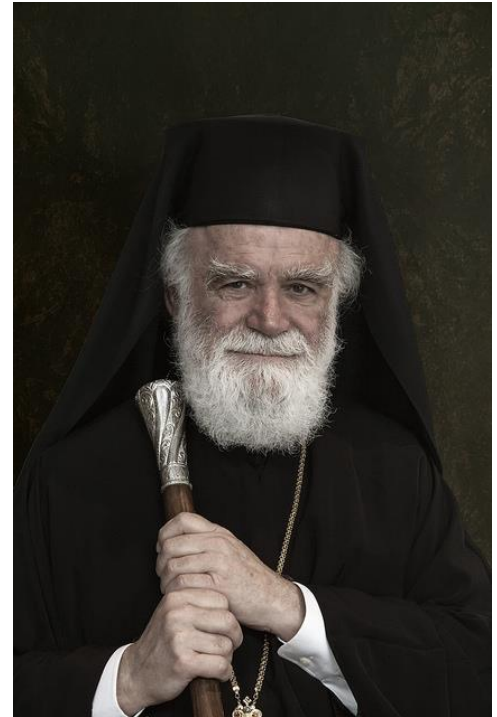


My Beloved Ones,

As we prepare to celebrate the feast of Pentecost this Sunday, the mystery of the tongues of fire may seem incredible—but we should not forget that each and every one of us partakes of this miraculous event when we are given *“the seal of the gift of the Holy Spirit”* at our Baptism. Just as the descent of the Paraclete allowed the Gospel to reach far beyond the Holy Land, we must think of how we are meant to use this precious God-given gift in our era.

50 days after the Resurrection of our Lord, the Disciples, and the many women who followed Jesus throughout His Ministry, were gathered in the Upper Room, praying without ceasing. They were together for the Feast of Pentecost, which of course, was 50 days after the Passover. The ancient Jewish feast of Pentecost (or Shavuot as it is known in the Hebrew language) remembered how God gave His Law to Moses, after He had freed the Israelites from Egypt. Jewish pilgrims from all over the world were going to the Temple to make sacrifices to God, and like many faithful people, the Disciples had kept an all-night vigil to remember how Moses awoke the Children of Israel in the night to teach them the Law.



Of course, it was not only for this tradition that the Disciples kept their vigil. We read in the Book of Acts that, *“While staying with them, [Jesus] ordered them not to leave Jerusalem but to wait there for the promise of the Father. ‘This,’ he said, ‘is what you have heard from me; for John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days from now.’ (Acts 1:4-5)* Therefore, ten days after He had gone from them into Heaven, the Disciples and the Theotokos, waited with patience and with great faith for the promise to be fulfilled.

The Book of Acts then tells us, *“And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability.” (Acts 2:2-4)* And so the Disciples went out and began to speak of God’s Word to the pilgrims, all in different tongues, baptizing many thousands in the name of the Holy Trinity. St. John Chrysostom, in his sermon on Pentecost compares this miracle to the story Tower of Babel: *“In former times men, seized by madness, wanted to build a tower to reach heaven; but the Lord, by dividing their tongues, divided their evil purpose. So now the Holy Spirit descends upon them in fiery tongues to unify a divided world. The result is something new and mystical.”*

My beloved ones, this day should not be thought of as the “birthday of the Church” (for the Church has always been, and always will be), but as the fulfillment of our Lord’s

promise, “...*do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say, for what you are to say will be given to you...*” (Matthew 10:19) Indeed, with the seal we received at Baptism, it is our responsibility to witness God in our lives just as Peter did to the multitude. In this way every kind word we give to every person we meet, will be a kind of Pentecost, offering God the worship and glory He is due, as we speak of Him, not only through praise but good works as well.

+ALEXIOS

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