

the

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“Do the work of an evangelist” - 2 Tim 4:5

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Missing the Purpose of Pentecost

by the Rev. Archimandrite Fr. Eusebius Stephanou, Th.D.

We usually think of Pentecost as the day on which the Church was founded with the descent of the Holy Spirit. Pentecost marks the birthday of the Church. But when Christ foretold the event of Pentecost, He made no mention

whatsoever of the Church being birthed on that day.

The Lord's primary focus was on the personal experience His disciples were to taste of on that divinely appointed day. Here is the promise of Jesus: “You shall receive power after the Holy Spirit is come upon you. And you shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and in Samaria and unto the uttermost part of the earth” (Acts 1:8).

The power received by the disciples in that Upper Room was a supernatural, spiritual power that enabled them to accomplish what in the natural was impossible. During the days following Pentecost, the Apostles witnessed to the message of salvation and especially to the resurrection of Jesus that qualified Him to be Lord and Messiah. What made the difference was the impact the Apostles made upon the hearts of the people in a supernatural manner, since they witnessed “with great power” (Acts 4:33). Only the action of the Holy Spirit could account for such impressive, life-changing effectiveness.

All men and woman are called upon to experience the Holy Spirit baptism, both in liturgical Churches as well as in non-liturgical Churches. It is the only way in which we can secure

our spiritual survival at a time the spirit of the Antichrist is beginning to flood the world and is trying to transform the Bride of Christ into the Great Harlot Church. We will never make it with religious routine and the familiar religious formalism the Church offers us today.



The Holy Spirit Baptism is the special extraordinary provision God is making available to all those who long for the “latter rain”. Jesus said: “Whosoever thirsts, let him come to me and drink. He that believes on Me, as the scripture has said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water” (John 7:37). “Whosoever drinks of the water that I shall give him shall never thirst, but the water that I shall give him shall be in him a well of water springing up unto everlasting life” (4:14).

Each member of the Church, dear reader, needs to have a testimony of experiencing the baptism with the Holy

Spirit. You won't make it into Heaven on your baptismal certificate. That piece of paper cannot secure your salvation. You need a personal experience of rebirth. Otherwise, we make a liar out of Christ who said, “Whosoever believes in Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water.”

You must have an experience of Pentecost, dear reader, in order to be with Jesus eternally in His glory and majesty. You need the Upper Room experience. “If the Holy Spirit is operative within us unknowingly”, teaches St. Symeon the New Theologian, “and without our sensing His presence, obviously neither in eternal life which follows will we receive the perception of the Holy Spirit, but we will be dead and blind and unconscious, remaining then as we are now, and thus vain is our hope” (Catechesis vol. 2, 10, 508).

Saint Symeon had to confront many critics in his day over this teaching, which he regarded as fundamental to spiritual growth and salvation. He exhorted them with these words: “How can such persons who have never been baptized in the Holy Spirit understand the transformation of those already baptized in the Spirit?” (Catechesis 24:112).

“Run! As many of you as are unsealed. As many as are unmarked, make haste to be stamped with the seal of the Spirit! Which person is unsealed? Who is unmarked? It is the person who has no certain awareness of the nature of the seal, because whoever is conscious of the divine imprint possesses a shameless hope and takes courage by reason of his faith” (Catechesis 2:133).

We do not earn the right to receive the Holy Spirit baptism. It is not a reward for our righteousness. Like salvation, it is given to us purely because of God's grace and divine favor.

What is God saying to the Church Today?

by Joseph Abbate / President

In the Book of Revelation we read: ***“Listen to what the Spirit says to the Church.”*** With everything going on today, we have to ask ourselves, what is God trying to tell us?

I'm sure you have all heard the expression ***“we will get through this”*** over our televisions. Even famous pastors are saying the same thing. The issue at hand is not if we will get through this difficult time, but rather why it happened in the first place, and what do we do after this virus has past? Why are we not hearing this message?

