

PENTECOST SUNDAY

The Feast of the Descent of the Holy Spirit or Pentecost, is one of the greatest holy days of the Church year. This holy day is celebrated over two days; Sunday - the Descent of the Holy Spirit, and Monday - the day of the Holy Trinity. This day begins the life of Christ's Church and the beginning of apostolic activity. Following Jesus' Ascension, God sends us his love and greatest gift through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit helps us to know God's teaching, and to lead us to union with Him. He, especially, tries to help us discover the greatest gift - the truth of God's infinite love for people. Remembering the words of Christ, "...you will know the truth, and the truth will make you free" (John 8:32).

The Holy Spirit guides, enlightens, and sanctifies the Church. In the teachings of the Second Vatican Council on today's feast, we find the following words: "When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that He might continually sanctify the Church, and thus, all those who believe would have access through Christ in one Spirit to the Father.... The Spirit dwells in the Church and in the hearts of the faithful, as in the temple. In them He prays on their behalf and bears witness to the fact that they are adopted sons.... By the power of the Gospel He makes the Church keep the freshness of youth. ...He renews it and leads it to perfect union with its Spouse. The Spirit and the Bride both say to Jesus, the Lord, 'Come!'" (Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, §4).

The apostles received the promised Spirit, which came after the ascension of Jesus Christ into heaven: "...I send the promise of my Father upon you; but stay in the city, until you are clothed with power from on high" (Luke 24:49). Christ's disciples are now strong because they are baptized with the Holy Spirit: "...he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire" (Luke 3:16). God's action is different from human action or natural phenomena. Fire has the property of burning, noise frightens people, but when it comes from the Lord, it acquires a different purpose and color. The fire did not frighten the three young men, Serdach, Misach, and Abednego, who were placed in the furnace (n. Dan. 3:23). Similarly, the fire did not harm the apostles, for it was the Holy Spirit in the form of tongues of fire. The noise did not cause the people to flee, but instead they gathered, and were, *amazed and wondered*, hearing the message in their own native language (n. Acts 2:7). As soon as the Holy Spirit descended, the disciples began to fearlessly fulfill the Lord's commandment: "Go therefore and make disciples of all nations..." (Matt. 28:19). And the nations began to hear in their tongues the mighty works of God (n. Acts 2:11), because the apostles received a powerful Teacher: "for the Holy Spirit will teach you in that very hour..." (Luke 12:12); "When the Spirit of truth comes, he will guide you into all the truth..." (John 16:13). Thus, was born the Church of Christ, headed by Christ, who ordained the apostles to serve men, and to watch over the righteousness of the spread of His teaching on earth.

The Holy Spirit is the source of love and life. As a sign, we decorate the temple and homes with green branches that symbolize life, so this celebration is called the Green Feasts. It reminds us of the supernatural life that the Holy Spirit gave to the Church as He descended on the apostles.

So, today, on this Feast of Pentecost, we ask the Holy Spirit to send His fire of love on us, to burn all evil in us, and to light good. May His light always shine on our way to a happy eternity!

Christ addresses us, "Receive the Holy Spirit" (John 20:22). Let us accept this light to be sons and daughters of light, not darkness. We live in truth: "And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God..." (Eph. 4:30), for the Savior promised us, "And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Counselor, to be with you forever..." (John 14:16). We know that in the Lord, to promise means to fulfill, to make words true. Therefore, on this day of Pentecost, let us rejoice in the coming of the Holy Spirit and be faithful to this *light*, the fire of *love* and eternal *truth*, so that we may all share in the eternal joy of the Kingdom of Heaven.

ALL SOUL'S SATURDAY

"The Holy Fathers were convinced that the commemoration of the departed by alms and sacrifices (Divine Liturgies) brings great comfort and benefit to them."

(SYNAXARION FOR MEAT-FARE SATURDAY)

One of the most venerable traditions in the Church, equally observed in the West as in the East, is the commemoration of the departed in our liturgical prayers. It is the constant teaching of the Church since Apostolic times that the departed can be helped by our prayers, offerings and good deeds.

All the early Liturgies of the Church, including the most ancient one, the Liturgy of St. James, contain a prayer for the departed. In the Liturgies of St. Basil the Great (d. 379) and St. John Chrysostom (d. 407) prayers for the deceased are also included.

The Apostolic Constitutions (4th century) prescribed that during the celebration of the Divine Liturgy, the deacon should remind the faithful to pray for the deceased, saying:

Let us pray for our brethren that are fallen asleep in Christ, that God, the Lover of mankind, Who has received their souls, may forgive them every voluntary and involuntary sin, and may be merciful and gracious to them, placing them in the land of righteousness . . . where there is no pain, sorrow or lamentation.

Therefore, the Fathers of Vatican II rightly decreed that the Church "from the very first centuries of Christianity has cultivated the memory of the dead with great piety" and "offered prayers for them."

In the Byzantine Rite, we commemorate the deceased every day at the Divine Liturgy immediately after the Consecration with the petition: "Remember, O Lord, all those who have departed in the hope of resurrection unto eternal life N.N. . . ., and grant them rest where the light of Your face shines."

In our liturgical calendar, Saturdays are dedicated, in a special way, to prayer for the deceased. In accord with this, the Byzantine Church has, since the ninth century, established a special day of prayer for the departed popularly known as "Zadushna Subota which literally translated means Souls Saturday. In the Byzantine Liturgical Year there are five All Souls Saturdays namely, Meat Fare Saturday, the Second, Third and Fourth Saturdays of the Great Lent, and Pentecost Saturday .

Meat-Fare Saturday as a special day of prayer for the deceased can be traced down to the sixth and seventh century. On Meat-Fare Sunday we liturgically commemorate the Last Judgment (Mt. 25:31-46). Therefore, on the previous day, we, in our charity, intercede with the merciful Judge for the deceased that they be placed at His right hand when He will come to judge the living and the dead.

When the Triodion, the liturgical book for the Easter cycle, was basically compiled during the ninth century, the Second, Third and Fourth Saturdays of Lent were also dedicated to the commemoration of the dead. The reasons for designating these days were: 1. to make up for the a-liturgical days of the Great Lent since in the Liturgy of the Presanctified Gifts, which is prescribed for Lent, there is no commemoration of the dead; 2. to remind us of our own death and make our penitential exercises during Lent more meaningful; and 3. to give us an opportunity to practice good deeds in behalf of our faithful departed and renew our love for them .

On Pentecost Saturday we commemorate "all the departed souls since Adam" (cf. Pentecostanon). By the Descent of the Holy Spirit, commemorated on Pentecost Sunday, the economy of our salvation was completed. Since the will of God is that "all men be saved" (I Tim. 2:4), therefore the day preceding this Feast is set aside as a day of prayer for all the deceased so that they be included in the salutary work of Christ.

We should remember our departed loved ones, especially during the All Souls Saturdays, as long as we live, and point out to those coming after us the wholesomeness of this beautiful and praiseworthy custom of praying for and remembering our departed loved ones.

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