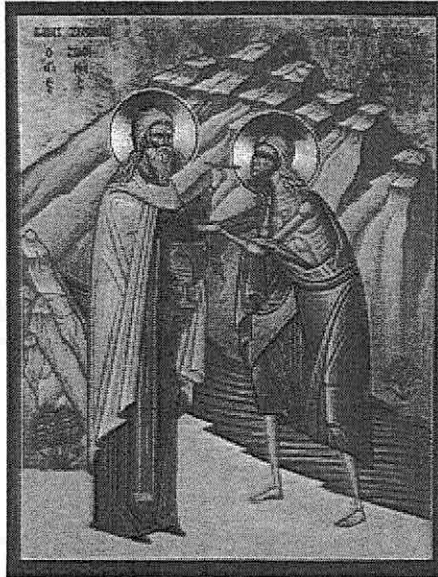




St Mary of Egypt

Memory celebrated 1 April and 5th Sunday of Great Lent



One of the most celebrated (and discussed) saints in the Orthodox pantheon, Mary of Egypt has a long history. Scholars attribute the earliest known version of her legend to Sophronios, Patriarch of Jerusalem (+ 639 A.D.). Written first in Greek, it appeared later in Latin, French, Spanish, Dutch, Portuguese, Italian, German, Norwegian, English, Armenian, Ethiopian, Syrian and Ukrainian translations. Immensely popular throughout the Middle Ages, both in the East and West, the haunting figure of Mary of Egypt is known also in modern literature.

Dostoevsky mentions her in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), James Joyce in *Ulysses* (1922). The subject of a poem by the American poet John Berryman, she is named in its title, No 47: April Fool's Day or Saint Mary of Egypt (1964). Along with this "funny title," the poem's final two verses note that Mary's feast day falls on April 1.

*We celebrate her feast with our caps on,
whom God has not visited.*

The poet suggests that unlike Mary, whom God "visited," some of us wear a "fool's cap."

In addition to April 1, this saint is also commemorated in the Orthodox Church on the Fifth Sunday and Thursday of Lent.

As indicated by her name, Mary was born in Egypt. When she was twelve years old, she ran away from home. She went to Alexandria, the cosmopolitan city founded and named for the world conqueror born in Macedonia. There the runaway girl became a prostitute. For seventeen years Mary led a licentious life on the streets of that busy Mediterranean seaport. She enjoyed the life she had chosen. Money did not interest her. Mary had, she confessed, "an irresistible passion for wallowing in the mud."

One year, she encountered some young men down by the harbour wishing to venerate the Holy Cross in Jerusalem, the young men were about to sail to the Holy Land. Mary, always ready for adventure, joined them. She had no money. So she offered herself as payment for her passage. The young men accepted her offer.

On arrival in Jerusalem, the pilgrims from Alexandria went to the great church to venerate the Cross. (It had been discovered in 326 AD by Saint Helen.) Out of curiosity, Mary joined the procession with her fellow-travellers. Unlike them, however, she could not step across the threshold into the church. She tried repeatedly, but each time invisible hands held her back.

After Mary's companions entered the church, she remained alone, outside in the courtyard,

frustrated and weeping. Suddenly the thought crossed her mind that it was her dissolute life which prevented her from entering the church. Mary then noticed an ikon of the Theotokos. Falling on her knees before it, she appealed to the Mother of God to help her enter the church. Always as compassionate as her son, the Theotokos granted Mary's request.

After venerating the Holy Cross, Mary returned to the ikon to thank the Theotokos for the mercy and grace given her. As she stood in front of the ikon, Mary heard a mysterious voice, instructing her to cross the Jordan. She obeyed the voice.

En route to the river, she met a Christian who gave her three loaves of bread. By nightfall Mary reached the Church of Saint John the Baptist, located near the Jordan. When she had washed her face in the sacred water, she returned to the church and received Holy Communion. She then ate half of one of the three loaves of bread and drank water from the Jordan.

The next morning, Mary found a boat and crossed over into the desert on the other side. She was at that time twenty one years old. She spent the rest of her life in the wilderness. For forty-seven years Mary lived in total isolation from the world. Until the day a monk named Zosimas found her, she had neither seen nor talked with any human being.