I would like each of you to seek the Lord yourselves and ask Him what He is saying. There are a number of things which are certain. I don't believe that God wants us to just get back to what we were doing before the virus had shut everything down. I am saying this regarding the Church. It is understandable that people want to get back to work and to their daily routine. Maybe God is trying to get the attention of both our Nation and Church.

Our Nation has seen a number of fundamental rights being dissolved before our very eyes. What is the use of just “getting through this” after everything reopens, only to find that our Nation's Constitutional laws and rights have been eroded.

Much personal sacrifice will be required of this generation, in their personal lives. Dreams of family, a good job and financial security may very well have to be placed aside to accomplish the goals the Lord will want us to achieve.

As it was for the American generations during the 1920s and 1930s, who had endured unbelievable events such as the Great Depression, the Dust Bowl and the Spanish Flu, to help shape

them to face the events in their future, today's generation may very well be undergoing these dilemmas to get us ready for future hardships. The previous generation, often referred to as *“The Greatest Generation”* had to pick themselves up from these terrible events, to fight off an evil enemy during the Second World War, then check the spread of Communism and eventually bring down the Soviet Union.

The very founders of our nation endured immense sacrifice. If they were to witness what has happened to our country through the years and the freedoms which are at risk, one could imagine how they would feel. The word of God puts it this way: *“If the foundations are destroyed, what can the righteous do?”* (Ps. 11:3). During this virus outbreak we have seen some in positions of government try to alter this country's voting laws and try to spend Billions of dollars on items which have absolutely nothing to do with assisting our citizens or virus relief. If our government continues to print money at the pace of trillions of dollars a year then it is only a matter of time until our currency devalues at an alarming rate, which will then cause massive inflation.

There are some which may say: “well, that can never happen here in America.” “We are too big to fail.” My response is, sure, and General Motors was also too big to fail. Our economy was too great to collapse. The empires of Spain, France, Germany and Russia were also too great to fail.

Spain, which had the emblem of the Holy Cross on their flag and was importing countless gold and emeralds from the New World, ended up falling. In the 1930s Catholic Spain had a civil

war in which fascists were fighting communists! France fell into revolution, in which you were guilty until proven innocent. Revolutionary atheists, such as Robespierre would gain power and change the very calendar to have 10 days instead of 7, and to do away with Sundays, including all religious holidays. Germany which at one time had the Christian hymn “Glorious things of thee are spoken”, would plunge the entire planet into 2 World Wars, while retaining the German national emblem of the Cross painted on all their planes and tanks. Do I need to mention what happened in Holy Russia? Please don't tell me that it can never happen here! At the rate we are going, it will probably happen here sooner than you think.

Recently, I had found a page of scripture in between the pages of Father Stephanou's personal Bible. The scripture was from the Prophet Ezekiel. ***“Thus says the Lord God unto the shepherds of Israel that do feed themselves! Should not the shepherds feed the flocks?.....The diseased you have not strengthened, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you brought again that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost.”*** (Ezekiel 34: 2, 4).

What is even more terrifying is what the Lord said to such shepherds: ***“Behold, I am against the shepherds; and will require my flock at their hands”*** (34: 10). I have been honored to know a number of good pastors who have fed the flock. After all, Our Lord Jesus Christ has commanded the pastors to ***“Feed My Sheep.”*** However, this is what I believe what

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God's message to all those pastors who have not been doing their duties. It would probably be something such as **“Your Time in the limelight is Up!”** For too long there have been pastors who have delivered a watered down message of the Gospel. For too long, the television airwaves have been filled with a “feel good” message which does not challenge or feed God's flock, because those pastors wanted to have a super-sized church building full of people to impress other pastors. **“Your Time in The Spotlight is over!”** God will hand the flock over to pastors who will feed them, unless His people starve to death. We are witnessing these big church structures which were built to impress others to now be completely empty.

Now don't get me wrong. There is no problem in having a large church to accommodate people. You may have the largest church structure in the world, nevertheless, it adds up to be nothing in the sight of God if the flock is left starving! God is more interested in the *“temples made without hands.”* A lukewarm message will not do. A five minute sermon will no longer suffice. God will no longer tolerate pastors *“preaching another Gospel.”* There is too much at stake now. Time is running out! The return of the Lord is at hand!

