23/06/2021

THE FEAST OF THE MONDAY OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AT THE RUSSIAN MISSIA



On Monday 8/21 June 2021, the feast of the Monday of the Holy Spirit was celebrated at the Church of the Holy Trinity of the Russian MISSIA of the Russian Patriarchate, which is located in new Jerusalem, not very far from the northwest side of New Gate.

The Divine Liturgy was officiated by H.H.B. our Father and Patriarch of Jerusalem Theophilos with the co-celebration of their Eminences, Metropolitan Isychios of Kapitolias, the Archbishops Aristarchos of Constantina, Theodosios of Sebastia, Metropolitan Joachim of Helenoupolis and Archbishop Aristovoulos of Madaba, Hagiotaphite Hieromonks, the Head of the Russian MISSIA Archimandrite Alexander and other Priests and Archdeacon Mark. The chanting was delivered by the choir of the MISSIA and the Service was attended by many faithful Christians, the Russian Ambassador in Israel and Palestine and the representative of the Latin Patriarchate and the Custody of the Holy Land.

Before the Holy Communion His Beatitude delivered the following Sermon:

“O Holy Sion, thou Mother of all the Churches of God, in thee in fiery likeness did the Comforter Spirit come down on the Apostles with awesome descent. So rejoice now and celebrate this day of Pentecost longed-for by all the world, and keep festival with us in joy” (Pentecostarion, Friday of Pentecost, Matins, Praises, Troparion 3).

Beloved Brethren in Christ,

Noble Christians,

The grace of the Holy and Life-giving Spirit has gathered us all in this Holy Church of the Holy Trinity, to co-celebrate in Doxology and Eucharist the life-giving and all-mighty Spirit, the One Person of the God of Trinity, Who is of the same honour, essence and glory with the Father and the Son.

The Mother of all the Churches, the Holy Zion, rejoices today because it was here that the Comforter Spirit came down to the Apostles in the form of tongues of fire, as the hymnographer says: “On this day the working of Thy Holy Spirit the Comforter came upon Thine Apostles’ choir, O Lord; and He showed them forth wise in divine knowledge. For, behold, He filled them completely and abundantly with that most blessed of doctrines taught by Thee. We, therefore, glorify Thy saving dispensation, O Friend of man, O my Jesus, Al-mighty Lord, Thou divine Saviour of our souls” (Tuesday of Pentecost, Vespers, Aposticha 1).

The power of the All-holy Spirit, which is common in all three Persons of the Holy Trinity, is no other than the grace, which the Apostles received, from the fulness of God the Word, our Saviour Jesus Christ, as Saint John the Evangelist says: “And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace. For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ” (John 1:16-17).

Christ set the Apostles first in His Church (1 Cor. 12:28). And having become the vessels of the shedding of the gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Apostles became the foundation stone of the structure of the Church, while Christ is its cornerstone. And the Church is the dwelling place of God in the Holy Spirit, as Saint Paul preaches: “And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief cornerstone; In whom all the building fitly framed together groweth unto a holy temple in the Lord: In whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God through the Spirit” (Ephesians 2:20-22).

It is noteworthy that the Lord promised to the Apostles the sending of the Holy Spirit, both before His Passion on the Cross and after His Resurrection. According to the testimony of Saint John the Evangelist, Jesus told His Disciples right after the Last Supper: “And I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter, that He may abide with you forever” (John 14:16). And after His Resurrection, the Lord said to the Apostles: “And, behold, I send the promise of my Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high” (Luke 24:49).

The Promise of God the Father is no other than the Comforter, namely the Holy Spirit, Whose divine power was going to be given as armour to the Apostles.

Precisely this divine power from on high, namely the power of the Comforter Spirit is the one Who “holdeth together the whole institution of the Church”, as the hymnographer says. “The Holy Spirit provideth all things; He gusheth forth prophesy; He perfecteth the priesthood; He hath taught wisdom to the illiterate. He hath shown forth the fishermen as theologians. He holdeth together the whole institution of the Church. Wherefore, O Comforter, one in essence and throne with the Father and the Son, glory be to Thee” (Saturday Vespers of Pentecost, Troparion 3).

And according to Saint John Damascene, the Holy Spirit makes “luminous the children of the Church”. And this is so, because, as Saint Gregory, the Theologian says, “the enlightenment, is the brightness of the souls…denaturation of light, and abolishment of darkness”. “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12) the Lord says.

And being the body of Christ (Col. 1:24), the Church has the light of life, while its members are called by Saint Paul, in order to walk as children of light (Eph. 5:8). And this, because the members of the Church, namely of the body of Christ, are according to Apostle Peter “a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light” (1 Peter 2:9).

This “marvellous light” is the Grace of the Spirit of our Saviour Chris, which was foretold by the Prophets and shone forth through the Apostles. “Now the Lord is that Spirit: and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty” (2 Cor. 3:17), Saint Paul preaches. This liberty, which we have “in Christ Jesus” (Gal. 2:4) is the mindset of the Church.

