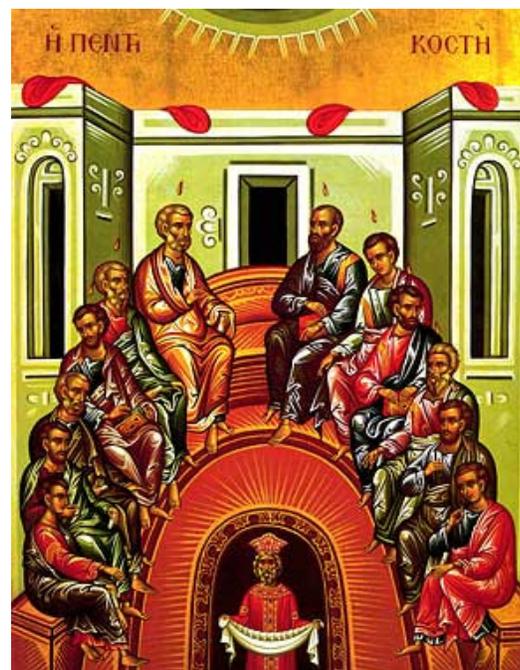


FEAST OF HOLY PENTECOST

INTRODUCTION

The Feast of Holy Pentecost is celebrated each year on the fiftieth day after the Great and Holy Feast of Pascha (Easter) and ten days after the Feast of the Ascension of Christ. The Feast is always celebrated on a Sunday.

The Feast commemorates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles on the day of Pentecost, a feast of the Jewish tradition. It also celebrates the establishment of the Church through the preaching of the Apostles and the baptism of the thousands who on that day believed in the Gospel message of salvation through Jesus Christ. The Feast is also seen as the culmination of the revelation of the Holy Trinity.



BIBLICAL STORY

The story of Pentecost is found in the book of The Acts of the Apostles. In Chapter two we are told that the Apostles of our Lord were gathered together in one place. Suddenly, a sound came from heaven like a rushing wind, filling the entire house where they were sitting. Then, tongues of fire appeared, and one sat upon each one of Apostles. They were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages as directed by the Spirit (Acts 2:1-4).

This miraculous event occurred on the Jewish Feast of Pentecost, celebrated by the Jews on the fiftieth day after the Passover as the culmination of the Feast of Weeks (Exodus 34:22; Deuteronomy 16:10). The Feast of Weeks began on the third day after the Passover with the presentation of the first harvest sheaves to God, and it concluded on Pentecost with the offering of two loaves of unleavened bread, representing the first products of the harvest (Leviticus 23:17-20; Deuteronomy 16:9-10).

Since the Jewish Feast of Pentecost was a great pilgrimage feast, many people from throughout the Roman Empire were gathered in Jerusalem on this day. When the people in Jerusalem heard the sound, they came together and heard their own languages being spoken by the Apostles (Acts 2:5-6). The people were amazed, knowing that some of those speaking were Galileans, and not men who would normally speak many different languages. They wondered what this meant, and some even thought the Apostles were drunk (Acts 2:7-13).

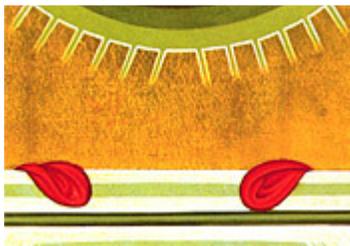
Peter, hearing these remarks, stood up and addressed the crowd. He preached to the people regarding the Old Testament prophecies about the coming of the Holy Spirit. He spoke about Jesus Christ and His death and glorious Resurrection. Great conviction fell upon the people, and they

asked the Apostles, "What shall we do?" Peter said to them, "Repent, and let every one of you be baptized in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:38-39).

