

# The Voice



*"Their voice has gone out into all the world;*

*and their proclamation to the ends of the universe."*

Pentecost – May / June 2004

Issue Two

## O Most Holy Trinity Our God, Glory To Thee ! Пресвятая Троице Боже Наш, Слава Тебе !

### Holy Pentecost

#### Troparion (Tone 8)

Blessed art Thou, O Christ our God,  
Who hast revealed the fishermen as  
most wise by sending down upon  
them the Holy Spirit; through them  
thou didst draw the world into Thy  
net. O Lover of Man, Glory to Thee!

#### Kontakion (Tone 8)

When the Most High came down and  
confused the tongues, He divided the  
nations; but when He distributed the  
tongues of fire. He called all to unity.  
Therefore, with one voice, we glorify  
the All-Holy Spirit!

#### Тропарь – глас 8

Благословен еси Христе Боже наш,  
иже премудры ловцы явлей, низпо-  
слав им Духа Святаго, и теми улов-  
лей вселенную, Человеко-любче  
слава Тебе.

#### Кондак – глас 8

Егда снизшед языки слия, разделя-  
ше языки вышний: егда же огнен-  
ная языки раздаяше, в соединение  
вся призва, и согласно славим Все-  
святаго Духа.

### Dear Brothers and Sisters in Christ:

On this glorious day, the altar feast of our parish I cordially greet all of you and pray that God the Father will send down upon us, upon our families and households and upon our parish the Most Holy Spirit – for the Spirit enlightens all; the Spirit warms our hearts; the Spirit fills our souls with joy and peace; the Spirit gives us all that which we need for salvation!

Saint Tikhon of Zadonsk writes: *"The grace of God is the life of our souls. Our soul cannot be alive without the grace of God. For as our body lives by the soul, so our soul lives by the grace of God. Pray, then, always, and sigh unto God that He give you His grace, and that He preserve you in it. We need the grace of God every minute. For this reason, sigh often from the depths of your heart, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence, and take not the Holy Spirit from me."*

Brothers and sisters just as we cannot live without air and water every day of our life, so too, even more so, we cannot live without being touched by the Grace of God every day of our life. Today on the feast of Pentecost the Holy Spirit was sent upon the Apostles and Disciples – upon the young Christian Church – to sanctify all who believe in Christ and to reunite fallen man back to God. Let us pray as the Apostles did and ask God to fill our souls with His Spirit, *"the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who fillest all things"*, so that we, as brothers and sisters in Christ, may always work for, support and nurture peaceful unity within our parish family and within our households, for in that unity we will be blessed with God's peace and love, strengthening, enlightening and upholding us all the days of our life.

My sincerest and warmest greetings of the feast to all !

**Fr. John Vass, Rector**

**On the 50th Day after Pascha, the Holy Church celebrates the Feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit (Holy Pentecost).** When the Day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance (Acts 2:1-4).

In His farewell discourses to His disciples, the Lord told them, I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Comforter, to be with you for ever, even the Spirit of Truth, Whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; you know Him, for He dwells with You, and will be in you.... [The] Comforter, the Holy Spirit, Whom the Father will send in My name. He will teach you all things... (John 14:16-17, 26). These words of the Lord were accomplished on the 50th Day after the Passover (Pascha), for the Seal of the Holy Spirit was seen on the Apostles in the form of fiery tongues, just as, in Holy Chrismation, we receive the Seal of the Holy Spirit in the form of the Holy Chrism.

The people who were present were greatly amazed at the sight, and especially that each one of them, no matter what nationality, heard the Apostles speaking to them in their own language. But others mocking said, "They are filled with new wine" (Acts 2:13).

Then Peter got up and spoke to them: Men of Judea and all who dwell in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and give ear to my words. For these men are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day; but this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel: "And in the last days it shall be. God declares, that I will pour out

My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; yea, and on My menservants and My maidservants in those days I will pour out My Spirit; and they shall prophesy. And I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth beneath, blood, and fire, and vapor of smoke; the sun shall be turned into darkness and the moon into blood, before the day of the Lord comes, the great and manifest day. And it shall be that whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Acts 2:14-21). Peter went on to speak of the Risen Christ and His redemptive acts, reminding them that this Jesus God raised up, and of that...all [of the Apostles were] witnesses (Acts 2:32). He continued: Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit. He has poured out this which you see and hear (Acts 2:33).



Many of those hearing were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the apostles, "Brethren, what shall we do?" And Peter said to them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit..." So those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls (Acts 2:37-41).

