



Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

3101 Clairmont Ave. Birmingham, AL 35205

Church Tel. 930-9681 / 907-9447

Visit stsymeon.com

✠ **June 23, 2013** ✠

Pentecost

Martyr Agrippina of Rome (260)

Fast-Free Week

How easy it is to say
with every breath:
"My Lord Jesus,
have mercy on me!
I bless you, my Lord
Jesus Christ, help me!"
~ St. Macarius of Egypt

"The Lord said to His
friends: I shall not leave
as orphans all you
whom I have gathered;
but rather, I shall send the
Holy Spirit unto you."

Matins - Saturday of the Ascension

⇒ Inquirer's Class – Tuesday, June 25, 6:30pm

⇒ **New Temple Groundbreaking Service Today**

✠ Friday, June 28, 6:30pm Vespers ~ Sts. Peter and Paul

✠ Saturday, June 29, 10:00am Divine Liturgy ~ Sts. Peter and Paul

⇒ **Note: NO VESPERS NEXT SATURDAY / NO MATINS NEXT SUNDAY, JUNE 30**

⇒ Father Alex will be away next Sunday on a Deanery trip to Atlanta.

The Paraclete

Paraclete comes from the Koine Greek word παράκλητος (*paráklētos*, that can signify "one who consoles or comforts, one who encourages or uplifts; hence refreshes, and/or one who intercedes on our behalf as an advocate in court"). The word for "Paraclete" is passive in form, and etymologically (originally) signified "called to one's side". The active form of the word, *parakletor*, is not found in the New Testament but is found in Septuagint in Job 16:2 in the plural, and means "comforters", in the saying of Job regarding the "miserable comforters" who failed to rekindle his spirit in his time of distress.

In the Greek New Testament the word is most prominent in the Johannine writings. It appears in the Gospel of John (14:16, 14:26, 15:26, 16:7) where it may be translated into English as "counselor", "helper", encourager, advocate, or "comforter". **The early Church identified the *Paraclete* as the Holy Spirit** (Acts 1:5, 1:8, 2:4, 2:38) and Christians continue to use Paraclete as a title for the Spirit of God. In 1 John 2:1, "Paraclete" is used to describe the intercessory role of Jesus Christ Who pleads to The Father on our behalf. And in John 14:16, Jesus says "another Paraclete" will come to help his disciples, implying Jesus is the first and primary Paraclete.

According to Trinitarian doctrine, the Paraclete or Holy Spirit is the Third Person of the Trinity Who among other things provides guidance, consolation, strength, and support to people. – *Wikipedia*

The Treasury of Blessings

✠ The Holy Spirit is the treasury of all blessings of spiritual riches. Look with what wonderful riches the souls in which the Holy Spirit dwelt were endowed, with what light of knowledge, with what fragrance of virtues! The soul of a righteous man is a most rich spiritual treasury; such were, for instance, the souls of the Apostles Paul, Peter and John; of the bishops St. John Chrysostom, St. Basil the Great, and St. Gregory the Theologian. "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good." (Luke 6:45) There is where the true treasure is. It is not what the world values. ~ St. John of Kronstadt

Pearls of the Holy Fathers (11)

Why do you trouble yourself in a house that is not your own? Let the sight of a dead man be a teacher for you concerning your departure from hence.

St. Isaac the Syrian

Beguiling and deceptive is the life of the world, fruitless its labor, perilous its delight, poor its riches, delusive its honors, inconstant, insignificant; and woe to those who hope in its seeming goods: because of this many die without repentance. Blessed and most blessed are those who depart from the world and its desires.

Elder Nazarius of Valaam

Who am I . . . What shall I call myself? For Abraham says that he is 'but dust and ashes' (Gen. 18:27); David calls himself 'a dead dog' (2 Sam. 9:8) and 'a flea' (1 Sam. 24:14) in Israel; Solomon calls himself 'a little child, not knowing left from right' (cf. 1 Kings 3:7); the three holy children say, 'We have become a shame and a reproach' (Song of the Three Children, verse 10); Isaiah the prophet says, 'Woe is me, for I am undone, because I am a man of unclean lips' (Is. 6:5); the prophet Abba-cum says, 'I am a child' (Jer. 1:6); St. Paul calls himself the chief of sinners (cf. 1 Tim. 1:15); and all the rest said that they were nothing. What then should I do?