Zosimas was a holy man much honoured for "the purity of his way of life and the fervour of his repentance." For fifty three years, since childhood, he had submitted himself to a strict ascetic discipline. Although he had attained spiritual perfection, Zosimas had the uneasy thought that somewhere there was someone who surpassed him spiritually. He decided he must somehow find that person.

Zosimas therefore entered the Monastery of Saint John the Baptist, near the Jordan, "the holiest of rivers." This monastery was famous throughout Christian East for its austere rules and the extraordinary holiness of its community.

Every year, on the first Sunday of Lent, the monks of Saint John's crossed the Jordan and withdrew into the desert. Each monk went his separate way, to pray and fast alone until Palm Sunday. Zosimas also made this Lenten retreat.

After walking twenty days into the interior of the desert, he saw a human figure in the distance. Fearing it might be a demon, he made the sign of the cross. He then began to pursue the strange, black-skinned, white-haired creature, begging it to stop.

Mary stopped. Calling Zosimas by name, she asked him for a cloak to cover her naked, sun-baked body. That the stranger knew his name astonished the monk. At the same time, it revealed to him that she was a "vessel" of the Holy Spirit.

Mary and Zosimas prostrated themselves at the same moment. Each thus acknowledged the holiness of the other. Mary, respecting Zosimas because he was a priest, asked for his blessing. For his part, Zosimas, certain that Mary was a saint, asked her to bless him. "Your grace," he declared, "is greater than mine."

Zosimas had expected to find his spiritual superior among the monks in the monastery by the Jordan. Instead, he discovered a woman in the desert whose spiritual triumphs outshone his.

This was Mary's first contact with a human being in the forty- seven years since, led by the Theotokos, she had crossed the Jordan into the barren desert.

She wanted to know about Zosimas. She also questioned him about conditions in the world. Was

there peace? Did the church prosper? How were the Christians? Zosimas answered her questions. Reverently addressing Mary as "my spiritual mother," he begged for her intercessions in heaven.

While the monk continued to lie prostrate on the ground, Mary stood in silent prayer, her arms stretched toward heaven. When Zosimas lifted his eyes, to his amazement he saw Mary standing in the air, several feet above the ground.

The thought again crossed his mind that she must be a demon. Demons, it was well known, inhabited the desert wastelands. But Mary, reading his unspoken thought, reassured him. "Do not doubt," she said, "that I am only a woman and a sinner."

Impressed by Mary's insight and powers of discernment, Zosimas wanted more than ever to hear her story. Mary described to him her career as a prostitute for seventeen years on the streets of Alexandria, her conversion in Jerusalem and the experiences of forty-seven years in the desert.

Zosimas wondered how she had managed to survive alone in such a hostile environment. She explained. "For seventeen years I lived on the two and half loaves of bread I had brought with me. Although they became hard as rocks, I ate them, little by little. After that, I lived on plants growing in the desert."

The first seventeen years had been the hardest. "This was a time of daily struggles against temptations of all kinds. Songs of the devil, which I used to sing, echoed through my head. When I was thirsty and had no water to drink, I remembered the refreshing sweet wines of Egypt. Then I would turn my thoughts to the Theotokos. And a bright light would shine in front of me, chasing away all bad thoughts. It was always the Theotokos who restored peace to my soul."

In the course of their conversation, Mary quoted from the Scriptures, the "books of Moses, Job and Psalms." This surprised Zosimas. When he questioned her, she replied: "I never learned to read or write. For forty-seven years I have seen no one, not even an animal. I have had no teacher. God taught me these words."

An illiterate woman, Mary had been transfigured into a "theologian of the divine Word."

Convinced that he was in the presence of a person "who was pleasing to God," Zosimas tried again to kneel before her. But Mary, taking his hand, again did not let him.

Before they parted, she told him to keep her story a secret. Mary also asked Zosimas to return next year on Holy Thursday and to bring her Holy Communion. He should not however, cross the Jordan: they would meet on the other side.

The following year passed slowly for Zosimas. He was eager to see Mary again. On Holy Thursday, Zosimas prepared the consecrated bread and wine in a small chalice. He took a few dates, figs and soaked lentils and went to the bank of the Jordan. There he waited for Mary as she had instructed

Night fell. A full moon rose and shone in the sky. Mary still had not appeared. Zosimas sat and waited. No boat was in sight on either bank. He wondered how Mary would cross the river.