A special characteristic of this day is the singing of the Troparion to the Holy Spirit: "O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere present 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!" In addition, seven Kneeling Prayers are read by the Priest during the Vespers which immediately follows the Divine Liturgy of that day, while everyone is on bended knees, this being the first time kneeling is permitted since Holy Pascha. ❖

## The Gift of the Holy Spirit

Martha Elliott

The Orthodox Church is not a church of philosophy or of abstract theorizing about God. It is above all a church of the experience of God and of the desire for union with Him. “The goal of Orthodox spirituality, the blessedness of the Kingdom of Heaven, is not the vision of the essence, but, above all, a participation in the divine life of the Holy Trinity; the deified state of the co-heirs of the divine nature, gods created after the uncreated God, possessing by grace all that the Holy Trinity possesses by nature.”<sup>1</sup> This echoes St. Peter’s promise that we can become “partakers of the divine nature.” (2 Peter 1.4)

For the Orthodox Church the foundation of Christian spirituality is the doctrine of *theosis* – deification – or the unification of man with God. This doctrine was articulated most frequently and fully by St. Athanasius in the context of the struggle against the Arian heresy, but it is also found in Justin Martyr (*Dialogue with Trypho.*) Irenaeus (*Against Heresies.*) Clement of Alexandria (*The Proteptique.*) Basil the Great (*On the Holy Spirit.*) and Gregory of Nyssa (*Catechetical Discourses.*)<sup>2</sup> To quote from Athanasius, “For he (Jesus) became man so that man might become God.” (*On the Incarnation*)<sup>3</sup> And again,

“For he has become man, that he might deify us in himself, and he has been born of a woman, and begotten of a virgin, in order to transfer to himself our erring generation and in order that we may become henceforth a holy race, and ‘partakers of the divine nature,’ as blessed Peter wrote.” (*Letter to Adelphos*)<sup>4</sup>

Orthodox theology recognizes that we cannot participate either in God’s essence or in any of the three divine hypostases. What we can (to pg. 4)

<sup>1</sup> Vladimir Lossky, *The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church* (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 1976) p. 65.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew the Poor, *Orthodox Prayer Life, the Interior Way*, (Crestwood, New York: St. Vladimir’s Seminary Press, 2003) p. 104.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 105.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 105-107.

## Prayers by the Lake (XXIV)

Holy Hierarch Nikolai (Velimorivich)

*You pour Your holy oil into the stars, O Holy Spirit, and out of senseless conflagrations You make vigil lamps before the Glory of Heaven. Pour yourself into my soul also, and out of a passionate conflagration make a vigil lamp before the heavens.*

*You stroll through fields of flowers without being heard, and You sprinkle the flowers with Your grace, so that the blood of the earth may not look through, but the beauty of God. Sprinkle the field of my soul with Your grace also, so that it may not be said that the field of my soul sprouted from the blood of the earth, but that it is adorned with the beauty of God.*

*You mingle with every heap of ashes and pour in life. Pour life into the ashes of my body also, so that I may live and glorify Your works.*

*You tame the fire and wind, and out of demons of fury You make servants of the Most High. Tame my pride and make me a servant of the Most High.*

*You are kind to the animals in the woods. Show kindness to me also, who are animalized by ignorance.*

*You fertilize every seed of life. You hover in every womb. You sit in the egg of a bird’s nest and masterfully form a new miracle of life. Fertilize, I beseech You, the invisible seed of goodness within me also, and keep watch over it until it reaches maturity.*

*O Awesome and Almighty Spirit, by your presence You turn a den of thieves into a haven of Heaven, and a terrifying universe into a temple of God. Descend into me also, I beseech You, and turn a handful of ashes into what You know how to do and can.*

Cited from *A Treasury of Serbian Orthodox Spirituality, Vol.5.* (Grayslake, Ill.: The Free Serbian Orthodox Diocese of the United States of America and Canada.)

participate in is God's energies, His "divine operations, forces proper to and inseparable from God's essence, in which He goes forth from Himself, manifests, communicates, and gives Himself."<sup>5</sup> This doctrine of divine energies was most fully articulated in the fourteenth century by St. Gregory Palamas though it was present in the earlier Greek fathers. St. John Climacus called them "divinities," "uncreated light," or "grace."<sup>6</sup> It is through these divine energies that we can become "partakers of the divine nature." According to the teachings of St. Maximos, "In deification we are by grace (that is to say, in the divine energies) all that God is by nature, save only identity of nature.... We remain creatures while becoming God by grace, as Christ remained God in becoming man by the Incarnation."<sup>7</sup>

It is through the Holy Spirit that the divine energies of God are transmitted to the human soul. "That which is common to the Father and the Son is the divinity which the Holy Spirit communicates to men within the Church, making them "partakers of the divine nature", in conferring the fire of deity, uncreated grace, upon those who become members of the Body of Christ."<sup>8</sup>

