

# THE CROSS AND PENTECOST

by  
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The Cross and Pentecost are inseparable in Orthodoxy. The connection between these two events forms the foundation – the entire paradigm – of our spirituality, liturgical life and theological reflection, and most especially, our theology of deification. It is only through this relationship that we can understand the many antinomies and even paradoxes of the spiritual life. This means that when God sends us a cross in our lives, it is to prepare us to receive the Holy Spirit; and likewise, when He sends us the grace and power of the Holy Spirit, it will be accompanied by a cross. This is so because God wishes us to be *inspired*, but *not* exalted (c.f. 2 Cor 12:7).

The inseparable connection between the Cross and Pentecost in Orthodoxy is based on both the eternal relationship of the Son and the Spirit, and their inseparability in the economy, that is, in the incarnation, ministry, death and resurrection of the Son of God. From all eternity, as we say in the Creed, the Son is "begotten of the Father," and the Holy Spirit "proceeds from the Father." The Holy Fathers further clarified that the Spirit proceeds *from* the Father *to* the Son, and *rests* in the Son, and is *manifested* from the Son to the Father. The Son and the Spirit dwell in one another from all eternity, and are always found together.

This eternal inseparability of the Son and the Spirit is manifested in the entire earthly life of the Son of God: the Spirit is present at Jesus' incarnation (overshadowing the Virgin Mary, Lk 1:35), leads the child Jesus to the temple (Lk 2:40), is upon Him as He reads in the synagogue (Lk 4:18), descends and rests on Him at His baptism (Lk 3:22), leads Him to the wilderness to be tempted (Lk 4:1), casts out devils (Mt 12:28), is present at His death on the Cross (at which Jesus, "breathed forth the Spirit", Jn 19:30), and brings about His Resurrection from the dead (e.g. Rom 8:11). And conversely, the Spirit is sent into the world by the Son: Jesus prays that the Comforter will come, to continue Christ's work, bringing His words into remembrance and even teaching the disciples directly (Jn 14:16,17,26; 15:26). The Spirit in turn is given by the Resurrected Christ: "And when he had said this, he breathed on them, and said to them, Receive the Holy Spirit" (Jn 20:22). The Son and the Spirit work together at all times; they are, in the words of St Irenaeus, the "two hands" of the Father.

Thus it is that in Orthodoxy, we stress not only the inseparability of the Cross and the Resurrection, but

of the Cross and Pentecost. True, the Cross – as well as all of Jesus' unique claims about Himself and His teaching – can only be understood in light of the Resurrection. The Resurrection confirmed who Jesus was, and all the claims He made about Himself. If there was no Resurrection from the dead, then Jesus' teaching and His death on the Cross would have been shrouded in ambiguity. Nevertheless, the Resurrection did not answer everything: even though Jesus appeared to His disciples for forty days after His resurrection from the dead – He forgave Peter, confirmed Thomas, etc. – the disciples still could not preach about it. Only after the descent of the Spirit on Pentecost did they have the power to preach the resurrection and baptize. Only after they had the Holy Spirit poured out on them did they continue Christ's work. Without the Holy Spirit, there is no Gospel.

In Orthodox Christianity, we expect all the blessings and good things and gifts of God, gifts which come through obedience and love. But we do not expect them without qualification. The one, all-encompassing Gift of God is His Son in the Spirit – and this gift cannot come without the Cross. Hence, the glory of Orthodoxy can never be a "get-rich" Gospel, nor that of any other this-world qualification, but rather the glory of Orthodoxy is a mature and grounded glory, a glory which transcends but does not avoid the misfortunes, disappointments, trials and tribulations of this life, but rather transforms them. It accepts the Cross; it does not flee from it. Neither did Christ avoid it. This is a spiritual truth: only in accepting the Cross is the Spirit given. In accepting the Cross, we are thereby filled with God's power; the result is Resurrection unto life.

The light of the Resurrection, the glory and gifts of God restore to humanity its authentic beauty. For this we prepare through asceticism and fasting for forty days, a period of self-denial, purification and death of the old man. But this is not done without the power of the Spirit and the light of the Resurrection. Thus we hear the Church sing, "Let us keep the fast with joy." Asceticism, joy and beauty are not mutually exclusive in Orthodoxy. On the contrary, they necessitate each other. This is the unique balance of our Holy Orthodox Tradition: the Cross, the Resurrection and Pentecost, inseparable, as God's great gift for the renewal of man. Thus, on the glorious Feast of Pascha, St. Gregory the Theologian exclaimed: "May He who rose again from the dead recreate me by the Spirit." May we also be so recreated.