All of a sudden, Zosimas saw her standing on the opposite bank. Mary made the sign of the cross over the river. Then she walked across the Jordan. Her feet remained dry. It was as if Mary had crossed on dry land. (Saint Peter almost drowned when he tried to walk on water.)

After reciting the Creed and the Lord's Prayer, Mary received Holy Communion from Zosimas. It

was her first Communion in forty-seven years. Filled with joy, Mary then sang Saint Symeon's canticle:

"Now, Lord, let your servant depart in peace, according to your word. For my eyes have seen my Saviour."

Zosimas offered Mary the dates, figs and soaked lentils that he had brought. But she refused everything, taking nothing except three tiny grains of the soaked lentils.

Before parting from Zosimas, Mary asked him to return on Holy Thursday next year to their first meeting place in the desert. Mary then left him. She walked across the Jordan again and vanished from his sight into the desert. Zosimas had in vain tried to detain her longer.

The monk then returned to his monastery, "joyful and amazed." Nevertheless, he regretted one thing. Zosimas did not know her name. He was sorry that he had not asked the woman for it. At their next encounter he would ask.

The next year, on Holy Thursday, Zosimas crossed the Jordan and went to the place in the desert where he had first met Mary two years earlier. He found her dead. Her head faced the east. Her hands were crossed. On the ground beside her body were written these words: "Father Zosimas, bury the body of wretched Mary. Return to the earth that which is made of earth. Add dust to dust."

Mary our Holy Mother had died the year before, after Zosimas had given her Holy Communion. Now as he chanted appropriate hymns and prayers, Zosimas wept. Then with a small stick he began to dig a grave for Mary. But he made little progress. The ground was hard and he was a feeble old man.

Suddenly a large strong lion appeared and began digging the hard ground. His appearance startled Zosimas because Mary had told him that she had seen no animals in the desert. Soon the lion excavated a grave large enough for the saint. Zosimas then buried Mary. She was still wearing the cloak he had given her at their first meeting.

After the burial, the lion and monk parted. The lion bowed to Zosimas and disappeared into the desert. The monk returned to his monastery. Before dying at the age of one hundred, Zosimas had told the story of Mary of Egypt.

Later, patriarchs of Constantinople and emperors of Byzantium glorified Saint Mary of Egypt in sermons and hymns.

*"O holy transformation that brought you to a noble way of life.
O godlike love, O burning faith in God.
We bless you, Mary, worthy of great praise. And forever we exalt you above all others."*

Note:

Byzantine hymnographers address Mary as "holy mother." They describe her as "god-bearing," "god-minded," and victorious over Satan who deceived a "gullible little woman" (Eve). At the hands of Saint Mary of Egypt, Satan had endured disgrace, "defeat and ridicule."

Trusting in her powers of intercessions in heaven, and relying on her sympathetic understanding,

generations of Orthodox have turned in prayer to Saint Mary of Egypt.

"O Holy One, behold my sorrow and the groaning of my heart. See the narrowness of my life. Save me from my sin and have mercy on my soul, through your mediation before the Lord."

from **Saints and sisterhood: the lives of 48 Holy Women**

by Eva Catafygiotu Topping,
Light and Life Publishing, p 165-172

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Sts Raphael, Nicholas and Irene of Lesbos

Memory celebrated on the first Tuesday after Easter Sunday



Apolytikon

Having contended on Lesbos for the sake of Christ God, you have sanctified the island since the discovery of your sacred relics, O blessed ones; for what reason we honour you, O God-bearing Raphael, together with Nicholas and virgin Irene, as our divine protectors and intercessors with the Lord.

Kontakion

Let all of us honour as our protectors and miracle-workers the holy Martyrs who manifestly contended for Christ. Whose relics were hidden under the earth for many years, and who have manifested themselves to us in wondrous ways, Raphael, Nicholas and Irene, as well as those who contended with them in a godly-minded manner.

Megalynarion

Let us honour with hymns the Hosiomartyrs of Christ, divine Raphael and venerable Nicholas, together with Irene, the guardians of Lesbos, for helping all.

