

# COME AND ABIDE IN US

by  
Hieromonk Calinic (Berger)

Orthodox Christianity *par excellence* is a “charismatic” form of Christianity, a life in the Holy Spirit. Every single service in the Orthodox Church – both communal and private – begins with an invocation of the Holy Spirit through the prayer “O Heavenly King.” The whole Church as well as each of the faithful is called to live in a perpetual Pentecost. “Where the Church is, there is the Holy Spirit. And where the Holy Spirit is, there is the Church,” wrote St Irenaeus in the second century. The Church inhales the Spirit (through invocation) and exhales the Spirit (through its blessings) in a continual breathing of divine life. In so doing, the Church shows its realization that the Spirit *rests* in the Church but is not *possessed* by it – the Church itself needs continual renewal through an unceasing invocation of the presence of the Spirit. The same is true for each individual Christian.

The presence of the Holy Spirit gives the Orthodox Church and its divine services the simultaneous feeling of intimacy and transcendence, of local familiarity and universal vision, of a single Apostolic experience of being in the presence of Christ which transcends time and place. Indeed, an element of timelessness accompanies all authentic Orthodox worship. This is so not only through our Holy Tradition, but precisely because Tradition manifests the Spirit, who Himself is outside of time and has deigned to be present within it. It is the presence of the Holy Spirit that is the ultimate criterion of Orthodoxy.

In Orthodox teaching, the Spirit is held to be never separated from the Son. Perhaps most unique about the Orthodox Church’s view of the Holy Spirit is the magnificent balance with which the Church sees (theologically) and experiences (liturgically, etc.) the simultaneous presence of the Son and the Spirit in all things. The Son and the Spirit show themselves as totally inseparable; the work of Christ is enabled by the Holy Spirit who incarnates Him, guides Him at every step of His human life and ministry, and raises Him from the dead (Rom 8:11). The Spirit is then poured out on the Church through the Son (Jn 15:26; 16:7; 20:22). This perspective is wonderfully summarized in the 13<sup>th</sup> century response of the Orthodox to the Latin proponents of the *filioque*: the Spirit proceeds from the Father and rests in the Son, and “shines forth” from the Son to the Father. The begetting of the Son and the procession of the Holy Spirit are not two sequential “acts” – they are simultaneous and internal to one another. Thus it is that, in Orthodox thought,

unity in the Holy Trinity is both *essential* (the Spirit being “consubstantial” with the Father and the Son) and *personal* (each of the Divine Persons knowing one another from within Himself, in an eternal mutual indwelling, or what the Fathers call “perichoresis”) simultaneously.

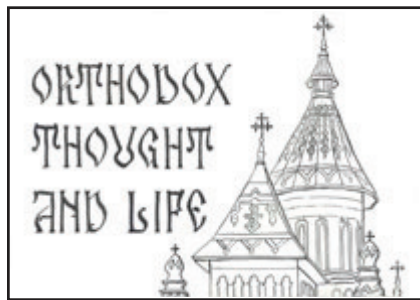
The beautiful balance of Orthodox Trinitarian thought has tremendous implications for the entire culture of the Orthodox Church in all of its manifestations: ecclesiological, liturgical, ascetical, artistic, etc. We remain hierarchical and charismatic simultaneously, because all of our sacraments are performed by Christ Himself, through the priest accompanied by the faithful, by the invocation of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit Himself is the source of both hierarchy and prophecy – and these two aspects of the Church co-exist in what could be called a Chalcedonian manner (“inconfusedly, unchangeably, indivisibly, inseparably”). Each Sunday

in the Orthodox Church is not only a commemoration of the Resurrection (a sharing of the sacrificed and glorified presence of Christ in the Eucharist), but is also a new Pentecost, the Spirit being called down not only on the gifts but on all those present.

