

(June 11, 2008) On Sunday, we will be celebrating the Feast of Pentecost, commemorating the descent of the Holy Spirit Who came as tongues of fire upon the disciples (Acts 2). Although the disciples – simple fishermen – were all Galileans, they were each given the ability to speak in various languages. Their witnesses were initially confused, knowing that this event was extraordinary; however, Saint Peter responded to their confusion with his eloquent sermon, testifying to God’s ultimate power (Acts 2:14-41).

In the Saturday evening Vespers of Pentecost, the following hymn is chanted: “Once tongues were confused through the presumption of building the tower; but now tongues have been made wise through the glory of the knowledge of God. There God condemned the impious for their offence; here Christ has enlightened the fishermen with the Spirit. Then discord was wrought for punishment; now concord is renewed for the salvation of our souls.”

The words of this hymn contrast the foolishness of the people of Babylon (Genesis 11:1-9) with the simple piety and divinely endowed gifts bestowed upon the disciples. In Babel, they wanted to build a tower in order to reach up into heaven. Problem? It is of the Lord’s domain to decide who gets into heaven and when, and not for men, such as those who unilaterally decide to become builders of a tower. So, the Lord confused them by having them speak in different languages.

Yet, with Pentecost, different languages symbolized something else! Being, first and foremost, a clear demonstration of God’s authority, it symbolized the broad appeal of the message of the Gospel of Christ. On Pascha, during the Agape Vespers, the Gospel passage is read in various languages – why? This practice is maintained to remind us of the fact that Christ’s teachings, and especially His great mercy and gift of eternal life, is not limited to one culture or people, but to all who come and follow Him. In our modern practice, we cannot afford to forget this fundamental truth.

In Old Testament times, the builders of the Babylonian Tower were condemned by God because of their impiety. They thought themselves equal to God, and then foolishly set out to prove it. With all of our modern intellectual and technological progress, it is amazing how such foolishness continues today! Not only in some extreme areas of biomedical research, for example (and by this, I do not mean the overall and necessary research for medical progress), but also in the increasingly prevalent desire by men, women, and children to marginalize God’s importance in our daily lives, on one hand, yet never allowing themselves to be caught beyond communication with one another by always having either cell phone, blackberry, or Ipod at the ready!

Contrasted with that condemnation is the enlightenment given to the simple fishermen through the Holy Spirit. When we kneel and pray during Pentecost, the priest is asking for our enlightenment as well. In other words, he is seeking, on our behalf, the forgiveness of our sins, the pardon of our personal examples of foolishness, and the re-education (not academic, but spiritual) of our minds and souls towards the Lord.

In short, rather than the punishment given to those in Babylon, which was meant to respond to humanly derived arrogance with Godly prescribed discord, the prayers of kneeling call for our concord. This concord, or agreement (cooperation), is intended to be a renewed version of the agreement made by God with Adam before the Fall. He offers us Paradise – yet again. Yes, Adam and Eve fell and were punished! Yes, the people “of God” killed His prophets, even His Only-Begotten Son! Yes, we ourselves commit sins daily, even moment by moment! Still, He offers us concord with one another and with Him for the salvation of our souls. As you remember these thoughts, I pray that you have a blessed Pentecost! I look forward to seeing you this Sunday!

Important Notice: As in past years, this weekly email message will be my last for a few weeks, until I return from vacation. Once I return, you will continue receiving them. Meanwhile, please remember that while I will be out of town vacationing, as your priest and spiritual father I never ‘vacation’ from remembering you in my prayers. Stay well and stay close to our Lord by participating in the sacramental life of our Church. I look forward to seeing you when I return.

God bless,

Fr. Anthony Stratis

Upcoming Services:

- Saturday, June 14th: 9:00 am Divine Liturgy, followed by the Trisagion {Saturday of Souls}
- Sunday, June 15th: 9:00 am Orthros & 10:00 am Divine Liturgy, followed by the Pentecost Prayers of Kneeling
- Monday, June 16th: 9:00 am Divine Liturgy {Feast of the Holy Spirit}

Activities and Events:

- Thursday through Sunday: Goyans traveling to Tampa, Florida, for the GOYA Olympics
- Sunday, June 15th: 7:00 pm Festival Appreciation Dinner

9:00 a.m. Orthros
10:00 a.m. Divine Liturgy
Sunday School classes begin after Holy Communion

Phone: (504) 282-0259
Email: htrinno@bellsouth.net

Mailing address:

Holy Trinity Greek Orthodox Cathedral
1200 Robert E. Lee Boulevard
New Orleans, LA 70122