The first and most important lesson for unbelievers is that God,
Whom we venerate and worship,
"... is not the God of the dead, but of the living" (Matthew 22:32)

Sts Raphael, Nicholas and Irene suffered martyrdom by the Turks on the island of Lesbos (also called Mytilene) on April 9 1463 AD, after the fall of Constantinople. St Raphael was the Abbot of Karyes near the village of Thermi on the island. St Nicholas was a Deacon at the monastery, and St Irene was the 12-year-old daughter of the major of Thermi. The three saints were at the monastery with the village teacher and St Irene's father when the Turks raided it.

These saints were unknown for about 500 years after their martyrdoms during the Turkish occupation of Lesbos. In 1959 the three saints appeared to the people on Lesbos in dreams and visions. They guided excavations of their own graves, called people to repentance, and cured many kinds of diseases.

The saints revealed how they were cruelly tortured at the monastery, calling it a "second Golgotha" (in the words of St Raphael). St Raphael's torture ended when his head was sawn off. St Nicholas died of heart failure when he was being tortured. St Irene was tortured in front of her father and burnt alive in a clay cask, where her charred bones were later found. The teacher's head was cut off and placed between his legs when he was buried. A great deal of blood was shed at the monastery; the saints were martyred for the sake of their Christian faith and Fatherland.

Found amongst these excavation was St Raphael's round metallic Enkopion with a low relief of Christ Pantocrator on it. Orthodox Bishops wear Enkopions externally on the breast.

Details of the lives of these saints, and miraculous cures and visions can be found in a book by Constantine Cavarnos titled "Saints Raphael, Nicholas and Irene of Lesbos", Modern Orthodox Saints, vol 10. Published in 1994 (second printing) by the Institute for Byzantine and Modern Greek Studies, 111 Gilbert Road Belmont, Massachusetts 02178 USA.(currently out of print)

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

Virgin-Martyrs Sts Agape, Irene and Chione (304 AD)

Memory Celebrated April 16

Virgin-Martyrs Sts. Agape, Irene and Chione were young women from Saloniki. During Maximian's persecution they left their homes and went to live on a nearby mountain to follow lives of prayer, where they were arrested under Diocletian in late 303. When they were brought before the magistrate, they refused to eat sacrificial food and stated that they would prefer to die than do so. Agape and Chione, the older two, were sentenced to be burnt alive. Irene, because of her youth, was sentenced to imprisonment. After the death of the other two, Irene was again cross-examined and admitted that she possessed books of the Scriptures and refused once again to eat sacrificial food. She was sentenced to be sent naked into the soldiers' brothel, however, no man dared to approach her. She too was eventually burnt alive. This was recorded in her Acts as 1 April, but the feast of the three Virgin-Martyrs together is 16 April.

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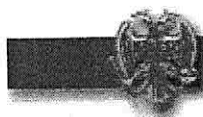


St Alexandra

Commemorated April 21

Martyr St Alexandra, the Empress and wife of Emperor Diocletian, was so impressed by the courage and martyrdom of St George that she became a Christian and fell under the same persecution. She also was condemned to be beheaded but when she arrived at the place of execution she asked to be allowed to sit down. Her request was granted. She sat down and died quietly before the executioners could carry out their task. Her feast day is 21 April.

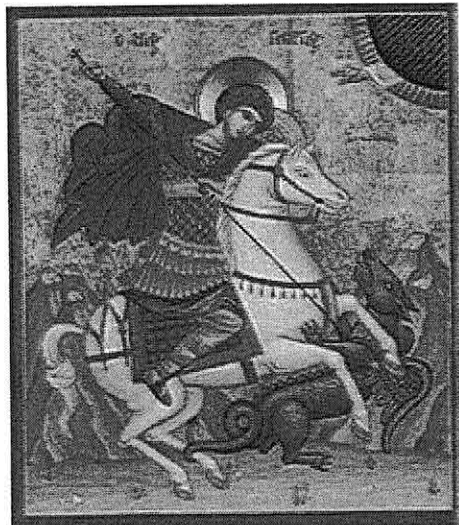
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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

St George the Great Martyr

Commemorated April 23



Very little is known about St. George the Megalomartyros, but he was one of the saints revered very early by the Church. He was born and lived in Cappadocia and was persecuted under the Emperor Diocletian. It is likely but not certain that he was a soldier and was renowned for his courage in the area, where he suffered various tortures, and was finally beheaded at Diospolis (Lydda) in Palestine. Many soldiers were converted to Christianity by witnessing the martyrdom of St. George. It is not quite clear how St. George came to be specially chosen as the patron saint of England, but it seems likely this occurred during the English crusades late in the 11th century or the early part of the 12th century.

