

## On Pentecost - St. Gregory Palamas

### Homily Twenty-Four

On how the Holy Spirit was manifested and shared out at Pentecost

Also about Repentance

1. A SHORT while ago, with the strong eyes of faith, we beheld Christ ascending, no less clearly than those accounted worthy to be eye-witnesses, nor are we less favoured than they. "Blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed", says the Lord (John 20:29), referring to those who have found assurance through hearing, and see by faith. Recently we saw Christ lifted up from the ground bodily (Acts 1:9). Now, through the Holy Spirit sent by Him to His disciples, we see how far Christ ascended and to what dignity He carried up the nature He assumed from us. Clearly He went up as high as the place from which the Spirit sent by Him descended. He Who spoke through the Prophet Joel showed us whence the Spirit comes, saying, "I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh" (Joel 2:28), and to Him David addressed the words, "Thou sendest forth thy spirit, they are created: and thou renewest the face of the earth" (Ps. 104:30). It follows that at His Ascension Christ went up to the Father on high, as far as His Fatherly bosom, from which comes the Spirit. Having been shown, even in His human form, to share the Father's glory, Christ now sent forth the Spirit Who comes from the Father and is sent by Him from heaven. But when we hear that the Spirit was sent by the Father and the Son, this does not mean that the Spirit has no part in their greatness, for He is not just sent, but also Himself sends and consents to be sent.

2. This is clearly shown by Christ's words spoken through the Prophet, "Mine hand hath laid the foundation of the earth and stretched out the heavens, and now the Lord God, and His Spirit, hath sent me" (cf. Isa. 48:13-16). Again, speaking through the same Prophet He says, "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me; because the Lord hath anointed me to preach good tidings unto the meek" (Isa. 61:1). The Holy Spirit is not just sent, but Himself sends the Son, Who is sent by the Father. He is therefore shown to be the same as the Father and the Son in nature, power, operation and honour. By the good pleasure of the Father and the cooperation of the Holy Spirit, the only begotten Son of God, on account of the boundless ocean of divine love for mankind, bowed down the heavens and came down (Ps. 18:9). He appeared on earth after our fashion, lived among us, and did and taught great, wonderful and sublime things truly worthy of God, which led those who obeyed Him towards deification and salvation.

3. After willingly suffering for our salvation, being buried, and rising on the third day, He ascended into heaven and sat down on the right hand of the Father, whence He co-operated in the descent of the divine Spirit upon His disciples by sending down together with the Father the power from on high, as Both had promised (cf. Luke 24:49). Having sat down in the heavens, He seems to call to us from there, "If anyone wants to approach this glory, become a partaker of the kingdom of heaven, be called a son of God and find eternal life, inexpressible honor, pure joy and never-ending riches, let him heed My commandments and imitate as far as he can My own way of life. Let him follow My actions and teachings when I came to the world in the flesh to establish saving laws and offer Myself as a pattern." Truly the Saviour confirmed the Gospel teaching by His deeds and miracles, and fulfilled it through His Sufferings. He proved how beneficial it

was for salvation by His Resurrection from the dead, His Ascension into heaven, and now by the descent of the divine Spirit upon His disciples, the event we celebrate today. After rising from the dead and appearing to His disciples, He said as He was taken up into heaven, "Behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). "For ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Spirit is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judaea, and unto the uttermost part of the earth" (cf. Acts 1:8).

4. When the fiftieth day after the Resurrection had come, the day we now commemorate, all the disciples were gathered with one accord in the upper room, each having also gathered together his thoughts (for they were devoting themselves intently to prayer and hymns to God). "And suddenly", says Luke the Evangelist, "there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the house where 'they were sitting' (Acts 2:1-11). This is the sound which the Prophetess Hannah foretold when she received the promise concerning Samuel: "The Lord went up to heaven and thundered; and he shall give strength and exalt the horn of his anointed" (cf. 1Sam. 2: 10 Lxx). Elias' vision also forewarned of this sound: "Behold the voice of a light breeze, and in it was the Lord" (cf. 1Kgs.19:12 Lxx). This "voice of a light breeze" is the sound of breath. You might also find a reference to it in Christ's Gospel. According to John the Theologian and Evangelist, "In the last day, that great day of the feast", that is to say Pentecost, "Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink... This spake he of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (John 7:37-39). Again, after His Resurrection He breathed on His disciples and said, "Receive ye the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22).

5. That cry of Christ prefigured this sound, and His breathing upon the disciples foretold the breath, which is now poured down abundantly from above and resounds with a great voice heard far and wide, summoning everything under heaven, pouring grace over all who approach with faith and filling them with it. It is forceful in that it is all-conquering, storms the ramparts of evil, and destroys all the enemy's cities and strongholds. It brings low the proud and lifts up the humble in heart, binds what should not have been loosed, breaks the bonds of sins and undoes what is held fast. It filled the house where they were sitting, making it a spiritual font, and accomplishing the promise which the Saviour made them when He ascended, saying, "For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:5). Even the name which He gave them proved to be true, for through this noise from heaven the Apostles actually became sons of Thunder (cf. Mark 3:17). "And there appeared unto them", it says, "cloven tongues like as of fire, and it 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 2:3-4).

