

JUNE 19, 2016---HOLY PENTECOST

ST. MATTHEW ORTHODOX CHURCH

ACTS 2:1-11

JOHN 7: 37-52; 8:12

“WHEN YOU’RE ON YOUR KNEES.....”

Today is one of the very greatest of the great Holy Days of the year---the day of Pentecost. On this day the Holy Spirit came down upon the Disciples and the history of the Church began.

The Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity. He has always existed for He is God. We worship Him equally along with the Father and the Holy Spirit.

He was present in Old Testament times but had not yet fully poured Himself out upon God’s people. That happened at Pentecost, 50 days after Christ’s resurrection---and it is that full pouring out that we celebrate this morning.

Hundreds of years before, the Holy Prophet Joel prophesied about that day---he said this pouring out would take place in what he called “the last days”. St. Peter, in Acts 2, on Pentecost Day preached to the huge crowd that gathered and told them that Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled that day—the Last Days had come, the Holy Spirit had come. Let me read for you a little of his sermon, the part where he proclaimed Joel’s prophecy fulfilled-----Acts 2:16-19---“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.’”

The Holy Spirit came down on the believers in Jesus and the Church was born.

And the Holy Spirit hasn’t yet stopped pouring Himself out---it’s still going on. If you have been baptized and chrismated, it’s happened to you. When you were baptized and chrismated, you had your own personal Pentecost as the Holy Spirit entered into you as He entered into the Disciples on the day of Pentecost

That was a great gift to you from God. St. John Chrysostom wrote 1600 years ago—“God has given us the greatest gift possible and in profusion... What is this gift? It is the Holy Spirit.” (Ancient Christian Commentary on the Scriptures, Vol. 6, Romans, InterVarsity Press, 1998, p. 130) That gift was given to you personally when you were baptized and chrismated.

I’m sure you know that part of the ceremony. If you were baptized and/or chrismated as an adult, you remember it from your own ceremony. If it happened to you as a baby, well, you’ve been to others’ and you know how it goes---and how it went for you. After the baptismal immersions, the priest anoints the person just baptized with the holy Chrism oil in several places. And at each anointing of each part of the body, the priest says, “The seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit”. And the godparents and all present loudly respond each time with what sounds like a command to God, but is actually a prayed request to God—“Seal!”

God responds and seals the person with the gift of the Holy Spirit.

At that point you received the great gift St. Chrysostom wrote about. God sealed that gift into your life, you were baptized with the Holy Spirit, you were filled with the Holy Spirit. What a happy day it was! It was your own personal Pentecost! St. Paul describes baptism with great joy in Titus 3: 5-6---“He saved us, not because of deeds done by us in righteousness, but in virtue of His own mercy, by the *washing of regeneration and renewal in the Holy Spirit, which He poured out upon us* richly through Jesus Christ our Savior...” At your baptism, Christ saved you and you were born again (regenerated), but He did even more----He “poured out upon us richly” the Holy Spirit!

But how full of the Holy Spirit have you been lately? Has He been directing your every word and action? Have you been experiencing His power to lead a holy life? Or have you been feeling a bit spiritually deflated like a balloon running out of air or helium? Or maybe you’ve gone totally flat like a balloon that isn’t even round anymore?

If so, today is a good day to get back on track. We will have the Kneeling Prayers at the end of today’s liturgy---what a perfect opportunity to get “filled up” again!

We haven’t been kneeling to pray for the last 50 days as a physical manifestation of our joy at Christ’s resurrection which we celebrated 50 days ago. Today, although we always rejoice in His resurrection, we leave behind that intense 50 day celebration and go “back to normal”. And part of that normality is sometimes kneeling to pray. And that kneeling starts again at the end of today’s liturgy.

We will kneel 3 times to pray those beautiful and poetic prayers for the day of Pentecost. There are enough prayers said to cover just about everything that needs praying about! But perhaps for many of us the most essential thing to pray when we’re on our knees today is to tell the Lord that we wish to resubmit ourselves to Him. And to make an appeal to God to fill us up again with His Holy Spirit; to once again pour out the power of the Spirit upon us.

So, today, when we kneel----don’t just bend your knees. In fact, if you have a bum knee, you won’t even be able to bend your knees. More important-----bend your heart and your mind to God. Make the outward kneeling a sign of inward kneeling before Him—submitting anew your life to Him. Ask Him to again pour out His Spirit upon you as He did when you were baptized and chrismated.

When you kneel today, ask the Holy Spirit who has been in you ever since you received the baptism in the Spirit when you were baptized and chrismated---ask Him to no longer just be *in* you, but to *fill* you. To fill you to overflowing so that you can live for Him and serve Him with full spiritual power.

Then, after all the prayers are done, and we rise from our knees for the 3rd time at the end of the service, ---get up and live by His power in you every day with a new and deeper commitment to Christ.

Today is the perfect day for this---don’t let it slip by. On your knees today, submit and recommit to the Lord. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill you more fully so you can live more fully for our Lord Jesus Christ.