The Holy Spirit is God's gift to the Church and is appropriated through the sacraments, first the sacrament of Baptism and Chrismation and then through the Eucharist. In the Orthodox Church in the service of Chrismation, which follows immediately on Baptism, the newly baptized is anointed with chrism and "sealed" with the gift of the Holy Spirit. Through this gift of the Holy Spirit, this gift of grace, the divine energies, are at work in a person from the time of baptism. "Baptismal grace, the presence within us of the Holy Spirit – inalienable and personal to each one of us – is the foundation of all Christian life."<sup>9</sup> The grace of God is also given in the Eucharist, which is why regular reception of the Eucharist from the time of Baptism forward is so

necessary. Alexander Schmemmann, in his volume on the Eucharist, points out that "In almost every ordo of the eucharist that has reached us, the Church prays in the text of the epiclesis that the eucharist will be for those who partake 'for the communion of the Holy Spirit.'"<sup>10</sup>

Nicholas Cabasilis, fourteenth century Byzantine mystical theologian, links the necessity for baptism, chrismation, and eucharistic participation as the essential means for living a "life in Christ" and acquiring the "gifts of the spirit." "Baptism confers being and in short, existence according to Christ. It receives us when we are dead and corrupted and first leads us into life. The anointing with chrism perfects him who has received (new) birth by infusing into him the energy that befits such a life. The Holy Eucharist preserves and continues this life and health, since the Bread of life enables us to preserve that which has been acquired and to continue in life. It is therefore by this Bread that we live and by the chrism that we are moved, once we have received being from the baptismal washing."<sup>11</sup> which have no share in grace...the righteousness of works and the grace of the Spirit, coming together to the same place,... fill the soul in which they are united with the life of the blessed."<sup>12</sup>

*Theosis* or deification is achieved fully only in the age to come. But the goal of Orthodox spirituality is to live in such a way as to come ever closer to the likeness of God while still on this earth. In revelation we learn that man was made in the image and likeness of God, but throughout both the Old and New Testaments we see how that image was tarnished and that likeness obscured by man's fall into a state of sin and death. However, that image can never be fully eradicated even though, by the misuse of freedom, man can turn his face away from God. The overcoming of sin and death was made possible through the incarnation, death, and resurrection of Christ, the "second Adam," thus mak-

<sup>5</sup> Lossky, p. 70.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p.87

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, p.162.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 171.

<sup>10</sup> *The Eucharist, Sacrament of the Kingdom* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1988.), p. 226.

<sup>11</sup> *The Life in Christ* (Crestwood, N.Y.: St. Vladimir's Seminary Press, 1974) pp. 49-50.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

ing the restoration of the image and likeness of God in humans possible. This restoration is effected through the synergistic action of man's will and God's grace. The Eastern Christian tradition is united on the necessity of this synergy. To quote St. Gregory of Nyssa: "As the grace of God cannot descend upon souls which flee from their salvation, so the power of human virtue is not of itself sufficient to raise to perfection souls which have no share in grace...the righteousness of works and the grace of the Spirit, coming together to the same place, fill the soul in which they are united with the life of the blessed."<sup>13</sup>

Grace is a freely given gift of God, bestowed on mankind through the gift of the Holy Spirit. But there are things that man must do to increase his ability to appropriate God's grace. In the New Testament the disciples are told to pray and fast, as Jesus himself prayed and fasted. Jesus also told his disciples to care for the poor and he showed them how. Throughout the history of the Orthodox Church the spiritual disciplines of prayer, fasting and alms giving have been emphasized and adhered to as foundational for the Christian life. However, these ascetic disciplines are never to be viewed as ends in themselves. Rather, they are an essential means of preparation of the soul and body for the reception of God's grace. Drawing from the Parable of the Sower, the ascetic disciplines have been likened to the clearing and tilling of the soil of the heart so that the seeds of the word of God can take root and flourish.<sup>14</sup>

Matthew the Poor, a contemporary monk of the Egyptian desert, emphasizes the intrinsic link between prayer and fasting. "Fasting by itself is not a virtue. It is nothing at all. Without prayer, it becomes a bodily punishment that induces spiritual aridity and bad temper. The same is true of prayer; without fasting it loses its power along with its fruits.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 197.

<sup>14</sup> St. Ignatius Brianchaninov, *The Arena, An Offering to Contemporary Monasticism*, (Jordanville, N.Y.: Holy Trinity Monastery, 1997) pp. 136-139.