6. Those miracles accomplished by the Lord in the flesh, which bore witness that He was God's only-begotten Son in His own Person, united with us in the last days, came to an end. On the other hand, those wonders began which proclaimed the Holy Spirit as a divine Person in His own right, that we might come to know and contemplate the great and venerable mystery of the Holy Trinity. The Holy Spirit had been active before: it was He Who spoke through the prophets and proclaimed things to come. Later He worked through the disciples to drive out demons and heal diseases. But now He was

manifested to all in His own Person through the tongues of fire, and by sitting enthroned as Lord upon each of Christ's disciples, He made them instruments of His power.

7. Why did He appear in the form of tongues? It was to demonstrate that He shared the same nature as the Word of God, for there is no relationship closer than that between word and tongue. It was also because of teaching, since teaching Christ's Gospel needs a tongue full of grace. But why fiery tongues? Not just because the Spirit is consubstantial with the Father and the Son - and our God is fire (cf. Heb. 12:29), a fire consuming wickedness - but also because of the twofold energy of the Apostles' preaching, which can bring both benefit and punishment. As it is the property of fire to illuminate and burn, so Christ's teaching enlightens those who obey but finally hands over the disobedient to eternal fire and punishment. The text says, "tongues like fire" not "tongues of fire", that no one might imagine it was ordinary physical fire, but that we might understand the manifestation of the Spirit using fire as an example. Why did the tongues appear to be divided among them? Because the Spirit is given by measure by the Father to all except Christ (John 3:34), Who Himself came from above. He, even in the flesh, possessed the fullness of divine power and energy, whereas the grace of the Holy Spirit was only partially, not fully, contained within anyone else. Each one obtained different gifts, lest anyone should suppose the grace given to the saints by the Holy Spirit was theirs by nature.

8. The fact that the divine Spirit sat upon them is proof not just of His lordly dignity, but of His unity. He sat, it says, "upon each of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:3-4). For although divided in His various powers and energies, in each of His works the Holy Spirit is wholly present and active, undividedly divided, partaken of while remaining complete, like the sun's ray. They spoke with other tongues, other languages, to people from every nation, as the Spirit gave them utterance. They became instruments of the divine Spirit, inspired and motivated according to His will and power. Anything taken hold of by somebody outside itself, sharing in the energy but not the essence of the one acting through it, is his instrument. As David declared through the Holy Spirit, "My tongue is the pen of a ready writer" (Ps. 45:1). The pen is the writer's instrument, sharing in the energy, though obviously not the essence, of the writer, and inscribing whatever he wishes and is able to write.

9. In what sense is the Holy Spirit the promise of the Father? He foretold Him through His prophets, saying through Ezekiel, "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will put my spirit within you" (cf. Ezek. 36:26-27). Through Joel He proclaims, "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that I will pour out my spirit upon all flesh" (cf. Joel 2:28). Longing for the Holy Spirit, Moses cried out in anticipation, "Would God that all the Lord's people were prophets, and that the Lord would put his spirit upon them" (Num. 11:29). As the gracious will of the Father and His promise are one and the same as the Son's, Christ told those who believed in Him, "Whosoever drinketh of the water that I shall give him, it shall be to him a well of water springing up into everlasting life" (cf. John 4:14), and, "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water" (John 7:38). By way of explanation, the Evangelist says, "This spake He of the Spirit, which they that believe on him should receive" (John 7:39). As He approached His saving Passion He told His disciples, "If ye love me, keep my commandments. And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John

14:15-17). And again, "These things have I spoken unto you, being yet present with you. But the Comforter, which is the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he shall teach you all things" (John 14:25-26). And yet again, "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26), and "he will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13).

10. The promise was now fulfilled and the Holy Spirit, given and sent by both the Father and the Son, descended. He shone round about the holy disciples and with divine power kindled them all like lamps or, rather, He revealed them as heavenly lights set above the whole world, who had the word of eternal life, and through them He illuminated all the earth. If from one burning lamp someone lights another, then another from that one, and so on in succession, he has light continuously. In the same way, through the Apostles ordaining their successors, and these successors ordaining others, and so on, the grace of the Holy Spirit, is handed down through all generations and enlightens all who obey their spiritual shepherds and teachers.

11. Each hierarch in his turn comes to give the city this grace and gift of God and the enlightenment of the divine Spirit through the Gospel. Those who reject any of them, as can happen, interrupt God's grace, break the divine succession, separate themselves from God and deliver themselves up to sinful rebellions and all kinds of disasters, as you are obviously aware from recent experience. If; however, now that you have returned to the shepherd of your souls appointed by God, you obey my counsels for salvation, you will really and truly celebrate this annual commemoration of the Coming of the divine Spirit, Who of His unimaginable love descended for our salvation, just as the only-begotten Son of God, because of this same love and for the same purpose, bowed the heavens, came down and assumed our flesh.

