

The Holy Spirit

By Bishop George Khodr

God has ultimately come to us in Christ Jesus; yet the question remains as to how Christ continues in us after having left this world? Some have said that His presence continues in us through the Bible; and that is what all Christians believe. And it was said that His presence continues in the Church; and that is what the Traditional Churches strongly believe in. But when the Lord comes to us with His words and revelations (like Baptism, Chrismation and the Eucharist) we need to appropriate the words and have them reach our hearts; the lukewarm will not pick any of God's words but the believer whose heart is on fire for the Lord will live by them and also by them move to further depths with God. You can internalize the inspiring Word; but God can also instill it in you.

The ongoing Pentecost and the work of the Holy Spirit is to activate in your soul the Sacramental grace thus renewing the power given you and making it functional in you and the community you belong to. The work of the Holy Spirit is that the death and resurrection of Jesus are active in you now; also that you bridge the gap of time and have Christ, after His ascension, always come down afresh on you and the people you are with.

In the Epistle of the feast of Pentecost, we read: "When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound like the blowing of a violent wind came from heaven and filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues[a] as the Spirit enabled them."

"In one place" and with one heart and one expectation; that is what the Church is about. You must be of the community who received the Scriptures so that you inherit the Spirit; that is you have to follow the words that Jesus has spoken. Grace has to fill the whole house because it (the house) is founded on obeying Him. Then fire from Heaven will descend on you and all of your being will be turned to "fire". And that is what the New Testament calls the gifts of the Holy Spirit. And the fire in you might be enkindled always – a great fire. And when others find you fully given to the word of God, that word which has become alive in you will inspire you with "new words" that give new life to you and those with you.

This is why the Church has life through those who in Her are "alive". She is not an institution with a hierarchy of those who are above and others who sit at their feet. There is none above and none below. All of them speak in the Spirit who is in them. There are no classes in the Church. And in our Tradition, we choose for the priesthood those who are illuminated and for the episcopate those who are

deified; that is those who transcend their passions. So the priesthood is not an office which those who hold are there to obey those above them, but they are there because they have received it from God in this earthly life. So the Bishop is so only if the “fire” descends on him; and through Him (the Spirit) he (the bishop) listens to what He (the Spirit) has to say to the Church. And the Church here does not mean certain groupings exclusively, but the individuals that the Spirit has anointed. Such individuals who are in a position to exhort the Bishop, whom they consider to be anointed of God, meekly and humbly in the name of the Holiness of the Church. To both, Bishop and people, the truth of the hymn we sing for the feast of Pentecost has been revealed: “The Holy Spirit is light and life and a spiritual spring of living waters, the spirit of Wisdom and Knowledge; He is good, upright, active. He purifies from wrongdoing, He is God, and the One who deifies, fire of fire; He speaks to us and distributes His gifts to us...” The Spirit as the distributor of the gifts is an essential truth that fosters our togetherness in one body. One is gifted to serve the poor, and another for teaching and another for preaching and another for administration and another for works of mercy and all are bound in love. So let no one despise the other and let not one consider the gift he has better than that of another. And when we consider the Fathers of the Church, we find the same gifts distributed among them in the same pattern; we find one more gifted in something than another. We also find them disparate in their theological knowledge and abilities and depth in theological thought and intelligence. So you might find those among them who are less dazzling, very active in serving the poor. In all that they make the One Church. And in that the human being becomes a word (God’s word).

It seems that the conflict between the Eastern and Western Churches on the procession of the Holy Spirit (as to whether He proceeds from the Father as the East says or from the Father and the Son as the West says) is being resolved after Rome has issued a theological document in which there is much similarity to the position of the East from that matter. And as I see things, the Orthodox Church will not stir up the old conflict when the dialogue between the Churches is resumed. Yet the good thing resulting from that is that the Holy Spirit who was not adequately prominent in Catholic teaching has started to show in both, teachings and life (practice). But at any rate those who are filled with the Holy Spirit are one in all churches. Holiness is the same anywhere though different churches use different expressions in talking about it. Holiness shines brightly as the sun in the lives of many here. In the Orthodox Church, each of the Patriarchates proclaims its own Saints.

Is the Holy Spirit sent to those who do not belong to the Church? This is a very delicate question. Thirty years ago I have lauched an understanding expressed as “Christ as existing in the ‘night’ of religions”; I meant by that the latent or concealed truth in those religions that is the truth which God sends to whoever He

wishes. And after those thirty years, I am here to say that when one does not reject or oppose the gospel openly, that means that its words have found a way to his heart though he might not be too involved with it. Yet I am more inclined to say that I refrain from evaluating religions in their doctrines but I cannot but notice people of those religions who are pure in their ways; and if such purity is very prominent then it comes from the spirit of holiness, since human effort on its own is not a source of purity. Of course there is nothing wrong in saying that the Church extends beyond the present Christian community. I consider that when the Hallaj (A Muslim mystic), as he was praying, says when his hands were cut off: "Two prostrations in love, the only ablutions of which is blood." I see in that the Spirit descending on him with martyrdom and the he is gathered to the cross of Jesus.

Thinking of the above, a prayer of a Byzantine saint, Symeon the new Theologian, comes to mind: "Come O true light. Come O eternal life. Come O great mystery. Come O who cannot be understood and uttered. Come O light in whom there is no darkness. Come O hope who desires all to be saved. Come O resurrection of those who are dead. Come O immutable one who is always on the move; come to those who are in hell. Your name no one utters.....come O whom my soul loves. Come by yourself only for me. Come O who has separated me from all and made me lonesome in this world and have become my desire and wanted me to want you. Come O unreachable One."

And so with things as those the Spirit has enriched us; and the poor in spirit found life in Him on the hope that the world will be set on fire by Him - fire that makes this world mere light.