St. Peter of Damascus

To the Angels who are spiritual Abraham brought food for the body, and they ate. The new miracle is that our mighty Lord has given to bodily man Fire and Spirit to eat and drink.

St. Ephraim the Syrian

When you go to pray, go with greater joy and warmth towards our Christ, let it be as if you were embracing Christ and weep before Him, so that He will watch over you.

Elder Ieronymus of Aegina

If you have spoken evil of your brother, and you are stricken with remorse, go and kneel down before him and say: "I have spoken badly of you; let this be my surety that I will not spread this slander any further." For detraction is death to the soul.

Abba Or, a Desert Father

Believe me, children, if I possessed any candor before God, I would first of all pray that none of you should pass one single day of your entire lifetime in corporeal health. For I know, I know very well that when the body is ill, the soul will benefit greatly, especially for such as offer thanks for this to God, the Guardian of our souls.

St. Irene Chrysovalantou

If you yourself do not repulse His help, God will not give you over into slavery to your former passions.

Metropolitan Anthony Khrapovitsky

Let your thoughts be ever in the Kingdom of Heaven and soon you will possess it as a heritage.

Abba Hyperechius, a Desert Father

What can those empty worldly goods of ours and riches benefit us in the day of Judgment? Rather they will harm us. Again, neither will youthfulness and comeliness of our bodies remain to the end unfading, but either by old age or untimely death it will be lost and extinguished.

St. Symeon the Fool-for-Christ

To be patient for the sake of Christ is a virtue higher than all ascetic feats and pious works.

Elder Eustratius of Glinsk

Holy Pentecost

After the Savior's Ascension into the Heavens, the eleven Apostles and the rest of His disciples, the God-loving women who followed after Him from the beginning, His Mother, the most holy Virgin Mary, and His brethren-all together about 120 souls returned from the Mount of Olives to Jerusalem.

Entering into the house where they gathered, they went into the upper room, and there they persevered in prayer and supplication, awaiting the coming of the Holy Spirit, as their Divine Teacher had promised them.

In the meanwhile, they chose Matthias, who was elected to take the place of Judas among the Apostles. Thus, on this day, the Seventh Sunday of Pascha, the tenth day after the Ascension and the fiftieth day after Pascha, at the third hour of the day from the rising of the sun, there suddenly came a sound from Heaven, as when a mighty wind blows, and it filled the whole house where the Apostles and the rest with them were gathered. Immediately after the sound, there appeared tongues of fire that divided and rested upon the head of each one.

Filled with the Spirit, all those present began speaking not in their native tongue, but in other tongues and dialects, as the Holy Spirit instructed them. The multitudes that had come together from various places for the feast, most of whom were Jews by race and religion, were called Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and so forth, according to the places where they dwelt. Though they spoke many different tongues, they were present in Jerusalem by divine dispensation. When they heard that sound that came down from Heaven to the place where the Disciples of Christ were gathered, all ran together to learn what had taken place. But they were confounded when they came and heard the Apostles speaking in their own tongues.