In the Greek the name George is derived from a word meaning husbandman so in the texts for the day there are constant references to St George as a spiritual husbandman, scattering the seed of the Word and cultivating the barren ground. His feast day is 23 April.

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The Life and Work of St. Mark the Apostle and Evangelist

Commemorated April 25



In the Acts of the Apostles we learn that Mark, the son of Maria, lived in Jerusalem during the early formative years of the Church. His mother was one of the first members of the Church, and it appears that she was a person of means. This can be assumed from the description of her home which was decorated with columns, and which had large facilities capable of receiving great numbers of the followers of Jesus (Acts 12.12).

This is the same house where Peter met his other brethren, after being miraculously freed by the angel of God from jail, and where he baptised Mark into the new faith. Peter, in his first letter (1st Epistle 5:13) refers to Mark as his "son", although there is not any apparent relationship between them. In Colossians 4:10 it

is shown that Mark was the "nephew of Barnabas", a Levite from Cyprus.

The first direct mentioning of Mark is in the Acts 12:25. There, prior to the description of the first apostolic voyage of Paul and Barnabas, the two return to Antioch after delivering supplies sent by the Christian brethren to the Christians of Jerusalem. There with them was "John who is also called Mark". Given that the assistance had been sent at the time when the Emperor was Claudius Caesar, the trip of Mark to Antioch took place during the 15th or 16th year from the Resurrection of our Lord.

A little later, directed by the Holy Spirit, Paul and Barnabas, taking with them Mark, arrive in Salamis, Cyprus, where after they cross the island arrive in the city of Paphos. There takes place the conversion to Christianity of the first Roman official, Sergius Paulus.

Mark accompanied Paul and Barnabas in their second missionary journey, and again followed Barnabas when he visited Cyprus to teach about Christ. More information about Mark comes to us in the letters of St. Paul.

Ten or twelve years later, as we read in the Epistle of Paul to the Colossians (4:10) and again in Philemon (6:24) Mark is with Peter in Rome, among the few who stood by the Apostle during those trying days.

Orthodox ecclesiastical tradition has it that St Mark came to Alexandria in the year 42 and established the Church of Alexandria, and was its first bishop for 22 years.

St Mark died the death of a martyr while he was being pulled through the streets of Alexandria by a pagan mob, and was buried in a nearby village.

In the year 828 AD, Venetian merchants transported his relics to Venice, and since then he has been considered as the protector saint of this city.

St Mark the Evangelist is commemorated in the Orthodox Church on 25th April.

Text and graphics are from the [Greek Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria website](#).

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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

All Saints Day

Commemorated first Sunday after Pentecost

by the Late Rev N. Patrinos

The Orthodox Church celebrates the memory of All Saints on the first Sunday after Pentecost. The need for setting aside one day in the ecclesiastical calendar to honour 'all saints' was felt right after the Persecutions. Obviously, and in spite of the fact that the Church was already celebrating the memory of well-known saints, it was impossible to know individually and by name, all those who gave themselves for the faith in Christ. And though the day of commemoration varied among the various local Churches, the faithful of the Christian Church at large felt the need not only to commemorate the life and martyrdom of those athletes of the new faith, but also to establish a communion with them.

The present day of celebration of the feast of All Saints goes back at least to St. John Chrysostom, who in one of his homilies in Constantinople says that the commemoration of the Martyrs of the Universal Church was observed on the first Sunday after Pentecost. All Saints Day has always been observed not only as an opportunity for the Church to project to her living membership Christian ideals to be emulated, but also as an opportunity to establish a unity between the Triumphant Church of Christ in heaven and His militant one on earth.

