



ORTHODOX CHURCH IN AMERICA
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Archpastoral Letter for the Feast of Pentecost 2020

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The Feast of Pentecost
Sunday, June 7, 2020

Dearly Beloved Members of Our Diocesan Family:
Christ is in our midst! – He is and ever shall be!

**“For whenever the Holy Spirit is present,
He makes gold in the place of clay.”**
(St. John Chrysostom, *Homily 4 on Acts*)

Before He ascended into Heaven, our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ promised His followers the gift of the Holy Spirit: *“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all of Judea and Samaria, and to the very ends of the earth”* (Acts 1:8). And on Pentecost Sunday, 50 days after the Resurrection of our Lord and 10 days after His Ascension, the Holy Spirit did come upon Christ’s apostles and disciples. *“And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as a rushing mighty wind”* and *“there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them”* (Acts 2:2-3).

Saint Luke continues his account of the Birthday of the Church with these words: *“And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance”* (Acts 2:4). In his commentary on this reading from Acts for the Feast of Pentecost, the “golden-mouthed” preacher Saint Chrysostom points out that “they were all filled” refers not only to the 12 apostles but also to the then 120 disciples as well.

The famous Archbishop of Constantinople continues, saying that just as fire lights as many lamps as it wishes and never gets diminished, so it was with the Spirit filling the apostles. So great was the gift that they had received that they were able to preach everywhere – having been given the gift of tongues to teach peoples of every nationality the most important of all messages, salvation in Jesus Christ.

Thus, they fulfilled the great commission of the Gospel ... beginning with the very place where they had been afraid – Jerusalem ... and afterwards to the ends of the earth. What is truly remarkable is that those who were being sent out made no objections – like the prophets of old. No one said that he was “weak of voice” or “slow of speech,” “sinful” or “unworthy,” or “too young.”

In the past, the apostles had been afraid and locked themselves behind closed doors. But now they feared nothing, and went knocking on doors to convert people, traveling far away to bring the light of Christ to distant nations. As St. John points out, they were now “angels of light,” ministers of things from above, and the Spirit would make it such that nothing would be able to withstand them and their precious message to the world.

Saint Peter is a prime example of this. He who had denied the Lord at the questioning of a poor girl (John 18:17), now, in the midst of a bloodthirsty crowd, preaches with such boldness as to prove the resurrection and convert 3,000 to faith in the Promised Messiah. Peter himself realized that he was

experiencing the promise foretold by the Prophet Joel centuries before: *“And it shall come to pass in the last days, says the Lord God, that I will pour out My Spirit upon all flesh. Your sons and your daughters shall prophesy; your young men shall see visions and your old men shall dream dreams”* (Joel 2:28-32).

Near the end of his commentary on this reading, Chrysostom points out that even though many of the listeners of Peter’s sermon scoffed at his words – and some even accused the apostles of being intoxicated! – it made no difference. They all remained bold ... “For the presence of the Holy Spirit had already transformed them, lifting them above all bodily considerations. For whenever the Holy Spirit is present, He makes gold in the place of clay.”

St. John’s reference to “clay” is from the prophet Jeremiah, who was given the vision of a potter shaping clay ... sometimes formed into a beautiful vase ... but sometimes cast away if it were resistant to being shaped. *“O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter?” says the Lord. “Look, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are you in My hand”* (Jeremiah 18:6). This means that we who are to serve the Lord are to allow ourselves to be shaped by Him for His service. If we do, we will become a useful and beautiful vessel; if not, we may find ourselves cast aside because of our resistance to God’s will for us. What Chrysostom is saying is that now, with the coming of the Holy Spirit, we (of the Church) cannot only be made into “vessels of clay” worthy to do the Lord’s work; but, by the Holy Spirit being active within us, we can be transformed into “vessels of gold.”

And then St. John concludes, challenging his original listeners and all of us on the great Feast of Pentecost: “Let us all render ourselves worthy of the grace from above, and everything will be easy.”

As we celebrate this Birthday of our Church, and begin to re-open our parishes after three months of isolation because of the pandemic, let us commit ourselves to truly receiving the Grace of the Holy Spirit in our souls and activating His power in our spiritual lives. Let us return to Church renewed – renewed by the Holy Spirit: in our daily prayer life and our daily Scripture reading; in our yearning to attend all the divine services in which we have been unable to participate; in our sincere confession of sins and our true return home to God in contrite repentance; in our unquenchable yearning for the Bread of Life and the Fountain of Immortality – the Holy Eucharist – which so many have been unable to receive; in our increased commitment to our parish of our time, talent and treasure – in gratitude for God’s many blessings through this pandemic; and in our heartfelt promise to reach out in assistance to those in need in our families, our parish, our community ... relying upon the Holy Spirit to help us each and every day.

And finally, let us be bold, like St. Peter, in witnessing to Our Lord God and Savior Jesus Christ to our corner of a world which so desperately needs His light, His life and His love. With the power of the Holy Spirit to enable us, let us tell others the story of His blessings in our own life, let us extend an invitation to them to find His love in our parish community, and let us witness to His truth in the faith of the Holy Orthodox Church ... so that those without a church home may experience through us the God Who loves them more than they love themselves.

In doing these things, St. John Chrysostom tells us, we will be transformed from “vessels of clay” into “vessels of gold” in the service of the One God in Trinity. What an awesome promise for us to realize! By the grace of the All-Holy Spirit, may this come to pass in all our lives ... unto the Heavenly Kingdom.

With my humble prayers, my archpastoral blessing and my sincere love,



Archbishop of New York and the
Diocese of New York and New Jersey