its rewards, its times of laughter, rest, getting, and dancing. The Optina Elders often referred to these little relaxations and joys along the way as "consolations" sent by God. Such times help us who are weak from breaking under the strain of constant effort. Yet every such consolation and joy in this life is only relative compared to the joy to come, a foretaste, a glimpse. We cannot live here in rest, relaxation, and meeting the needs of the body, for these pleasures are only a pale reflection of what is to come; the joys here are not the ultimate end. In this life, we get only a foretaste of the Kingdom, not the fullness thereof. God grants us consolations along our difficult way so we don't lose heart, but we cannot long tarry in them. Yet though we cannot linger in them for long, we should not disdain them nor be ashamed of our need for them—just don't get comfortable in them this side of Christ's Kingdom!

Fr. Justin Frederick

Thoughts Determine Our Lives: The Life and Teachings of Elder Thaddeus of Vitovnica,

a new book now available in our bookstore.

"If we ourselves do not learn humility, God will not stop humbling us" were words that Fr. Thaddeus often repeated during the last years of his earthly life... p. 40

"We must learn to ease the burden of thoughts that bears down upon us. As soon as we feel burdened, we must turn to the Lord and give our worries over to Him, as well as the worries and cares of our loved ones. I always give my problems over to the Lord, as well as the problems of those that come to me. I give them over to the Lord and His Most Holy Mother, and they take care of everything. As for me, how can I help others when I cannot even help myself?" p. 47

"Fr. Thaddeus tirelessly taught all the Christian men and women who came to him at Vitovnica the truth of the centuries-old experience of the Church—so easily forgotten and ignored in our day and age—that man is a creature of energy and thought, a being of noetic energies. He taught that most of the thoughts which torment us from the inside are not ours at all, but come from the demons, that every one of us has the God-given power and freedom to refuse such thoughts, and that our lives depend on the quality of the thoughts we nurture in our minds and hearts." p. 49

Upcoming Events 2010

23 May Sunday, Holy Pentecost, Kneeling Prayers
29 May, Saturday 2:00 p.m. Baptism of Thomas Jackson
30 May, Sunday, Pre-Memorial Day Picnic, 3:00 p.m.
4, 11 July: Fr. Justin gone; Fr. Christopher Allen here

GLORY BE TO GOD IN ALL THINGS!