And this mindset is the power of the Holy Spirit, which gathers together and

sustains the unity of the One Holy Catholic and Apostolic Church of ours, namely the brotherly Orthodox Churches of the same doctrines.

This witness of unity we testify along with the brotherly Orthodox Churches through this festive Holy Eucharistic gathering, on this joyful day of the inspiration of the Holy Spirit at the Upper Room of Jerusalem, hearkening to Saint Paul's advice:

"I beseech you…with all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love; Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace" (Eph. 4:1-3).

The All-holy Spirit – according to the hymnographer – "Filleth with tranquillity man's heart and spirit" (Matins, Ode 1, Iambic Canon, Troparion 3). Therefore, in David's words, we chant: "take not thy Holy Spirit from me" (Psalm 51:11), we beseech Thee, Lord, Friend of man.

And along with the hymnographer, let us say: "Of old, the tongues were confounded because of the audacity in the building of the tower, but now the tongues are made wise for the sake of the glory of the Divine knowledge. There, God condemned the impious because of their offence; and here, Christ hath enlightened the fishermen by the Spirit. At that time the confusion of tongues was wrought for punishment, but now the concord of tongues hath been inaugurated for the salvation of our souls" (Saturday Vespers of Pentecost, Aposticha Glory; both now).

By the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, through the intercessions of the Most Blessed Theotokos and Ever-Virgin Mary and of Your Apostles, Christ our God, have mercy on us. Amen. Many Happy returns!"

After the Divine Liturgy, there was a small reception at the MISSIA office, which was followed by a meal, at the presence of the Russian Ambassador in Ramallah and other officials. During the meal His Beatitude delivered the following address:

"Dear Father Alexander,

Respected Members of the Russian Diplomatic Service,

Your Eminences,

Your Graces,

Dear Fathers,

Beloved Monastics,

Sisters and Brothers,

As we join you today for this blessed feast, we recall the words that we sing at this time:

When the Most High came down

and confounded tongues of men at Babel,

he divided the nations.

When He dispensed the tongues of fire,

He called all to unity,

and with one voice we glorify the Most Holy Spirit.

(Kontakion of the Feast of Pentecost)

We have just demonstrated in a tangible way the oneness of our Orthodox Church in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ in the celebration of the Divine Liturgy. This oneness that finds its expression in the sharing of the common Chalice is the gift of the Holy Spirit, who is the Comforter, and who governs the whole life of the Church. In this way, we live in our own day the same unbroken unity that was given to the Church at Pentecost.

We see in our world the phenomenon of economic, technological, and entrepreneurial globalization. So much activity on which our life depends is exercised at an international level. But we Christians cannot forget that we live our own universal life. We too occupy the oikumene. We are truly global. This is because the Church lives the life of the Holy Spirit, and this life is the universal gift to humankind. It is available to all, open to all, a free gift to all.

We know this because as Christians generally and as Orthodox, in particular, we have a mission to the whole world – a global mission if you like – to be living martyria to the truth of God and the light of the Holy Spirit which we have received from the Apostles. This truth is the wellspring of eternal life and salvation for all humankind, and this truth is of ultimate importance for all peoples.

This is why our unity – the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost – is crucial, for our unity is itself both a fruit and a witness to the truth of God. In all things, we must

endeavour to overcome our human weaknesses and temptations that threaten our unity, and allow the Holy Spirit to enlighten our minds and dwell in our hearts. Before we can show this to anyone else, we must live this in the life of the Church, and we are called to do everything in our power to overcome any anomalies of Church life that our human weakness and sinfulness can so easily cause.

It is incumbent upon us all, the Orthodox faithful, as well as the leaders of our Orthodox Churches, to place ourselves under the obedience of the unity of the Holy Spirit. In a world that is torn apart by human divisions, fear, prejudice, and selfishness, the Church must live a different life if we are to be able to carry out our mission.

This is important for Churches in traditionally Orthodox countries as it is for Orthodox Churches in multi-cultural, multi-religious, and multi-ethnic societies. We all have the unique and challenging responsibility to follow faithfully in the footsteps of the Apostles by the living truth that has been given to us by God and expressed in our own unity. May God continue to bestow His grace upon us that we may be faithful to this vocation, so that we may make every effort to maintain the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace (Eph. 4:3).

We take this opportunity to wish His Excellency Vladimir Putin, the President of the Russian Federation, health, happiness, and strength in his leadership. We acknowledge with deep gratitude his commitment to the support of the Christian presence in the Holy Land.

We would also like to express our fraternal love in Christ for our brother His Holiness Patriarch Kyrill of Moscow and All Russia and wish Him many years in His primatial ministry. The country of Russia and its peoples have had a long and close relationship with the Holy Land for centuries, and we cherish the bond of unity that we enjoy.

Thank you.”

The feast of the Holy Spirit was also celebrated at the Church of the Holy Trinity in Toubas of north Samaria, led by His Eminence Archbishop Theophanes of Gerassa, with the participation of many faithful Christians.

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