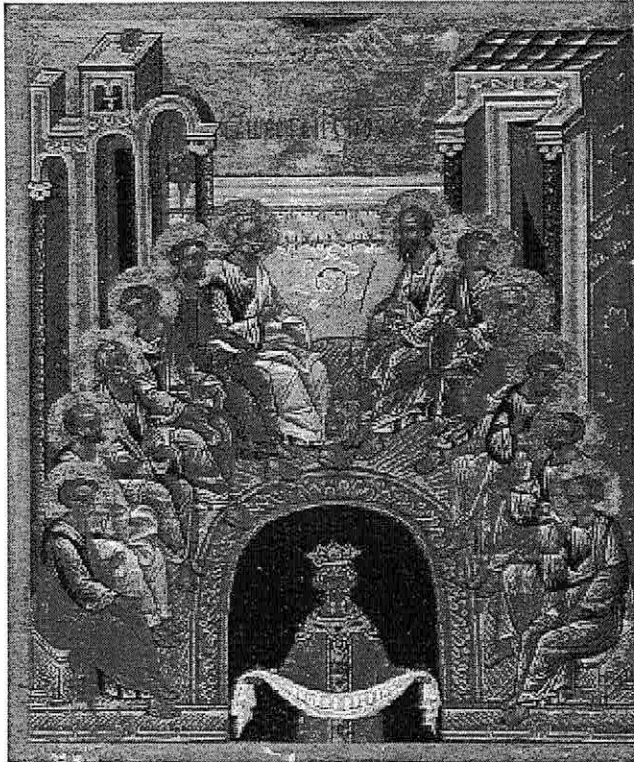
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GREEK ORTHODOX ARCHDIOCESE OF AUSTRALIA

Pentecost - Trinity Sunday

by Fr Thomas Hopko



"When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting.

Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them.

And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

And there were dwelling in Jerusalem Jews, devout men, from every nation under heaven.

And when this sound occurred, the multitude came together, and were confused, because everyone heard them speak in his own language.

Then they were all amazed and marvelled, saying to one another, Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born?

Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs – we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God" (Acts 2:1-11).

Tradition says that to fulfil the prophecy of Joel (Joel 2: 28-29), the Holy Spirit descended not only on the twelve chosen Apostles, but also upon all those who were with them "with one accord in one place" (Acts 2:1), that is, on the whole Church. This is why in Icons of Pentecost there are represented Apostles not belonging to the twelve - Apostle Paul (sitting with Apostle Peter at the head of the circle of Apostles), and among the seventy, Luke the Evangelist and Mark the Evangelist (Ouspensky and Lossky, **The Meaning of Icons**, Rev Ed, SVS, NY, 1982, p208).

**And there appeared to them divided tongues as of fire ...
and they were filled with the Holy Spirit**

So that by gradual increase ... and progress from glory to glory, the light of the Trinity might shine upon the more illuminated ... for this reason it was, I think, that He gradually came to dwell in the disciples. He measured Himself out to them according to their capacity to receive Him: at the beginning of the gospel, after the Passion, after the Ascension, making perfect their powers, being breathed upon them and appearing in fiery tongues ... You see lights breaking upon us, gradually, and knowledge of such order of theology, as is better for us to maintain, neither proclaiming things too suddenly nor yet keeping them hidden to the end ... He said that all things should be taught us by the Spirit Himself, made clear at a later time, when, such knowledge

would be seasonable and capable of being received after our Savior's restoration; when it would no longer be received with incredulity because of its marvelous character. For what greater thing than this did either He promise, or the Spirit teach ... If He is not to be worshiped, how can He deify me by baptism?... And indeed from the Spirit comes our new birth, and from the new birth our new creation, and from the new creation our deeper knowledge of the dignity of Him from whom it is derived ... Look at these facts: Christ is born; the Spirit is His forerunner. He leads Him up. He works miracles; the Spirit accompanies them. He ascends; the Spirit takes His place (St. Gregory the Theologian, Fifth Theological Oration, 26-29).

The Promise of Pentecost

"On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink.

"He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water".

But this He spoke concerning the Spirit, whom those believing in Him would receive; for the Holy Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified.

Therefore many from the crowd, when they heard this saying, said, "Truly this is the Prophet".

Others said, "This is the Christ", but some said, "Will the Christ come out of Galilee? Has not the Scripture said that the Christ comes from the seed of David and from the town of Bethlehem, where David was?"

So there was a division among the people because of Him.

Now some of them wanted to take Him, but no one laid hands on Him.

Then the officers came to the chief priests and Pharisees, who said to them, "Why have you not brought Him?"

The officers answered, "No man ever spoke like this Man!" Then the Pharisees answered them, "Are you also deceived? Have any of the rulers or the Pharisees believed in Him? But this crowd that does not know the law is accursed".