We may liken fasting to a burning coal and prayer to frankincense. Neither has value without the other, but together, the sweet savor of their incense fills the air. Fasting calms the impulses of the flesh and quenches the fire of passion; it curbs the prattling of the tongue. Thus, it substantially prepares us for the work of prayer and the release of the spirit from slavery to the flesh. In this way, fasting allows the spirit to contemplate the truths of eternity and the age to come".<sup>15</sup>

St. Seraphim of Sarov, nineteenth century Russian *starets* (elder) echoes this view of ascetic struggle. "Prayer, fasting, vigils, and all other Christian practices,... although wholly good in themselves, certainly do not in themselves constitute the Christian life; they are but the indispensable means for the attainment of that end. For the true end of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit. As for fasts, vigils, prayers, alms, and other works done in the name of Christ – these are the means whereby we acquire the Holy Spirit..."<sup>16</sup> ❖



### *Food for Thought... For our Teens*

submitted by Paul Havrilko

#### *Making Choices*

"You will recognize the Spirit" said Jesus," for He lives inside you and stays there" John 14:17

As I left the main entrance to our school I noticed friends and classmates coming and going from the main building. It's already four o'clock I thought to myself and all the other students were being picked up. Where is Mom? I need to get to my piano lessons, stop by the library to pick up "Anne Frank" and get home to finish my homework! All Mom talks about is how important it is to be on time and here she is late. I have to get my stuff done. When will I have the time?

Finally, we're home. I can get my homework done. As I enter the house, Dad calls out " how did your test preparation class go today? Are you

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<sup>15</sup> Matthew the Poor, p. 229.

<sup>16</sup> Lossky, p. 196-197.

ready for Tuesday?" I answer, "I don't know?" It's seven thirty, I'm tired, and he always asks about those tests. Dad rolls his eyes and begins his story about how he was working at the age of 11. I turn and run upstairs just as he starts into his high school days. He calls out, "Amy left a message for you to call her as soon as possible."

Amy is a good friend of mine. She and I are studying to take the AP history test for college credit. We anguish over the test. Our parents, though, insist this is a good thing to do. You will get college credit! College credit! I can't even decide on my courses for next year in high school let alone look at a college major. "Hurry up!" Mom chimes in. The thought of Mom being late fades in and out of my mind. I would have had more time to talk to Amy had Mom been on time. "Make your call and make it short."

Good news. Amy wants me to go with her to a party next week. Mom wants to know if Jenny and Claire are going too. These are two of my oldest friends and we have hung out for years. I don't know what to tell my parents. Amy is a different friend. She hangs out with different people. Most of them are older than us. So I answer, "probably." Besides how do I know that Jenny and Claire are not invited? My parents always encouraged me to make new friends and these are the coolest friends I know.

Early on, my parents stressed that I should become a leader who serves as a good example for others to follow. They inspired me to make sure I became a decent human being and taught me to set goals and to do my best. There is where the problem arises. By trying to do my best, I try to be independent and to be responsible. I want to make decisions for myself, but so many things need deciding. How do I know I made the best choice or did the right things? I mean I have to decide who my friends are, where to go to college, how to act, what is good and what is bad? It never ends and it's very confusing. I want to take charge and yet I don't know if I can make the right choices. Just look in the news, shootings at local schools, babies found abandoned, and famous people caught in bad situations. How can I know I made the right choices?

What a responsibility? Not knowing where to turn, I decided to talk to an expert. My Grandma. She has seen so much and understands so many things. Every Summer I spend hours and days with her talking about how it was when she grew up. The Depression, the wars, and the scandals all existed then. The only difference she sees between today and yesterday is the lack of time everyone has for one another and the transient nature of society. Many families don't have roots in the neighborhoods where they live. Other than that, many of the decisions I have to face were around when she was a teenager. So, I called Grandma and explained how I felt about these tough choices. She listened and waited until I paused running out of breath from my rolling comments and sentences. She had a very simple answer, "you will know the right choice when you feel it." For the first time in my life, I had no idea what she was talking about. "You will know it when you feel it", isn't exactly what I was expecting. I wanted her to help me make my decisions and not tell Mom or Dad about her help. I was a little concerned that Grandma hadn't taken all of her medicine.

So I asked Grandma what she meant. She told me that one of the most important things to ever happen in my life was to become baptized Orthodox. She quoted, "Much is required from those to whom much is given, for their responsibility is greater." Now I really struggled to understand. Grandma, you have to help me. She told me that the gift I was given at baptism is the gift of the Holy Spirit and that it stays with me and goes with me everywhere. She also said that no matter what you do, the Holy Spirit is there to guide us, there to help us make good choices, and there to help us feel our choices. If it doesn't feel right, it probably isn't right.

From that time on, I knew I had help. I focused on being the best that I could be in everything I did and sometimes I failed. But, I never felt bad about it. Oh by the way, the test I took for college credit in AP history, I didn't get the credit. I did give it a good try. And the party with Amy, I decided not to go. Instead, Jenny, Claire, and I went to the movies to see Shrek II. It was cool.

