22/06/2021

His Eminence Archbishop Elpidophoros of America – Homily at the Divine Liturgy of Pentecost



Beloved Faithful,

In the Lauds of this morning's Matins, we chanted the following phrase in praise of Pentecost:

Ξένον ἄκουσμα, ξένον θέαμα, πῦρ διαιρούμενον εἰς νομὰς χαρισμάτων.

Strange, that which was heard, strange, that which was seen, a Fire divided that these gifts may be apportioned. [1]

This poetic hymn describes in concise – yet, dramatic – language, the moment when the Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire, as read in the Book of Acts:

And suddenly, a sound came from Heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed and resting on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. [2]

This moment – even though some of those who witnessed it thought some of the

Disciples were intoxicated – was not a moment of confusion or ecstatic reverie. It was not a so-called 'pentecostal' experience – something that is very much a part of American religious culture, but which is alien to the lived experience of the Church.

It was, on the other hand, a moment of revelation. Because the Apostles – through these various languages – put forth a singular message: τὰ μεγαλεῖα τοῦ Θεοῦ.[3]

And what exactly are these "great deeds of God? Well, none other than the very story of our creation and redemption. We were created by God to be persons of communion – with Him and with one another. And this communion was to be based in perfect love. But when we had fallen away from the path, God sent His Only-Begotten Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to show us the most excellent way of love. [4]

Our Lord Jesus Christ, "the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world,"[5] showed us that the way of sacrifice – and yes, even of death – is not defeat; it is not the end. For he arose from the dead and charted a new course for us.

Therefore, my friends, our gathering this Sunday, and every Sunday, is the way the Lord chose to transform us, and to bring us into that most excellent reality of love.

We receive Holy Communion – His Very Body and Blood – so that in the same way the Gifts are transformed by the Holy Spirit, we may be transformed by the Gifts Themselves.

The Holy Spirit descended in individual flames, resting upon the head of the Disciples, as we see in the Icon of Pentecost. This shows us that God, Who is the Living Flame of Love, comes to each of us individually, but with equal love, equal forgiveness and equal compassion.

Fire – which is always included in the ancient lists of the basic substances of the universe – is ever-changing in its shape, but always transforms whatever it touches. It burns away the dross, and consumes the wood of the sacrifice. And it transforms the sacrifice into the aromas and smoke that rise heavenward.

My beloved brothers and sisters, so it is meant to be for us as well! In the same way, God's love shapes us in ever-changing ways, but His Love never violates our freedom.

And if we accept God's forgiveness, He descends upon us in tongues of fire to burn away the dross of our sins.

He takes of our lives, and makes a sacrifice that gives us purpose and meaning – a

sacrifice that is worthy of Himself.

And when we have given all that we are able to give, He accepts us as we rise up to His Celestial Dwelling-Place, where He receives us as His own children. Our lives become a “sweet savour,” as the Apostle says. [6]

On this Pentecost, then, let us offer ourselves to the fire of the Holy Spirit. Like the Holy Fire in the Holy Sepulcher, it burns without harm – for it is the Uncreated Light of God.

Let us re-commit to transforming ourselves into agents of love, which is a strange sight in the world today. And let us speak with gentle and patient words of understanding and love for all; yet another strange thing to hear today – indeed, ξένον ἄκουσμα, ξένον θέαμα!

And so, dear brothers and sisters, may this Pentecost be our Pentecost, in which we receive the fullness of God’s Holy Spirit, worshipped with the Father and the Son, unto ages of ages. Amen!

[1] Final Sticheron of the Praises, Mains of Pentecost.

[2] Acts 1:2-4.

[3] Acts 1:11.

[4] Cf. I Corinthians 12:31 .

[5] Cf. Revelation 13:8.

[6] Cf. II Corinthians 2:15

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