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*Pentecost Sunday 2020*  
*Acts 2:1-11 & John 7:37-52;8:12*

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Today we celebrate the feast of Pentecost. This feast has several other names such as the Day of the Holy Trinity, the Descent of the Holy Spirit, or the Birth of Christ's Church! Pentecost brings us to the highest point of our Easter celebration. For, on Pentecost, we have the final fulfillment of Christ's mission and the birth of the Church. In our liturgical services, the coming of the Holy Spirit is celebrated together with the full revelation of the divine Trinity, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. Here too, we find the feasts of Passover and Pentecost are closely related.

The word Pentecost means "fifty days" after the Passover. The Christian Pentecost falls on the fiftieth day after Easter and the Jewish Passover. Passover was the feast day in which the Jewish people celebrated Giving the Law on Mount Sinai. With their promise to love God, He gave the tribes of Israel Ten Commandments as a guide. Being people of God meant relating both to Him and to their fellow humans as God intended, not in their limited thinking.

When the day of Pentecost had come, the Apostles were all together in one place. Suddenly a sound came from Heaven like the rush of a mighty wind and filled the house where they were sitting. And tongues as of fire appeared and rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit. . . (Acts 2.1–4. The apostles received "the power from on high," and they preached and bore witness to Jesus as the risen Christ, King, and Lord.

Pentecost is truly a celebration of the spiritual unity of all people belonging to the Church of Christ. In today's Kondak, we read, "When the Most High descended, He confused the tongues, dividing the nations; but when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all into Unity; wherefore, with one accord, we glorify the All-Holy Spirit." When God the Father gave the apostles the Holy Spirit, it established unity in the Church of Christ. The Holy Spirit brought together the disciples into a single spiritual body of Christ, and thus the Church was formed. On this day, the Church unites believers of all nationalities throughout the world with each other and Heaven. Everyone who heard the preaching of the Apostles on that day heard it in their native language. They were relating both to God and to their fellow humans as God intended.

Whenever we forget how limited we are and try to lead in our dealings with God, the outcome is a disaster. A good example is the story of the Tower of Babel in Gen 11. There we are told how people built a tower that would reach into Heaven. In this way, they would have access to God whenever they wanted; in this way, they could manipulate God. But in building the human bridge to Heaven, God came and created many languages. When communication was lost, they could not understand each other and could no longer work together.

Does the story of Babel sound like the story we read today from the Acts of the Apostles, where the disciples of Jesus spoke in other languages? The two stories are related. But Pentecost is not a repeat of Babel, Pentecost is a reversal of Babel.

At Babel, humans built a tower to God by their own effort, at Pentecost, it is God who creates a bridge to humans by sending the Holy Spirit. Babel was a human initiative, a human attempt, Pentecost is a Divine initiative, a sacred activity through the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Spirit descended in tongues of fire to burn all impurity and sinfulness from the hearts of all believers. The fiery flame of the Holy Spirit encourages us to strive for a burning sacrificial love for God and people, so our souls and hearts may shine with the light of grace. By tongues of fire, Christ's disciples were reborn and glowed from within with the joy of the Holy Spirit. If the Apostles had not received the Holy Spirit and had not lived in communion with the Spirit of God, the world would never have heard the Gospel. To inherit eternal life is not enough to go to Church on Sundays and to believe in Christ. To become saints, and to overcome the demons, it is necessary to get the power of the Holy Spirit. Christianity without the Holy Spirit is not orthodoxy.

On this festive day, we decorate our homes and churches traditionally with green branches of trees and flowers. This foliage reminds us that the feast of the Holy Spirit is the feast of Eternal life. More importantly, we must strive to beautify our hearts and souls to receive the power of God's spirit. Our soul must be clean and free. When we are about to receive a dear guest, we clean our house and prepare the best food. No one receives a guest with dirty dishes littering the kitchen. We must receive the Holy Spirit as the dearest guest. Let us cleanse our souls through repentance and prayer; let us fill our souls with the love of our neighbours and good deeds. Then the Holy Spirit will dwell in us.

Amen!