**Lisa, Teenager and Choice Maker**

## Fasting and Kneeling

submitted by Reader Michael Bishop

Our Lord told us, "When you fast," not "if you fast." Therefore, it is presumed that every Christian will fast. The Church has given us guidelines for fasting. **From the Ortho-Theo list, we learn:** "From the very earliest days, the people of God knew that they were of flesh and spirit. In this world, the flesh dominates us and the spirit is suppressed as the result of the Fall of Man. When we "fast," we refuse to cater to the body and enhance the spirit. Through fasting, we are telling our bodies that they are not the most important part of our existence--in this life they are passing away. By taking animal products out of our diet, we calm the body and its passions, but there is a void, how do we fill this? The spirit must be filled with those spiritual things which bring it to God. So, while fasting we read the scriptures, read spiritual books, **go to confession, pray,** and perform acts of Christ. This means visiting the sick and those in prison, **giving to the poor and needy** and performing other acts of kindness and goodness."

**Fr. Timothy Sawchak of Ss Peter and Paul OCA Church in Ohio tells us:** "Fasting involves prayer, repentance, almsgiving, sacrifice, and effort. Fasting means we eat less and pray more. If we don't eat meat, yet eat as much as we normally do, we are not fasting. If we don't eat meat, and don't add anything to our daily rule of prayer, we are not fasting. If we don't eat meat, but disregard the rest of the dietary guidelines concerning fasting, we are not fasting. (What's the purpose of having Cheesefare Sunday, if we don't give up dairy products during Lent?) (What's the purpose of having Meatfare Sunday, if we don't give up Meat for **all** of Great Lent?)"

We are about to enter the Apostles' Fast. It is called this because it ends on the feast of Saints Peter and Paul. This was the original fasting period of the Church and initially it started on the day after Pentecost Sunday but in time the Church decided to make the whole week of Pentecost a fast-free week.

**Coptic Pope Shenouda says:** "When the Bridegroom shall be taken from them....then they shall fast." (Matthew 9:15) The Apostles' Fast is the oldest fast and the first one kept by the Christian Church. During the Apostles' Fast, the Holy Spirit spoke to them, "As they ministered to the Lord and **fasted**, the Holy Spirit said separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them. And when they fasted and prayed and laid their hands on them, they sent them away." (Acts 13:2 3)... The apostles truly established the church and with their fast we contemplate the glory of God, their faith, and hardships in which they overcame."

In addition to the fast which starts a week later, the first time that we kneel is at Vespers after the Liturgy on Pentecost Sunday when the deacon (or priest) invites us, "On bended knees, again and again in peace let us pray to the Lord." Nobody seems to know when this practice started, but Fr. Michael Reagan thinks that "From its place in the Pentecostarion, it dates back a long while (to 400-500 A.D.). Hazarding a guess, once upon a time a priest or bishop thought it was a good idea to demonstratively note that kneeling was allowed again, wrote or amalgamated some earlier prayers, and the idea caught on."

In the Serbian tradition, according to Matushka Lindsay Zobenica, the Serbs will not kneel unless there is something for them to kneel on and thus they make rings out of grass and kneel on them. Many Orthodox churches are decorated with green branches on this day. The Slavic festivals associated with spring and summer and the sowing of crops coincided more or less with the Remembrance of the Dead, Pentecost and Holy Trinity. In time much of the old heathenish belief system yielded to Christianity and thus became less harmful. In consequence new customs derived from the old took form and persist among Eastern Slavs to this day.

Green Week begins on the Thursday before Pentecost. On this day, the girls in the village go into the fields to gather branches and flowers for weaving wreaths in memory of all the saints. The custom varies from place to place but represents

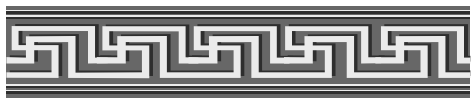
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the survival of the ancient practice of wearing wreaths in honor of the gods. Wreaths, then as now, represent youth and beauty as well as serving as protection against evil.

Green Saturday (Zelena Subota) is the Saturday of Remembrance of the Dead immediately preceding Pentecost Sunday. On this day the faithful visit and decorate the graves of their ancestors and pray for the repose of their souls and their release from their sins. In memory of the dead, flowers, wreaths and green branches, all representing life and the liberation from death (resurrection) are used not only at the grave sites but also to decorate the homes and churches.

This is the origin of our custom of decorating the churches on Pentecost with green branches. Thus, when we decorate our churches on Pentecost, Trinity Sunday or Green Sunday with green branches of trees and shrubs, we acknowledge the beliefs and customs of the Slavs who infused into the religion of Byzantium new meanings to edify and enlighten our minds and to beautify our rites. Green is the color of spring and summer, the color of life, and life is an attribute of the Holy Spirit, "the Lord and giver of Life" who animates us all.