Marveling at this, they said one to another, "Behold, are not all these which speak

Galileans? And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?" But others, because of their foolishness and excess of evil, mocked the wonder and said that the Apostles were drunken. Then Peter stood up with the eleven, and raising his voice, spoke to all the people, proving that that which had taken place was not drunkenness, but the fulfillment of God's promise that had been spoken by the Prophet Joel: "And it shall come to pass in the last days, that I shall pour out of My Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and daughters shall prophesy" (Joel 2:28), and he preached Jesus of Nazareth unto them, proving in many ways that He is Christ the Lord, Whom the Jews crucified but God raised from the dead. On hearing Peter's teaching, many were smitten with compunction and received the word. Thus, they were baptized, and **on that day about three thousand souls were added to the Faith of Christ.**

Such, therefore, are the reasons for today's Feast: the coming of the All-holy Spirit into the world, the completion of the Lord Jesus Christ's promise, and the fulfillment of the hope of the sacred Disciples, which we celebrate today. This is the final Feast of the great mystery and dispensation of God's Incarnation. On this last, and great, and saving day of Pentecost, the Apostles of the Savior, who were unlearned fishermen, made wise now of a sudden by the Holy Spirit, clearly and with divine authority spoke the heavenly doctrines. They became heralds of the truth and teachers of the whole world. On this day they were ordained and began their apostleship, of which the salvation of those three thousand souls in one day was the comely and marvelous first fruit.

Saint Epiphanius of Cyprus writes, "The Catholic Church, which exists from the ages, is revealed most clearly in the incarnate advent of Christ" (PG 42:640). Saint John Damascene observes, "The Holy Catholic Church of God, therefore, is the assembly of the holy Fathers, Patriarchs, Prophets, Apostles, Evangelists, and Martyrs who have been from the very beginning, to whom were added all the nations who believed with one accord" (PG 96, 1357c). According to Saint Gregory the Theologian,

"The Prophets established the Church, the Apostles conjoined it, and the Evangelists set it in order" (PG 35, 589 A). The Church existed from the creation of the Angels, for the Angels came into existence before the creation of the world, and they have always been members of the Church.

Saint Clement, Bishop of Rome, says in his second Epistle to the Corinthians, the Church "was created before the sun and moon"; and a little further on, "The Church exists not now for the first time, but hath been from the beginning" (II Cor. 14).

That which came to pass at Pentecost, then, was the ordination of the Apostles, the commencement of the Apostolic preaching to the nations, and the inauguration of the priesthood of the new Israel. Saint Cyril of Alexandria says that "Our Lord Jesus Christ herein ordained the instructors and teachers of the world and the stewards of His divine Mysteries ... showing together with the dignity of Apostleship, the incomparable glory of the authority given them ... Revealing them to be splendid with the great dignity of the Apostleship and showing them forth as both stewards and priests of the divine altars ... they became fit to initiate others through the enlightening guidance of the Holy Spirit" (PG 74, 708-712).

Saint Gregory Palamas says, "Now, therefore ... the Holy Spirit descended ... showing the Disciples to be supernal luminaries ... and the distributed grace of the Divine Spirit came through the ordination of the Apostles upon their successors" (Homily 24, 10). And Saint Sophronius, Bishop of Jerusalem, writes, "After the visitation of the Comforter, the Apostles became high priests" (PG 87, 3981B).

Therefore, together with the Baptism of the Holy Spirit which came upon them who were present in the upper chamber, which the Lord had foretold as recorded in the Acts, "ye shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit not many days hence" (Acts 1:5), the Apostles were also appointed and raised to the high priestly rank,

according to Saint John Chrysostom (PG 60, 21).

On this day commenced the celebration of the Holy Eucharist by which we become "partakers of the Divine Nature" (II Peter 1:4). For before Pentecost, it is said of the Apostles and disciples only that they abode in "prayer and supplication" (Acts 1:14); it is only after the coming of the Holy Spirit that they persevered in the "breaking of bread, "that is, the communion of the Holy Mysteries "and in prayer" (Acts 2:42).

June 24 ~ Nativity of the Holy Forerunner, St. John the Baptist

He that was greater than all who are born of women, the Prophet who received God's testimony that he surpassed all the Prophets, was born of the aged and barren Elizabeth (Luke 1: 7) and filled all his kinsmen, and those that lived round about, with gladness and wonder. But even more wondrous was that which followed on the eighth day when he was circumcised, that is, the day on which a male child receives his name. Those present called him Zacharias, the name of his father. But the mother said, "Not so, but he shall be called John." Since the child's father was unable to speak, he was asked, by means of a sign, to indicate the child's name. He then asked for a tablet and wrote, "His name is John."

