

John Paul the Great Eastern Orthodox Catholic Monastery
Oratory of St. Nicholas
San Antonio, TX

THE HOLY AND GLORIOUS PENTECOST SUNDAY

Sunday of the Holy Trinity

May 27, 2007

Schedule of Liturgy:

Sunday: 10:30 a.m. - For the People

Wednesday: 7:30 p.m. - Open Intention

Proper prayers for today:

Troparion of Pentecost - Tone 8

Kontakion of Pentecost - Tone 8

Readings:

First Reading: Acts: 2: 1-11

Responsorial Psalm: 104: 1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

Second Reading: 1 Cor. 12: 3-7

Gospel: John 7: 37-52; 8:12



“Heavenly King, Comforter, Spirit of Truth. You are everywhere present and fill all things. Treasury of blessings and giver of life. Come and dwell within us, cleanse us of all stain, and save our souls, O Gracious Lord.”

With these words we began today’s liturgy. Why did we take a moment at the beginning of this particular liturgy to kneel and prayer this hymn? Do we not use this prayer when we begin every service? Today is special because we are celebrating an ancient feast in the church as well as in the Jewish faith.

Today, the apostles gathered for the celebration of the Jewish feast of Pentecost. It is the 50th day after the celebration of the Passover feast and it commemorates the first fruits of the season. This day was acknowledged as a day of Thanksgiving for the people of Judah to God for his gifts, especially the gifts of the harvest, the gifts of sustenance, the gifts of nurturing and nourishment.

Today, we as Christian celebrate the feast differently. Our calculation of the day no longer matches that of the Jews and our celebration of the feast doesn’t match the celebration of the Jews. We celebrate today as the day on which the Holy Spirit, the Counselor, the Great Comforter, descended upon the Apostles and filled them with the promises and grace that Jesus had promised before his Ascension.

Today is a celebration of what has become a greater feast. In the scriptures, Jesus often talked about people having the physical food that they often take for granted, physical food that spoils and fades away. Today, however, we are blessed with a spiritual food that never ends, it never goes bad, it never fails, or perishes, or decays. Today we are nourished by a grace that is so deep and so profound that it can be compared to no other.

In the Acts of the Apostles, we hear of the physical manifestation of these gifts. We hear how the Apostles, men who had doubt and lacked courage, were tucked away in that same upper room that they seemed to occupy since the last supper. They were filled with fear, fear that they too would be killed, fear that they would be arrested and follow a little too closely in the footsteps of Jesus. Then all of a sudden there is the sound of a wind and the Holy Spirit descends on them in the forms of fire and they are filled with courage and they are given the words to express what they have held deep in their hearts all this time since

they were witness to the Crucifixion and Resurrection of Jesus.

Jesus made a promise to us in today's gospel passage. This is when he talks of the Holy Spirit for the first time and he does so in his usual symbolic form, telling us that he will pour upon us Living Waters. Most of us know that water is generally a living thing. Without water, nothing can live. But what Jesus is sharing today is that the water of this earth, as we all know, doesn't last forever. We have to water our plants regularly, we have to water ourselves regularly. The doctors have been telling us in recent times, that we need to drink 8 glasses of water each day to ensure that our bodies have all the moisture that they need to function properly. But Jesus tells us that this water is not enough. That we will need something more, we will always be coming back to thirst for this water. And in fact we do.

It is on this feast of Pentecost that Jesus fulfills his promise to fill us with water that never ends, that never dries up, that never leaves us thirsting. However, there are many of us who often feel that we are not filled, we are not satisfied, we are not satiated with the living water of the Holy Spirit. I have often wondered why we can't seem to hold on to this water and keep ourselves filled with it. We don't seem to have the stamina and courage to follow in the line of the Apostles and maintain the courage that they had. We live in the fear that the apostles had when they were gathered in the locked room not knowing what to do now that they were alone and Jesus was no longer coming back to visit them.

You and I are sometimes caught in the place where the disciples were before they had received the Holy Spirit but why? Why should we live our lives in that place when we have been showered with his gifts and he has become part of our souls? Were we not Chrismated and, when the oil of Chrism was put on our bodies did the priest not say the words, "Receive the seal and gift of the Holy Spirit"? So why are we still living in fear? Why do we not have the courage to stand up and profess our beliefs and the truth that we have come to know? We do this probably because the truth is fearful to some people and because they have taught us that what we know as truth is not truth. That right is not right and wrong is not wrong. That there is no black and white, merely shades of grey.

