

Office of Communications

Orthodox Church in America Diocese of New York and New Jersey

RELEASE NUMBER 2013.15.1

ARCHPASTORAL LETTER FOR **The Feast of Holy Pentecost** Sunday, June 23, 2013

Dearly Beloved in the Lord:

Christ is in our midst!

As we celebrate once again the Great Feast of Pentecost, we commemorate the Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the Birth of our Holy Church. And, in celebrating this milestone event in salvation history, we do well to recall from the pages of the Scripture *what the Church is* and *what it means for us* to be a member of the Church.

In Saint Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, the Apostle teaches us clearly the meaning of "the Church" and the meaning of membership in it. And, the Holy Fathers ~ Saint John Chrysostom and Saint Gregory of Nyssa ~ in their commentaries on this famous letter of Paul, explain clearly for us the patristic understanding.

First, Paul tells us that the Church established by Christ and to which the Spirit gave birth is one Church:

"...There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism: one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all." (Ephesians 4: 4-6)

In his commentary on this passage, Chrysostom tells us that, *"for this reason is the Spirit given, that He might unite those who are separated by race and different manners; for old and young, poor and wealthy, child and adolescent, woman and man, and every soul become in a manner one, and more entirely so than if there were one body. Now what is that one body? The faithful throughout the inhabited world, both which are, and which have been, and which shall also be."*

Saint Paul goes on to tell us that the reality of the Church is people, men and women who are energized by the Holy Spirit: *"To each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift."* (Ephesians 4:7)

What this means is that we are not all given the same gifts, but together as the Church we are equipped to do God's will. Saint John explains that *"gifts are bestowed not for the honor of one above the other, but for the work of the Church ... for the building up of the Body of Christ."*

The Apostle goes on to say that the head of the Church is none other than Christ Himself: *"...speaking the truth in love, we may grow up in all things into Him Who is the head – Christ – from whom the*