12. Christ had ascended bodily into heaven, so if He had not sent His Holy Spirit to accompany and strengthen His disciples and their successors in following generations who taught the Gospel of grace, He would not have been preached to all nations, nor would the proclamation have been passed down to us. That is why the Lord, in His all-surpassing love for mankind, showed at Pentecost that His disciples were partakers, fathers and ministers of everlasting light and life, who bring us to new birth for eternal life and make those who are worthy children of the Light and fathers of enlightenment. Thus, He Himself is with us unto the end of the world, as was promised through the Spirit (Matt. 28:20). For He is One with the Father and the Spirit, not according to hypostasis, but in His divinity, and God is One in Three, in one tri-hypostatic and almighty divinity. The Holy Spirit always existed and was with the Son in the Father. How could the Father and divine Mind be without beginning if the Son and Word were not also without beginning? How could there be a pre-eternal Word without there also being a pre-eternal Spirit? Thus the Holy Spirit ever was and is and will be, co-Creator with the Father and the Son, together with them renewing that which has suffered corruption, and sustaining the things that endure. He is everywhere present and fills, directs and oversees everything. "Whither shall I go from thy spirit", says the Psalmist to God, "Or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" (Ps. 139:7).

13. He is 'not just everywhere, but also above all, not just in every age and time, but before them all. And, according to the promise, the Holy Spirit will not just be with us until the end of the age, but rather will stay with those who are worthy in the age to

come, making them immortal and filling their bodies as well with eternal glory, as the Lord indicated by telling His disciples, "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever" (John 14:16). "It is sown", says the Apostle (meaning buried and committed to the earth), "a dead natural body", that is to, say, an ordinary created body with a created soul, stable and capable of movement. "It is raised" (that is, comes back to life), "a spiritual body" (cf. 1Cor. 15:44), which means a supernatural body, framed and ordered by the Holy Spirit, and clothed in immortality, glory and incorruption by the Spirit's power (cf. 1Cor. 15:53). "The first man, Adam", he says, "was made a living soul; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit. The first man is of the earth, earthy; the second man is the Lord from heaven. As is the earthy, such are they also that are earthy: and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly" (cf. 1Cor. 15:45,47-48).

14. Who are these heavenly people? Those who are steadfast and immovable in their faith, who always abound in the Lord's work and bear the image of the heavenly Adam through their obedience to Him. "He that obeyeth not the Son", says John, the Lord's Forerunner, through John the Evangelist, "shall not see life; but the wrath of God abideth on him" (John 3:36). Who can endure God's wrath? "It is a fearful thing", brethren, "to fall into the hands of the living God" (Heb. 10:31). If we fear the hands of our enemies, even though the Lord says, "fear not them which kill the body" (Matt. 10:28), who in his right mind will not fear God's hands raised in anger against the disobedient? For the wrath of God will be revealed against everyone who lives impurely and unjustly without repenting and holds the truth in unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18).

15. Let us flee from wrath and hasten through repentance to obtain the kindness and compassion of the divine Spirit. If anyone feels hatred towards another, let him be reconciled with him and restore love, lest his hatred and conflict with his brother should bear witness against him that he does not love God. "For if you do not love your brother whom you have seen, how can you love God whom you have not seen?" (cf. 1John 4:20). When we love one another, let our love be unfeigned, and let us show it in deeds, by neither saying nor doing, nor even enduring to hear, anything insulting or harmful to our brethren. As Christ's beloved Theologian taught us, "Brethren, do not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth" (cf. 1John 3:18).

16. Anyone who has fallen into fornication, adultery or any other such bodily impurity, should desist from this revolting filth and cleanse himself through confession, tears, fasting and the like. For God judges unrepentant fornicators and adulterers. He condemns them, dismisses them and consigns them to hell, unquenchable fire and other never-ending punishments, saying, "Let the impure and accursed be taken away, lest they see and enjoy the glory of the Lord" (cf. Isa. 26:10 Lxx). Let thieves and all who are openly grasping and greedy stop stealing, defrauding and seizing what belongs to others, but also share their own possessions with those in need. In a word, if you desire life, to see good days, to be rescued from enemies both visible and invisible, the barbarians currently threatening us, and those punishments reserved for the prince of evil and his angels, depart from all evil and do good (Ps. 34:12,14). "Be not deceived", the Apostle tells the Corinthians, "neither fornicators, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with men, nor covetous, neither drunkards nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God" (cf. 1Cor. 6:9-10). If someone has no inheritance with God he neither belongs to God nor has God as his Father.

17. But let us, brethren, I beseech you, abstain from deeds and words hateful to God, that we may boldly call God our Father. Let us truly return to Him, that He too may turn back to us, cleanse us from all sin and make us worthy of His divine grace. Then shall we keep festival both now and forever, and celebrate in a godly and spiritual way the accomplishments of God's promise, the Coming of the All-holy Spirit among men and His resting upon them; the fulfillment and perfection of the blessed hope in Christ Himself Our Lord.

18. For to Him belong glory, honour and worship, with His Father without beginning and the all-holy, good and life-giving Spirit, now and forever and unto the ages of ages.  
Amen.

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