For too long, many pastors have become disconnected from the people. Some pastors who claim to have a word from the Lord, yet live a disconnected high-life of luxury while their own parishioners have been scraping to get by. People have seen this hypocrisy and have given up on them. These type of Pastors have done more damage to the Church than they realize. Because of this bad testimony, many people have given up on God. The Church is no longer looked up to nor has the influence it once retained, and the good pastors have suffered because of it and have an up-hill battle to gain peoples trust. God has been watching too! Let me reiterate this important scripture: **“Behold, I am against the shepherds; and will require my flock at their hands.”** You think you have gotten away with it, but in God's

eyes, your service to Him has been found to be lacking, and your ministries will become only a shell of what it used to be. The sheep which have been turned off to God because of your bad testimonies will be required of you. God is holding you directly responsible for their souls!

There have been a number of people who state that religion kills. St. Paul said it best: **“the law kills, but the Spirit gives life.”** In fact, the law put Christ on the Cross. Everyone who understands this should also be aware that atheism has killed far more than religion ever has. Though, sadly, in many of our schools today, the younger generations are being taught on the evils of democracy and the greatness of socialism. We have once again witnessed the true nature of socialism in how China has tried to hide its responsibility with the virus situation.

While the virus had run riot throughout the city of Wuhan, and the Chinese government not only locked down the city, as well stopping all air travel from Wuhan to all other cities in China, travel from Wuhan to other parts of the world was virtually unhindered. While one could not take an airplane from Wuhan to Shanghai, one could take an airplane from Wuhan to New York, Rome or London. Obviously, the Chinese government could not allow their own economy to be at a disadvantage from the virus, not to mention the trade war with the U.S. They also couldn't admit that they fumbled the virus situation badly.

Since socialist governments are atheistic, the government becomes the replacement for God. If the government is seen to be so imperfect, then the people may lose faith in the government system. This is nothing new in the history of the Communist governments of China and Russia. Under Stalin and Mao, tens of millions of their own people were murdered to cover up the imperfections of an atheistic government which had promised to bring a utopian world to the people. Throughout history, the atheistic governments of Communism and Socialism have been responsible for

the deaths of over 100 million people! Now it is responsible for the deaths of hundreds of thousands of more free peoples around the world. It's truly surreal when the very same Chinese government which ran their own people over with tanks in Tiananmen Square and is at this moment taking the freedom away from Hong Kong, tries to tell the world how great their system of government is.

Yet, through all of this, God is not looking towards the world to correct these problems. God is looking towards the Church. The word of God says: **“If My people which are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land” (2 Chronicles 4:14).** The thing which stands out most about this scripture is how God has singled out His people. It is not the secular world which moves God's heart, it is His people who are called by His name.

The Bible states: **“In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity, consider” (Ecclesiastes 7:14).** I pray that during this difficult time in our country that we will collectively humble ourselves and seek after God. We need to ask ourselves if our heart is right with Him. We need to examine ourselves as never before to make sure that we are the Bride of Christ, blameless and without spot or wrinkle. Have we been thankful for all of the blessings which God had given to us in the past?

If these things we not enough on our plate, while I was finishing this article, our nation then experienced the latest protests and riots from the aftermath of the George Floyd murder. Not only did we witness a terrible murder take place over our televisions, but then we witnessed peaceful protestors who had rightful intentions, have their cause infiltrated by violent groups who ended up destroying businesses and killing police officers.

As the Church, we are God's

The Message of Pentecost

by Alex Kourtesis / Vice President

As we have come to the end of the Paschal season we are faced with a particularly important celebration in the church, the Sunday of Pentecost. Pentecost, which simply means the 50th day, is when the disciples, who were in the upper room, experienced the Holy Spirit or the 'helper' as Christ calls it, descending upon them. Jesus spoke previously about sending the Holy Spirit after His ascension and explains to the disciples that He will guide them through their journey of spreading the news of Christ throughout the whole world.