Some of us have been indoctrinated with a belief that because my gift is not your gift, I don't have any gifts. We think that we should all have the same gifts, we should all have the same opportunities and position and incomes and riches. My dad was a football player in high school so now I am expected to be one. My mom was a school teacher so I will be a school teacher. My mother was a maid in a hotel and so I will be a maid in a hotel too. My dad was a rancher and so I am going to be a rancher. But maybe my gift is not athletic, or in education, or maybe I want more than Walmart or The Hyatt.

Each one of us is given something different that we can excel in. Some are good at anything that they do. Sometimes people are great at things to do with people but horrible at academic pursuits. Others are book worms and you can't tear them away from studies. You hear people say of someone, "He is a professional student" speaking of someone who is into study for the sake of study and knowledge. Their thirst for knowledge is never filled. St. Paul was clear to recognize this and he told us specifically that it was OK that we should have different talents. His only charge to us was that, whatever the gift was, that it was to be used for the general good, to the best ability of the person who had the gift. If you are a teacher, teach with all your love and your heart. If you can sing, sing with the voice of an angel, if you are a scientist, work to find that cure for disease and sickness, if you are a taxi driver, focus on getting your passenger to where they need to go as quickly and as efficiently as possible.

Some people love to work in a small setting serving people, others need to be in an office and have limited personal contact. There is something for everyone and there is someone for every position. But all too often, we are put off by this and call it categorizing and judging. We may even hear the terms racism or Affirmative Action used to describe why someone got a job or opportunity that someone else didn't. All this doesn't really matter if we would all stop trying to compete for things that in our world. If we would stop focusing on the haves and the have nots. I remember this even permeated my seminary experience when I was told by some classmates that I would not be good at "afflicting the comfortable and comforting the afflicted." My response drew more distain than I would like to acknowledge. I simply asked the

question, “Why must I inflict affliction on anyone? Why can’t I just love all equally?” My feeling was that there would be plenty of rich people out there that I would cross paths with and it would be through love and support that I would teach them that they have a responsibility to help others. Sure, it would be great if they gave their support to my charity but I would ask them to see a deeper responsibility. One of our biggest supporters gives only a fraction of his income to this monastery but he give a fortune to the American Diabetes Foundation in honor of his wife who died from complications caused by her diabetic condition. Sadly, he saw her suffer until she was gone and he feels that what ever he can do to prevent that pain for others would be his way of taking away his own pain, is this not affliction enough?

The gift of the holy Spirit is poured anew on us today. We commemorate it in a special way by offering the “kneeling prayer” at the beginning of the liturgy. We wear green vestments to honor the first fruits that spring forth upon us after the Passover of our Lord. We honor the life giving waters that bless us and fill us with power and courage and strength. All we need to is accept this flow into our lives. Keep some of it and let the rest pass on to someone else and thus we ensure that our springs do not become stagnant and useless pools of water. Water must flow or it will die, these spiritual gifts must flow or they will die, WE must be flowing in these gifts or WE will die.

I asked earlier, why is it that we do not have the same courage that the Apostles have even though we have the same gifts of of the same Spirit? Maybe it is clearly stated in the fact that we are told that we have no place in the secular world and out life means nothing if our life is Christo-centric. When we acknowledge what and who we are as followers of Christ, when we speak out about what is right and wrong, when we stand up for the rights of those who cannot stand up for themselves. This is when we will have the courage expressed within us. The courage is there, but it will not come out unless we bring it out. It will not flow through us unless we open the dams of hatred and bigotry and political correctness that have closed off those spring. Knock down the dams and allow the Holy Spirit, who today comes anew and with new floods of grace, to cleanse those stagnant pools and flush them out, and then once they are clean again, allow the springs to flow freely and honestly and have the courage, strength, conviction and grace of God flowing within you, making you one again with God and God one again with you.

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Next Sunday is the Feast of All Saints.

Thursday, June 7: Feast of the Body and Blood.

The San Antonio Monastery will soon be closing and moved to the Greater Houston area. Please check future publications for more information as events progress.