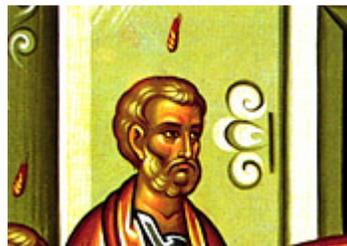
The Bible records that on that day about three thousand were baptized. Following, the book of Acts states that the newly baptized continued daily to hear the teaching of the Apostles, as the early Christians met together for fellowship, the breaking of bread, and for prayer. Many wonderful signs and miracles were done through the Apostles, and the Lord added to the Church daily those who were being saved (Acts 2:42-47).

THE ICON OF THE FEAST

The icon of the Feast of Pentecost is known as "The Descent of the Holy Spirit". It is an icon of bold colors of red and gold signifying that this is a great event. The movement of the icon is from the top to the bottom. At the top of the icon is a semicircle with rays coming from it (1). The rays are pointing toward the Apostles, and the tongues of fire are seen descending upon each one of them signifying the descent of the Holy Spirit (2).



1. Semicircle of rays pointing to each of the Apostles (detail).



2. A tongue of fire rests above the head of Saint Peter (detail).

The building in the background of the icon represents the upper room where the Disciples of Christ gathered after the Ascension. The Apostles are shown seated in a semicircle which shows the unity of the Church (3). Included in the group of the Apostles is Saint Paul (4), who, though not present with the others on the day of Pentecost, became an Apostle of the Church and the greatest missionary. Also included are the four Evangelists—Matthew, Mark (5), Luke (6), and John—holding books of the Gospel, while the other Apostles are holding scrolls that represent the teaching authority given to them by Christ.



3. The Apostles in the upper room being filled with the Holy Spirit.



4. Saint Paul, who was not present on the day of Pentecost, is included amongst the twelve (detail).



5. Saint Mark the Evangelist, who was not present with the twelve Disciples on this day, is included (detail).



6. Saint Luke the Evangelist, who also was not present on this day, is included (detail).

In the center of the icon below the Apostles, a royal figure is seen against a dark background. This is a symbolic figure, Cosmos, representing the people of the world living in darkness and sin, and involved in pagan worship (7). However, the figure carries in his hands a cloth containing scrolls which represent the teaching of the Apostles (8). The tradition of the Church holds that the Apostles carried the message of the Gospel to all parts of the world.



7. The Cosmos, appearing in the center of the icon, representing the people of the world (detail).



8. The scrolls that are carried by the Cosmos are representing the teachings of the Apostles (detail).

In the icon of Pentecost we see the fulfillment of the promise of the Holy Spirit, sent down upon the Apostles who will teach the nations and baptize them in the name of the Holy Trinity. Here we see that the Church is brought together and sustained in unity through the presence and work of the Holy Spirit, that the Spirit guides the Church in the missionary endeavor throughout the world, and that the Spirit nurtures the Body of Christ, the Church, in truth and love.

WHY IS THERE A “PENTECOST”?

Pentecost is a celebration of a new beginning, a celebration of God’s New Creation. This is a time that embodies the freshness and newness of life, especially our spiritual life. This allows all of us to put great emphasis on what we as individuals can do in order to bring the presence of God into our world.

Let us ask ourselves: Have we asked God to inspire us, to place on our hearts what He wants for us? Have we sincerely and openly asked God to lead us so that we know what will bring happiness, what will bring justice, what will bring goodness into our world, to others and to ourselves? Are we being led to what is good, to what is peaceful, to what will be of benefit to the community at large? God is the Good Shepherd. He wants to lead us to goodness.

The inspiration of the Holy Spirit comes to us in enlightenment. All of a sudden we see what is happening, we see what is unfolding, and we see what God is doing in us and through us. St. Paul told us: *we know that in everything God works for good with those who love Him, who are called according to His purpose.* (Romans 8:28). The Holy Spirit speaks to us in many ways both individually and when we as a people are gathered in Christ’s name. In a very particular and solemn way the Holy Spirit speaks to us in His Church, which is the mystical body of Christ.