Many images are used in the Holy Scriptures for the Holy Spirit: for example, wind, chrism, water, and fire. The Holy Spirit is a free, intimate, cleansing and transforming Divine Person. Most of all, He is “Fire issuing from Fire.” He descends in a unique, divine act on the day of Pentecost, as wind and fire, to establish the Church. Fire gives light, warmth and transforming energy. The Church and each Christian lives by this internal warmth and energy, which is the Holy Spirit. He is the source of all gifts (1 Cor 12), and by giving these gifts for us to use for each other, He “holds together the whole institution of the Church.” We are one Body – of Christ, because we have one Spirit – the Spirit of Christ (Rom 8:9), the Holy Spirit.

The Person of the Holy Spirit is mysterious. The Spirit reveals the Son, the Son brings us to the Father, but the Spirit Himself is never revealed. St Gregory the Theologian remarked that the Father was revealed in the Old Testament, the Son in the New, but the full revelation of the Spirit will take place only in the future age. Yet we can foretaste this now in this life. The Saints did precisely that. The Spirit “rests in the Saints” by grace as He rests in the Son by nature. Our goal as Christians is to become one with Christ and thereby also a “temple of the Holy Spirit” as St. Paul

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says (1 Cor 3:16) and as St Seraphim famously taught. The Spirit then brings us to the Father, as adopted sons, even praying for us: “the Spirit Himself makes supplication for us with groanings that cannot be uttered” (Rom 8:26). In other words, salvation in Orthodoxy is simply entering into the life of the Holy Trinity in the position of adopted sons: the Spirit is sent to us from the Father, rests in us and brings us back to the Father.

The constant invocation of the Holy Spirit in the Orthodox Church teaches us that His presence is not automatic but requires continual renewal through prayer and the struggle of self-purification. His presence is felt in those churches where the faithful are striving to talk to God, are struggling to know Him, follow His commandments in all things and have firmly committed themselves to a life in Christ of asceticism and prayer. In such places, the faithful “pull down” the Spirit into their midst. He “comes” and “abides” where invited and where He is welcome to stay. His energy and presence then become manifest: the church thrives with joy, humble enthusiasm and love. His holiness and tangible presence is felt. Hence our challenge is to always – at all times and in every circumstance, without fail – obey His gentle voice in our hearts. And this begins by taking seriously the words of the prayer “O Heavenly King”: *come and abide in us!*

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# THE GIFT OF THE SPIRIT IS AN ESCHATOLOGICAL REALITY

By Father Paul Florensky

People hardly know the Holy Spirit as a person, and then only in an incomplete, dim and confused fashion. It cannot be otherwise. For a full knowledge of the Holy Spirit would make all created being entirely spirit-bearing, entirely deified, and would confer a completely realized illumination. Then history would be ended; then the fullness of time would be at hand, and all waiting would be over; then there would indeed be no more time.

But as long as history continues, only instants of illumination by the Spirit are possible; only certain individuals at certain moments know the Paraclete, when they are raised above time into eternity.

Certainly, the Holy Spirit is indeed at work in the Church. But knowledge of the Spirit has always been a pledge or reward – at special moments and with exceptional people; and this is how it will be until ‘all is fulfilled’. That is why, when reading the Church’s writings, we cannot fail to be struck by something that seems strange at first but that later, in the light of what precedes, manifests its inner necessity. It is this: that all the holy fathers and mystical philosophers speak of the importance of the idea of the Spirit in the Christian world-view, but hardly any of them explains him-

self precisely and exactly. It is evident that the holy fathers know *something*; but what is even clearer is that this knowledge is so intimate, so hidden, without echo, ineffable, that they lack the power to express it in precise language.

Even Athanasius does not make clear the meaning of the ‘procession’ (*ekporevsis*) of the Spirit, as distinct from the ‘begottenness’ (*genesis*) of the Son. Of the three personal characteristics of the divine hypostases, ‘unbegottenness’, ‘begottenness’, ‘procession’, the first two are spiritually understandable, whereas the third represents only the sign of a certain spiritual experience that is still to come.

But the closer we draw to the End of History, the more do new, hitherto invisible roseate rays of the coming Day without evening appear on the domes of the holy Church.

Our characteristic attitude towards the Holy Spirit, it seems to me, is precisely one of expectation, of hope; a gentle and reconciling hope.

*From The Time of the Spirit – Readings Through the Christian Year. SVS Press, Crestwood NY, 1984, p. 163.*