And immediately Zacharias' mouth was opened, his tongue was loosed from its silence of nine months, and filled with the Holy Spirit, he blessed the God of Israel, Who had fulfilled the promises made to their fathers, and had visited them that were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death, and had sent to them the light of salvation. Zacharias prophesied concerning the child also, saying that he would be a Prophet of the Most High and Forerunner of Jesus Christ. And the child John, who was filled with grace, grew and waxed strong in the Spirit; and he was in the wilderness until the day of his showing to Israel (Luke 1:57-80). His name is a variation of the Hebrew "Johanan," which means "Yah is gracious."

With the Help of God, Chip it Away!

There is a story about a man who had a huge boulder in his front yard. He grew weary of this big, unattractive stone in the center of his lawn, so he decided to take advantage of it and turn it into an object of art. He went to work on it with hammer and chisel, and chipped away at the huge boulder until it became a beautiful stone elephant. When he finished, it was gorgeous and breathtaking.

A neighbor asked him, "How did you ever carve such a marvelous likeness of an elephant?" The man answered, "I just chipped away everything that didn't look like an elephant!"

If you have anything in your life right now that doesn't look like love, then, with the help of God, chip it away! If you have anything in your life that doesn't look like compassion, mercy, or empathy, then, with the help of God, chip it away! If you have hatred, prejudice, vengeance, or envy in your heart, for our Lord's sake, for the other person's sake, and for your sake, get rid of it!

Let God chip everything out of your life that doesn't look like tenderheartedness – i.e., a deep awareness of and sympathy for another's suffering and the offering of our love, support, and encouragement.

To help us achieve this aim, I call to mind a central teaching of early Christianity . . . righteousness is not to be understood as strict obedience to a complex code of laws and customs. **The one commandment that is fundamental is the principle of love.**

To appreciate this teaching of our Lord, compare John 13:34-35; 15:17 and 1 John 3:23; 4:7 presented in the following references:

John 13:34: I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

John 15: 17: I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another.

1 John 3: 23: And this is His commandment, that we should believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and love one another, just as He has commanded us.

1 John 4: 7: Beloved, let us love one another, because love is from God; everyone who loves is born of God and knows God.

For the Disciples whom our Lord was teaching, Deuteronomy 6:4-5 are perhaps the most treasured verses of Judaism:

Deut. 6:4: Hear, O Israel: The LORD is our God, the LORD alone. You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might.

When Jesus was asked which was the greatest commandment, He restated this teaching in Mark 12:28-30 as follows:

One of the scribes came near and heard them disputing with one another, and seeing that He [Jesus] answered them well, he asked Him, "Which commandment is the first of all?" Jesus answered, "The first is, 'Hear, O Israel: the Lord our God, the Lord is one. You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength.'"

Compare Jesus' words in Leviticus 19:18 with Mark 12:31. They are uniquely expressive of a Christian's concern and can hardly be offensive to anyone:

Lev. 19:18: "You shall not take vengeance or bear a grudge against any of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I am the LORD."

Mark 12:31: The second is this, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these."

From these verses from the Gospel of St. Mark, we as Christians today are informed of Jesus' greatest commandment . . . just as the early Gentile Christians were taught by Jesus that there is no other commandment greater than these.

May this reminder that we mutually share love for God, for our neighbors, and for ourselves, inspire each of us to seek to strengthen and transform our lives spiritually by means of prayer, fasting, repentance, good works, Bible Study, Holy Confession, and enhanced worship opportunities that are part of Great and Holy Lent.

Very Rev. Fr. George Tsahakis
Chancellor, Metropolis of Atlanta, Greek Archdiocese

St. Isaac the Syrian - Concerning Hell

"As for me I say that those who are tormented in Gehenna are tormented by the invasion of love. What is there more bitter and violent than the pains of love? Those who feel they have sinned against love bear in themselves a damnation much heavier than the most dreaded punishments. The suffering with which sinning against love afflicts the heart is more keenly felt than any other torment. It is absurd to assume that the sinners in Gehenna are deprived of God's love."

