

PENTECOST

Acts 2:1-11
1Cor 12 :3-7;12-13
Jn 20:19-23

In his book 'Images of Hope' (2006), Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI reminds us that on Pentecost Sunday the Eastern Orthodox Church celebrates the Holy Trinity. On the next day they celebrate the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on the Apostles, and on the following Sunday, they celebrate All the Saints of the Church. This may seem strange, but this sequence celebrates the unity of persons that exists within the Holy Trinity that is expressed by the Holy Spirit. The Spirit is gifted to the Apostles in the Upper Room so that within the Church, the Mystical Body of Christ on earth, the members are caught up into the Holy Trinity and called to the unity that exists in the Holy Trinity.

In the Eastern Church Jesus Christ is the icon, the image, of the Father and of mankind. The Church is the icon of the Holy Spirit who shows us that the Church will be one when its members become united to God in whose image we have been created.

After the Ascension of Jesus the Apostles and other disciples gathered in the same Upper room where they shared the Last Supper with Jesus and where the risen Christ appeared on Easter evening when he sent them to go into the world under his authority. In that room they heard what sounded like a wind and saw what looked like tongues of fire. The tongues of fire descended on each of them causing them to be awed, stunned and devastated by the power of God in their lives. The Holy Spirit of truth would remind them of the teachings of Jesus and lead them into all truth. On that day they spoke in different languages in order to be able to communicate the good news of the Resurrection. This Apostolic Church was Catholic. It was universal – the chaos of language that followed the rejection of God at the Tower of Babel was reversed.

Yet there is more. On the Cross, Jesus entrusted his mother to St John and named her his own mother. In that Upper room surrounded by the Apostles was the Blessed Virgin Mary who herself had been overshadowed by the Holy Spirit when she conceived Jesus, the Word of God made flesh. Once again the Holy Spirit overshadows her as he overshadows the Apostles. The one who gave us the incarnate Son of God, becomes the mother of the mystical Body of Christ, the Church. Without her there would have been no Jesus Christ, and without her there would be no Church. She is the Mother of the Church.

As the mission of the Church expanded, this Universal, Apostolic Church gave birth to local Churches such as the Church in Rome, Ephesus, Corinth, Thessalonica and Philippi. These local churches were not a federation of churches. They were in unity with each other

because they were united to the belief and teaching of the Universal Church of the Apostles whom the Spirit empowers.

As Christians, is it 'me and Jesus' as a personal and individual relationship, or is it 'me and the Church'? Being Christian means allowing oneself to be caught up in the Church. We do, and must, have our own individual experience of God, but Catholics realise that while individual experiences of the Holy Spirit are a good thing, on their own they can be fleeting, subjective and unreliable. It was C S Lewis who said that what we think is a 'religious' experience may simply be the result of a very good dinner. It could be an emotion, or manufactured by drugs, a rousing speech, music, guilt, wishful thinking or even the power of evil.

Our individual experience of religion needs to be grounded in the more objective experience of the Church as a whole. We are able to say with St Paul that, "It is no longer I who live, but Christ who lives in me" (Gal 2:20), but it is "only within the Church that our individual experiences can be validated and it is only a Church with a reliable, historic, Scriptural, rational, Apostolic authority which can speak with the necessary authority to validate our subjective experiences." (Fr Longenecker; Patheos Blog: May 2015)

This Church is the one that began its mission at Pentecost, and we believe that despite its shortcomings, this Church continues to exist within the Church that is in communion with the Bishop of Rome, the successor of St Peter.

May you have a holy, blessed and spirit empowered Pentecost.

Msgr Harry Entwistle
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