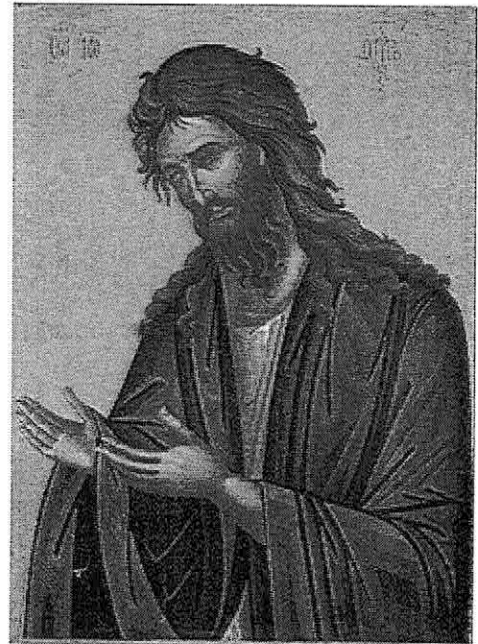
Nicodemus (he who came to Jesus by night, being one of them) said to them, "Does our law judge a man before it hears him and knows what he is doing?"

They answered and said to him, "Are you also from Galilee? Search and look, for no prophet has arisen out of Galilee" (John 7:37-52).

Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, "I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life" (John 8:12).

If anyone thirsts, let him come to me and drink...

Those who come to the divine preaching and give heed to the faith must manifest the desire of thirsty people for water, and kindle in themselves a similar longing; so they will be able, very carefully, to retain what is said ... For to show that we ought ever to thirst and hunger, He said 'Blessed are they who hunger and thirst after righteousness' (Matt.5:6) ... Elsewhere He calls it, 'eternal life,' but here, 'living water.' He calls that 'living' which ever works: for the grace of the Spirit, when It has entered into the mind and has been established, springs up more than any fountain, does not fail, never becomes empty ... He has represented its abundance by the expression 'springing' ... Consider the wisdom of Stephen, the tongue of Peter, the vehemence of Paul: how nothing bore, nothing withstood them, not the anger of multitudes, not the risings up of tyrants, not the plots of the devils, not daily deaths, but as rivers borne along with a great rushing



sound, so they went on their way hurrying all things with them ... When He was about to send them (after the crucifixion) He said, 'Receive the Holy Spirit' (John 20:22) ... and then they wrought miracles (St. John Chrysostom, Homily 51 on John 7).

In Praise of Salvation and Creation

"O God, You are my God; early will I seek You; my soul thirsts for You; my flesh longs for You in a dry and thirsty land where there is no water. So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory. Because your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips shall praise You. Thus I will bless You while I live; I will lift up my hands in Your name. My soul shall be satisfied as with marrow and fatness, and my mouth shall praise You with joyful lips. When I remember You on my bed. I meditate on You in the night watches. Because You have been my help, therefore in the shadow of Your wings I will rejoice. My soul follows close behind You; Your tight hand upholds me" (Psalm 63:1-8).

The Holy Spirit provides every gift: He inspires prophecy, perfects the priesthood, grants wisdom to the illiterate, makes simple fishermen to become wise theologians, and establishes perfect order in the organization of the Church. Wherefore, O Comforter, equal in nature and majesty with the Father and the Son, glory to You... (from The Bible and Holy Fathers for Orthodox ed. J. Manley, Monastery Books, Menlo Park, 1990, pp. 136-9).

In the days of old, pride brought confusion of tongues to the builders of the tower of Babel, but now the diversity of tongues enlightenend the minds and gave knowledge for the glory of God. There, God punished infidels for their sin, while here Christ enlightened fishermen through the Spirit; there the confusion of tongues was for the sake of vengeance, while here there was variety so that voices could be joined in unison for the salvation of our souls (Stichera of Pentecost for Vespers, pp. 891, 894).

Pentecost - The Descent of the Holy Spirit

In the Old Testament **Pentecost** was the feast which occurred fifty days after Passover. As the passover feast celebrated the exodus of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt, so Pentecost celebrated God's gift of the ten commandments to Moses on Mount Sinai.

In the new covenant of the Messiah, the passover event takes on its new meaning as the celebration of Christ's death and resurrection, the "exodus" of humanity from this sinful world to the Kingdom of God. And in the New Testament as well, the pentecostal feast is fulfilled and made new by the coming of the "new law", the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the disciples of Christ.