According to Saints Peter and Paul Orthodox Church in Manchester NH: "The green signifies life. The custom is founded upon readings in Lev. 23:10-17 and Nun 28:16. The trees and flowers are tokens of the renewal of nature in the spring, typifying also the renewal of people through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit." ❖



### ***The Fast of the Apostles: On being sent into the world***

The Apostles' Fast is one that was actually engaged in by the disciples of Christ following the Descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Having rejoiced throughout the fifty days following Pascha, the Resurrection of our Lord, God and Savior, Jesus Christ, the Apostles began to prepare

for their departure from Jerusalem to carry Christ's message to the far corners of the world.

As part of their preparation, they began a fast with prayer to ask God to strengthen their resolve and to be with them in their missionary undertakings. It is this fast that we ourselves participate in when we observe the Apostles' Fast. But we do this not only because we honor the Apostles and their sacrifice. We do this by way of preparing ourselves to be sent as missionaries into our world to reflect and radiate Christ to those around us.

Somewhere along the line, we seem to have disconnected ourselves from the Apostles. We've placed them on a very high plane so that we may admire them and their spirituality while, at the same time, effectively preventing ourselves from ever having anything to do with it as far as our own personal lives are concerned.

When Christ asked his sleeping disciples in the Garden of Gethsemane why they could not watch and pray with Him for one hour, He was actually giving all of us some real practical advice on how much time we should be spending in prayer at a minimum. Yet, today we think that His words were only for His apostles and disciples, for those who made a radical commitment to follow Him until the end of their days. THAT has nothing to do with us! And how wrong we are!

The apostles were people like we are. St Peter was actually so filled with a sense of his own sinfulness that he felt it was inappropriate for him to even speak with Jesus at their first meeting. And it was he who denied Christ three times. Later, through the power of the Holy Spirit, it was into this same Peter's shadow that sick people would try and throw themselves in the hope of receiving healing!

It was St Paul, the Apostle of the Gentiles, who called himself the "least of the disciples." He considered himself to be a full member of the Apostolic group, notwithstanding that he did not see Christ before His Crucifixion and Resurrection. St Paul did "see Christ." He saw Him in



His heavenly glory. Paul's apostolic zeal was second to none and he was determined to make the whole world be as he was, that is, see with the eyes of the faith he had. As the fulfillment of the Law and the Prophets, Christ chose his 12 apostles to represent the New Israel or Church of the New Covenant. That St Paul would be the 13th apostle hearkens to the role that the two sons of Joseph had among the tribes of Old Israel.

In her liturgy, the Church sometimes numbers the two assistants of Peter and Paul among the ranks of the Apostles, the two Evangelists, Mark and Luke. It was Mark in whose parents' house the Mystical (Last) Supper was held. It was Mark who was the mysterious young boy in the Garden at the time of Christ's arrest who escaped naked from the soldiers. Luke was a Syrian, former pagan doctor, whose great secular education put him right in Paul's league. It was appropriate for the Apostle to the Gentiles to have a Gentile assistant!

In addition, Christ chose 70 disciples, reflecting the choice of 70 judges by Moses who helped him govern Israel. These 70 disciples went out, two by two, as did the Apostles, and preached, prayed, healed and witnessed.

Added to this Apostolic Choir were the women who assisted Christ throughout his earthly sojourn. St Mary Magdalene was the most famous "Equal to the Apostles." There is simply no evidence to confirm that she was the "sinful woman" of the New Testament. A sister of Lazarus and Martha of Bethany, Mary Magdalene was a woman of means who used her resources to help the spread of the Christian message. She was even invited by the Emperor of Rome, Tiberius himself, to dine with him! It was during that dinner that Mary Magdalene tried to convert him and then occurred the famous miracle of the egg. The Emperor stopped her when she was talking about the Resurrection of Christ. He told her that there was no way that Someone who had suffered so much on the Cross could rise from the dead. It was as impossible as an egg turning red! At that, Mary Magdalene

lifted up an egg and it turned red in her hands, a kind of ancestor to the Pascha Egg, the symbol of Christ's Crucifixion and Resurrection!

Throughout the centuries since, others have received the title "Equal to the Apostles," including Sts. Vladimir and Olga for their apostolic labors to bring others to Christ.

So no one has missed the boat, so to speak, on becoming an Apostle. We are all called to be such, as a matter of fact. We may not be called to witness to Christ as the original Apostles did. We may not be called to die for Christ as they and others did. But let us remember that the root of the word "martyr" in Greek essentially just means "witness." For the ancient Greeks, to die for one's beliefs was considered a "proof" as to their validity, especially as experienced internally by the martyr.