As we know, the disciples were simple fisherman and even after the resurrection, the disciples were not sure of their future. Let us remember the disciples were in the upper room for a reason. They were afraid and hiding out. After all, these were men of fear and little understanding, who were afraid to disclose that they were disciples of Jesus even though they were with Him before He was crucified and after His resurrection. Remember, Peter who just weeks before had denied 3 times that He

was ever associated with Jesus. What changed after Pentecost? Where did Peter come up with the understanding of Jesus and how did He ever obtain the knowledge to give the greatest sermon of all time and changed 3,000 people to Christianity. It was so powerful that we call this day the birth of our Church! Where did He get this newfound understanding, where did He get the courage, where did He get the conviction? How did He obtain this wisdom? Can we as Orthodox Christians obtain this wisdom? You often hear the words born again or a coming to themselves or a spiritual renewal, is this what was happening? We read in the third chapter of John, Nicodemus approached Jesus and asked Him questions about His teachings, Jesus quickly responded, you must be born again. Here is a man who knew all the scriptures, spoke about them, studied all His life about how to obtain blessings from God, yet He was puzzled when Jesus said you must be Born again. Is this what happened to the apostles? After all is this not what Christ spoke about just days earlier. You will receive the Holy Spirit. Nicodemus knew Christ and the

scriptures intellectually, but the written word did not resonate in His heart. My brothers and sisters the greatest gift Christ gave us is the Holy Spirit, this is how we become one with Christ. The spirit gives us wisdom to understand the Trinity. We, just as the apostles can receive the Spirit. In fact, Jesus said it is a requirement. He says you must deny thy self, repent and believe. We cannot reject sin and have a full repentance without the Spirit guiding us. It's what makes us as Christians in the world not of the world. St. Symeon the New Theologian wrote it is essential for one's salvation and full repentance to experience the Holy Spirit. My brothers and sisters in Christ, seek this blessing from Christ, ask Him to fill your Heart with the Holy Spirit. I pray that you experience this Spirit baptism and Christ pours out His Love and blessings on you and your families. That you can have peace and understanding that He will secure a place for you in paradise because you believe in Him. The Holy Spirit can renew your mind and Heart and is for all who believe. I hope this brings a new light and understanding as we conclude the Paschal season.

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hands and it is our responsibility to bring comfort and healing, not only through the proclamation of the Gospel, but also in works and deeds. Historically, as Orthodox Christians, and our people's backgrounds, coming from Eastern Europe as well as the Middle East, we are relatively new comers to America. Greeks, Bulgarians, Romanians, Russians, Ukrainians, Jordanians, Syrians, Egyptians, as well as people from other Orthodox parts of the globe arrived here to the shores of this country after the issues of slavery and the wars of the American frontiers were already over with.

From the brutal Ottoman

occupation of Greece and parts of Eastern Europe for over 400 years, to the Armenian Genocide, to the recent persecutions of Syrian, Iraqi and Egyptian Orthodox Christians at the hands of ISIS Terrorists, We Orthodox came to America to flee from persecutions and wars.

America is truly a melting pot of different peoples. Everyone has come from different backgrounds and descended from sometimes hurtful parts of history. It is far more complex and deeper than just a "white and black" issue. It is also an issue of Sin. Throughout history, and at one point or another, an empire, or people perpetrated terrible actions towards each other. All the way from Ancient days, through the Middle Ages and

Mongol invasions, and through two bloody world wars to the present time, groups of people have done evil to other groups. There is no excuse for it, but the root cause is still Sin! Yet some people are still trying to figure out or even trying to solve these matters in their human efforts alone. As a society, we have been neglecting God in every area. I am not talking about religious insitutions, I am talking about God's principals. How can we ever hope to heal the wounds if we cannot even acknowledge these things? Without God we have no moral compass to go by. It is not human wisdom or a politician who will save us, it is only when we turn back to God that the healing will begin.