"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly a sound came from heaven like the rush of a mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, distributed as resting upon each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:1-4).

The Holy Spirit, that Christ had promised to his disciples, came on the day of Pentecost (see John 14:26, 15:26; Luke 24:49; Acts 1:5) The apostles received "the power from on high", and they began to preach and bear witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, the King and the Lord. This moment has traditionally been called the birthday of the Church.

In the liturgical services of the feast of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated together with the full revelation of the divine Trinity: Father and Son and Holy Spirit. The fulness

of the Godhead is manifested with the Spirit's coming to humanity, and the Church hymns celebrate this manifestation as the final act of God's self-disclosure and self-donation to the world of His creation. For this reason Pentecost Sunday is also called **Trinity Sunday** in the Orthodox tradition. Often on this day the Icon of the Holy Trinity - particularly that of the three angelic figures who appeared to Abraham, the forefather of the Christian faith - is placed in the center of the church. This Icon is used with the traditional **pentecostal Icon** which shows the tongues of fire hovering over the Virgin Mary and the Twelve Apostles, the original prototype of the Church, who are themselves sitting in unity surrounding a symbolic image of "cosmos" (the world).

On Pentecost we have the final fulfillment of the mission of Jesus Christ and the first beginning of the messianic age of the Kingdom of God (mystically present in this world in the Church of the Messiah). For this reason the 50th day stands as the beginning of the era which is beyond the limitations of this world, fifty being, that number which stands for eternal and heavenly fulfillment in Jewish and Christian mystical piety: seven times seven, plus one.

Thus, Pentecost is called an **apocalyptic** day, which means the day of final revelation. It is also called an **eschatological** day, which means the day of the final and perfect end (in Greek *eschaton* means the end). For when the Messiah comes and the Lord's Day is at hand, the "last days" are inaugurated in which "**God declares: ... I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh**". This is the ancient prophecy to which the Apostle Peter refers in the first sermon of the Christian Church which was preached on the first Sunday of Pentecost (see Acts 2:17, Joel 2:28-32).

Once again it must be noted that the feast of Pentecost is not simply the celebration of an event which took place centuries ago. It is the celebration of what must happen and does happen to us in the Church today. We all have died and risen with the Messiah-King, and we all have received His Most Holy Spirit. We are the "temples of the Holy Spirit". God's Spirit dwells in us (see Romans 8; 1 Corinthians 2-3, 12; 11 Corinthians 3; Galatians 5; Ephesians 2-3). We, by our own membership in the Church, have received "the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit" in the sacrament of chrismation. Pentecost has happened to us.

The **Divine Liturgy of Pentecost** recalls our baptism into Christ with the verse from Galatians again replacing the Thrice-Holy Hymn. Special verses from the psalms also replace the usual antiphonal psalms of the liturgy. The epistle and gospel readings tell of the Spirit's coming to humanity. The **kontakion** sings of the reversal of Babel as God unites the nations into the unity of his Spirit. The **troparion** proclaims the gathering of the whole universe into God's net through the work of the inspired apostles. The hymns 'O Heavenly King' and 'We have seen the True Light' are sung for the first time since Easter, calling the Holy Spirit to "come and abide in us", and proclaiming that "we have received the heavenly Spirit". The church building is decorated with flowers to show that God's divine Breath comes to renew all creation as the "life-creating Spirit". The word for Spirit, breath and wind in Hebrew is **ruah**.

Blessed are You, O Christ our God, who has revealed the fishermen as most wise by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit: through them You did draw the world into Your net. O Lover of Humanity, Glory to You (**Troparion**).

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, He divided the nations. But when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all to unity. Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the All-Holy Spirit! (**Kontakion**)

The Great Vespers of Pentecost evening features three long prayers at which the faithful kneel for the first time since Easter. The Monday after Pentecost is the feast of the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church, and the Sunday after Pentecost is the feast of All Saints. This is the logical liturgical sequence since the coming of the Holy Spirit is fulfilled in the faithful by their

becoming saints, and this is the very purpose of the creation and salvation of the world. "Thus says the Lord: Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy, for I your God am holy" (Leviticus 11:44-45; I Peter 1:15-16).

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