- That is what the torment of Gehenna is in my opinion: remorse.

- "This is the aim of Love. Love's chastisement is for correction, but it does not aim at retribution...But the man who considers God an avenger, presuming that he bears witness to His justice, the same accuses Him of being bereft of goodness. Far be it that vengeance could ever be found in that Fountain of love and Ocean brimming with goodness! The aim of His design is the correction of men."

- "That we should think that Gehenna is not also full of love and mingled with compassion would be an insult to our God. By saying He will deliver us to suffering without purpose, we most surely sin. We blaspheme also if we say that He will act with spite or with a vengeful purpose, as if He had a need to avenge Himself."

Every Sin and Hell Itself...

'Be convinced and informed that every sin and hell itself, has as its beginning and root and center a bad thought; and again conversely, a bad thought is the beginning and root and center of every sin and of hell itself, because, just as a small pebble or rock, when it happens to fall into some well, first causes a small circle, then the small circle causes another large one, and the large one another larger one, and so on until it reaches the edge of the well. Likewise, an assault from one bad thought begets a passionate coupling with the thought; coupling begets consent; consent begets the act; the act begets habit; habit begets addiction; addiction begets unrepentance; unrepentance begets hell.

~ St. Nikodemos the Hagiorite (1809)

On Prayer – Elder Ephraim of Katounakia (+1998)

"My child, you are amassing treasure when you say the Jesus Prayer; it's like putting gold in your wallet."

He (the Elder) always preached and displayed obedience. When he was asked: "Elder, how can we achieve prayer, how can we achieve grace?" he always answered: "When the vessel of your soul is clean, then it will be filled by God's grace itself."

"Obedience gives birth to prayer and prayer gives birth to Theology", he used to say.

"How should we say the Jesus prayer, Elder? Should we say the entire phrase 'Lord Jesus Christ, Son of God, have mercy upon me'?"

"No, no, this is tiring. It suffices to just say the words, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me'. If you progress in prayer, you will omit other words, too, because of the desire in your soul. You will probably end up saying just 'Jesus, have mercy upon me' or 'Sweetest Jesus, have mercy upon me'. You will be crying out, full of yearning, only the name 'Jesus, Jesus...' If you are blessed to still progress, then you will find yourself absolutely speechless, as if in rapture, feeling the fervor of divine grace."

"In which mood should we be praying, Elder? In a mood of glorifying God, of rejoicing, compunction, gratitude, sorrow or repentance? How?"

"In whatever mood your soul is in at that specific moment. If you feel joy, then you should pray with joy, if you feel repentant, then pray with repentance."

"What if the soul is in no mood for prayer, or the mind does not concentrate on praying?"

"The mind is always like that. It wanders around. Our duty is to bring our mind back on prayer. We start the Jesus prayer in a whisper or loudly until our mind is collected and starts paying attention to the prayer. Then, we pray inwardly, without whispering. Everyone learns this by experience though."

As for the mood, if we do not have it, then we create it. We bring to mind some spiritual

images that may touch our soul; for example the Crucifixion of the Lord, which makes us think how much the God-Man Himself suffered for us, wretched people. I myself have used the following image several times: I imagine that the second coming of Christ is here and He is departing with His people. They are leaving me behind and I'm in danger of being separated from Christ and His Kingdom for eternity. Then, my child, tell me: is it possible not to be in the mood for prayer? If you reach that point, you cry inwardly "My Christ, save me" and you cannot stop your tears streaming from your eyes".

"So, Elder, we should have such images in mind while repeating the Jesus prayer?"

"No, no. We use this thought only at the beginning, just to warm up the soul. When we say the Jesus prayer, we say it slowly and consciously. We have nothing on our minds, neither words, nor faces, or even images".