The Romans were not, primarily, interested in killing the Apostles and other Christians. What they wanted to do is have them deny their beliefs. That was where their sense of victory lay. To this end, the refined tortures they used on the Christians were designed to get them to deny Christ and affirm the gods and social structure of the Roman Empire. But Christians would rather suffer and die than deny Christ. The Apostles did great work to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ and His Church, as did their successors, the Bishops. This is why St Nicholas is commemorated on Thursdays along with the Apostles for he represents the episcopate of all ages.

The Apostles' Fast is therefore something which should be undertaken with an apostolic vision on our part. When Christ told His disciples to go and preach to all nations, He had us in mind as well. When He set the standards of "feeding the hungry, clothing the naked" and others, He was also using these in a spiritual sense.

How many are around us who thirst for spirituality? How many who hunger for the Word of God? What about those in the prison of their own sinfulness? Or who are naked, that is, unclothed by the Grace of the Holy Spirit? These

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are all apostolic opportunities that are presented to us by our Lord Himself. As St Peter said, our battle is with principalities and dominions etc. the representatives of the Evil One. And they are something that can only be cast out with prayer and fasting. ❖

From the Ukrainian Orthodox Church  
Dr. Alexander Roman

<http://www.unicorne.org/ORTHODOXY/default.htm>

#### The Source of the Spiritual Life

*One must always remember that success in any aspect of the spiritual life is the fruit of the grace of God. Spiritual life comes entirely from His most Holy Spirit. We have our own spirit but it is void of power. It begins to gain strength only when the grace of God flows into it.*

Bishop Theophan the Recluse

## On Holy Confession and Holy Communion

By Bishop Kallistos (Ware)

In the Epistle (1 John 4:7-11) and the Gospel (Luke 6:31-36) that are read in honor of St. John of Kronstadt, we notice the emphasis upon love. Our Holy Father St. John of Kronstadt, Wonderworker of all Russia, is an example to us of loving compassion, of pastoral love. In the Gospel in particular, the Lord emphasizes that our love should not simply be towards the people that we find congenial, not just towards those who show love towards us. It is to be far wider, we are to love our enemies, we are to love all our fellow humans, our love is to be without limits.

It is very clear that when St. John in his Epistle and our Savior in the Gospel speak about love they do not just mean something sentimental, something emotional, they mean something far more profound. The kind of love that they envisage, a universal all-embracing love, a love without limits, can only be a result of prayer, of ascetic effort. Such love is something for which we must struggle and suffer. Such love cannot be

based just upon our emotional feelings, it has got to have a deeper basis.

What is this deeper basis? It is precisely the service that we are celebrating together now, the service of the Holy Eucharist, which is indeed a sacrament of mutual love. Our love has its foundation and inspiration in the Divine Liturgy. If we are to show more vividly the kind of love of which the apostle John and our Lord speak, that can only come first and foremost through a deeper experience of Holy Communion, through frequent Communion received after profound and searching preparation.

St. John of Kronstadt was above all a Eucharistic Priest. He put The Holy Liturgy at the center of his life, and this was the source that enabled him to show such a dynamic and universal love. Our receiving of Holy Communion, while it is with the blessing of our spiritual father to be frequent, should never be mechanical or automatic. We are to prepare. And how should we do it? **We are to prepare above all through the use of the sacrament of Confession.**

Now, there are as we know different disciplines. Some have been brought up to go to confession before every Communion, others have a blessing from their spiritual father to go more frequently to Communion without confession every time. But undoubtedly in our Eucharistic experience the sacrament of healing which we call Confession or the sacrament of repentance plays a central part.

Why do we need to go to confession? Is it not enough to confess our sins with sincerity in our private prayers each evening, will not God forgive us from the very moment that we confess our sins? Yes, as soon as we turn to God in true repentance He forgives us. God is always more ready to forgive than we to repent. Even the slightest turning of our heart will be blessed by God. Why then are we taught also to go to the sacrament of confession? I can think of three reasons certainly, perhaps you can think of more.

First of all there are no private sins, all sins affect our brothers and sisters in Christ. All of our sins, however secret, have an effect on the community. If I feel in my heart anger towards someone else, even if I do not show it by word or action, that evil disposition in my heart has a destructive effect on others around. Every sin is a sin against the community, every sin however secret is a stumbling block for others and makes it harder for them to serve Christ.

In the early Church confession was public. After the fourth century, with the growth of the Christian community, that gave scandal and so confession assumed its present form, as an opening of the heart before the priest alone, under conditions of secrecy. But let us remember that during confession the priest is there, among other things, as the representative of the community, of the people. The fact that we confess not just to God, but in the presence of a fellow man, shows that we acknowledge the communal social dimension of all our sins. In confessing in his presence we are also asking forgiveness from the community. I heard a story once told about St. John Maximovitch of Shanghai and San Francisco. I have also heard it told of others, but the same thing can happen more than once.