"Elder, how can we realize that we are making progress in prayer?"

"The first thing that prayer brings is joy. You feel like a prince. Then you are enriched in tears. You want to embrace the whole world, both animate and inanimate. All people seem like angels to you. Besides, Apostle Paul says that the fruit of the Spirit is: 'love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control' (Gal. 5:22)".

"Should we pray with improvised words, Elder?"

"I do it quite often. The improvised prayer, as well as the spiritual images and visions we mentioned previously, help the soul reach a state of grace; even the quietest chant, hymn, or spontaneous words, may help the soul reach high spiritual states. In that case, we do not need all these things; we put them aside and pray just by saying the Jesus prayer with ardor, 'Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy upon me'. Other times, when we are in a good spiritual state, we yearn to chant from the bottom of our heart; or when our soul is suddenly filled with spiritual thoughts, we wish to improvise with our prayer. Then, we should let our soul quench its thirst".

HOMILIES from the Prologue of Ochrid

About the Holy Spirit the Comforter

"But the Comforter the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in My Name, He shall teach you all things, and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said to you" (St. John 14:26).

What practical meaning do these words have, if not that it is necessary that we pray daily that the Holy Spirit be sent to us just as we pray every day for our daily bread? God is willing to send us the Holy Spirit every day but He seeks that we pray daily for the Holy Spirit. For as, in regard to bread which is, at one time abundant and at another time scarce, so it is also in regard to the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit comes to us and departs from us, according to our zealotness and our slothfulness in prayer, according to our good deeds and our patience. That is the reason why the Church established that morning services begin with an invocation of the Holy Spirit: "O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Come!", and after that comes the prayer: "give us our daily bread!" Why? Because, without the Holy Spirit, we do not even know how to use bread as it should be used for our salvation.

"He shall teach you all things." That is: every day and every night, according to the conditions and circumstances in which you will find yourself in, He will direct you, counsel you, teach you what you should think, what you should say and what you should do. For that reason, implore from God only the Holy Spirit and all else He Himself will bring with Him all that you will need at that particular moment. When the Holy Spirit shall descend upon you, you will know all, understand all and you will be capable of all that is necessary.

"And bring all things to your remembrance whatsoever I have said to you." That is: do not be afraid that you will forget my teaching and my words. The Holy Spirit also knows all that I know so when He will be present in you all My teaching will be present in you, together with Him.

O Lord, Holy Spirit deign to descend upon us not according to our merits but according to the merits of the Lord Jesus and according to Thy infinite goodness!

About the Testimony of the Spirit of God

"The Spirit of truth that proceeds from the Father, He will testify to Me" (St John 15:26).

God's Son sent God the Holy Spirit into the world to testify about Him until the end of time.

"He will testify to Me."

How will God the Spirit testify about God the Son? God the Spirit will testify in many ways:

By attracting the souls of men to Christ's Church;

By revealing to them the meaning of the Holy Scripture;

By leading their minds to the commandments of Christ;

By giving warmth, freshness, power and gentleness to the words of Christ;

By converting repentant sinners into righteous ones;

By fulfilling all the promises and prophecies of Christ upon men and upon nations and upon God's Church;

By strengthening the Church of Christ and holding it firm against all the tempest of times and all the evils of Hades and men throughout the ages of ages.

The Spirit which works in these and many other similar ways is the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Truth, Good, Life creating and All-powerful.

Not one of Christ's words go against the Spirit of God nor does the Spirit of God go against a single word of Christ. That is why when the Spirit of God pleases to enter into the heart of man, He becomes alive and becomes a true witness to all that Christ said and did. Then, man believes joyfully and unwaveringly. For how would he not believe the greatest and the most enduring Eyewitness and Participator of all the words, all the miracles and all the works of Christ? That is why, brethren, let us pray before all and above all that this Eyewitness and Participator, the Holy Spirit and All-powerful, settle in our hearts so that our faith may become alive, unwavering and joy-creating.

O God the Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth, come and abide in us!