Once before the Divine Liturgy he was hearing the confession of a man, and the man said: "Yes I know that what I have done is a sin, I ask God's forgiveness, but my heart is like a stone, I do not feel any sorrow for my sin, it is all just in my brain." So St. John said to him: "Go out into the center of the church in front of the people and make a prostration before them and then come back to me." As the man did this and knelt to ask forgiveness from the people before him, something broke inside his heart and it came alive again. Suddenly he felt real compunction for what he had done. He said "now it is different," and the Archbishop gave him forgiveness.

That was the moment of turning for him because he acknowledged that his sin was a sin against the community and he asked their forgiveness. So in our confession let us first of all recall that dimension. We are also asking for forgiveness of

our brothers and sisters for what we have done. That is one reason to go to confession, because sin is social.

There is a second reason. The spoken word, the uttered word has great force. This applies in two ways. First of all we listen to the spoken word of the priest, the council that he gives, and it may be that what he says if written down and put in a book would not seem so striking. It may be that it wouldn't seem so remarkable.

But in confession the priest is praying and we are praying for the light of the Holy Spirit, and he is addressing those words under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to each one of us, to each penitent personally. The words which looked at in the abstract might seem obvious, common place, can prove words of fire when we realize that they are being said to me personally here and now under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

I can remember at the Russian convent in London many years ago there was a priest, Fr. John, who didn't much like hearing confessions, he didn't much like giving sermons either. He was a person of few words and very humble, and didn't feel he really had the authority to offer council in confession, but he was blessed by the bishop to hear confessions so he did so. On one occasion a woman was telling him at immense length of her quarrels with her husband: "I said this and he said this and I told him he was wrong and told him this" and so it went on "and I told him this and this." When she had finally stopped all Fr. John did was to turn to her and say "And did it help?" and then he gave her absolution.

That came as a sudden revelation to her, the futility of the endless arguments she had with her husband, of her endless desire to prove that she was right and that he was wrong. Suddenly she saw that there was no point to all this, it was quite simply unnecessary and she stopped from that moment.

So the uttered word can have great power and that applies also to what you or I utter when we make our confession. Yes we can confess our

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sins secretly in our evening prayers and we should do so, but when we come before the holy icons in church, when we have listened to the prayers and speak in the presence of the priest, when we have to say these things aloud, often then it becomes powerful, immediate, personally significant in a way it was not before.

The uttered word has great force and we find ourselves in confession, by God's grace, saying things that we never said in our private prayers. Suddenly we are able to understand more deeply and to express it more openly. Therein lies much of the grace of confession. The desert fathers say that a thought which is concealed has great power over us, but if we can find a way to bring it into the open and to speak of it, it loses its power. That is also what the modern psychiatrists tell us, but the desert fathers said it first! So, the uttered word that we bring in confession can have a sacramental force and a healing grace which will surprise us.

But then there is a third thing, not just what the priest does when he offers advice, not just what we do when we try to speak the truth in Christ. There is also what Christ does. Confession is a mystery of the Church that confers sacramental grace, there is power within it, Divine power. When the priest lays his hand upon our head in Confession, it is Christ who lays his hand upon us, Christ who forgives and that is certainly the deepest and most profound reason why we should go to Confession. When such grace and such healing is offered to us, who among us dare refuse to accept such an opportunity.

*Bishop Kallistos Ware is Spalding Lecturer of Eastern Orthodox Studies at the University of Oxford. The author of many books and translations, he is perhaps best known for The Orthodox Church, the most recent revision of which was published by Penguin Books in 1993, and The Orthodox Way, recently issued in a revised edition by St. Vladimir's Seminary Press.*

From the September 1998 issue of *In Communion*, quarterly journal of the Orthodox Peace Fellowship

**If we approach the Chalice frequently, then we must prepare frequently. And if we prepare frequently, then we include Confession as that integral part of our preparation.**

*Let us remind ourselves that pious preparation to receive the Holy Body and Blood of our Lord and God Jesus Christ includes:*

- ❖ **Attending evening Divine Services on the eve of our communion;**
- ❖ **Frequent Confession**
- ❖ **Fasting from all drink and food (and smoking!) from midnight of the previous night;**
- ❖ **Reading the Canon of Preparation to receive the Divine Mysteries the night before and then the Preparatory Prayers Before Communion in the morning before coming to church. This canon and the prayers are found in your prayer book. Read these prayers in the morning before Divine Services, not the newspaper or your emails.**
- ❖ **Reading the Prayers of Thanksgiving after receiving Holy Communion. These are also found in your prayer book.**

### *In Appreciation...*

Special thanks are offered to Reader Michael Bishop, Martha Elliot and Paul Havrilko for their contributing articles to this edition of *The Voice*.

*Would you like to join The Voice Editing Committee... would you like to write articles... would you like to contribute to cover the printing costs...??? Please contact Fr. John*

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