

Christ is Risen! ...So now What?

Victory brings a sense of satisfaction that is beyond words. We know something great has just taken place and with whatever words we can think of - we express gratitude, joy, fulfillment and love.

Elated, blessed and resurrected we leave the church and enter back into the world only to discover nothing has changed. Many go back to having petty conversations, complaining about this or that seemingly unchanged by the resurrection of Christ. It is impossible to experience transformation without the presence of the Holy Spirit Who is given to us for this very purpose. Perhaps our best examples of resurrected people are those who have suffered tremendously and not lost faith but knowing the body is dying while in the midst of that, they are lifted above it all. I was blessed to have witnessed three of our hospital bound parishioners become resurrected while singing *Christos Anesti* – Christ is Risen in the midst of their pain! The hymn of the resurrection conveys God’s love and resurrects the soul-transforming affliction into joy and victory.

- The purpose of Lent is to prepare us to personally receive a *resurrection* in Christ – a passing over between our old self and the new creation in Christ.
- Our resurrection is not completed until it is fulfilled in the reception of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost.
- On the day of our baptism we all received a personal Pentecost when we were Chrismated by the priest; yet, just like Lent the fifty days following are meant to renew this experience in our lives again as well.
- This is why Lent focused upon the depth of our love for Christ. As love increases so does our ability to keep His commandments. Lent teaches us that these “commandments” are not limited to the “Big Ten” but embrace the 10,000 things that render us sinners in God’s eyes. Nothing shows more our imperfection as the new commandment Jesus gave before He went to His Cross. “A new commandment I give to you, that you be loving one another; even as I loved you, that you also be loving one another. “By this shall all know that you are My disciples, if you be having love among one another (Jn. 13:34,35).” No matter how “great” Pascha was, without the birth of *love* we have labored in vain and have forfeited the possibility of experiencing the final gift Christ has to give – the reception of the Holy Spirit.
- Jesus made this connection when he said, “If you love Me, keep My commandments. “And I will ask the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter (Advocate/Paraclete), that He may abide with you forever— “the Spirit of the truth, Whom the world is not able to receive, because it sees Him not, nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He abides by you, and shall be in you (Jn. 14:15-17).”
- We are the chosen ones who have been called to receive the Holy Spirit on account of our love for one another and discipleship. Christ is risen and with a

renewed desire to love God more intensely we continue for fifty more days awaiting the arrival of the Holy Spirit.

- The Church also knows that our love is still imperfect because we lack the fullness of *knowing* Him. Those who have been worthy to receive the Holy Spirit are found to have eyes that can *see* Him, *know* Him, abide in Him and are surrounded by Him! What is the content of this *knowing, seeing and co-mingling*? It is none other than loving one another *as* Christ has loved us. Love opens the gates to the presence of the Holy Spirit in our love. Love that does not seek its own self-interest, is not prideful, is not jealous or unkind, is not conceited or puffed up and is unconditionally given to all people.

St. Gregory the Great outlines how the Holy Spirit operates in one's life.

The Holy Spirit is the Advocate for love to reign in us.

- The Holy Spirit is the primary advocate of love and unity in the Church.
- The very desire to grieve over ones' wrong doing is a cry for love to be *perfected* in us and in our *relationships* with one another. I cannot say 'I love Christ' and at the same time hate my neighbor.
- "The Greek word 'Paraclete' means 'Advocate' or 'Consoler.' He is called an Advocate because He intervenes before the Father's justice on behalf of the wrongdoings of sinners. He Who is of one essence with the Father and the Son is said to plead earnestly on behalf of sinners because He causes them whom He fills to do so. Hence Paul says, 'The Spirit Himself intercedes for us with unutterable groaning' (St. Gregory)." When we have an earnest desire to grow in love through having a repentant heart it is a sign of the presence of the Holy Spirit praying in us and with us. We simply cannot grow in love without the presence of the Holy Spirit Whose mission is to unite us all with one another.

The Holy Spirit consoles our distressed souls through forgiveness

- The Orthodox prayer which calls upon the Holy Spirit is not addressed to an individual but to the *community* of believers in fellowship with Christ. The Holy Spirit constitutes us as an *ecclesia* - a body united in Christ and one another.

"Heavenly King, Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, present in all places and filling all things, treasury of blessings and Giver of Life, come and abide within *us*, cleanse *us* of every stain and save *our* souls, O Good One."

Why is it that we feel the comforting power of the Holy Spirit at funerals? No other time has the same potential for an inner change as when we are faced with the reality of death, separation and the brokenness in our unity. These realities are signs of the

consequences of sin in the world and are the catalyst of an *inner* thirst for remedy, restoration, wholeness and salvation.

The Holy Spirit as the “Giver of Life” overcomes death. When we are confronted with the reality of death the Holy Spirit comes to us and offers consolation to our distressed souls. Here, the *joyful-sadness* which permeates Holy Week is experienced once again. “This same Spirit is called a Consoler, because, when He prepares a hope of pardon for those grieving over their sins, He is lifting up their hearts from sorrow and affliction (St. Gregory).”

There is no greater motivator for an inner change than to experience forgiveness and to be one praying for the forgiveness of others - whether they are living or not. The presence of the Holy Spirit brings the hope of pardon as forgiveness shines forth from the grace before us and all around us.

The Holy Spirit takes away the veil so we can be taught by Him

- At the adult baptisms on the Saturday of Lazarus and the Chrismations on Palm Sunday we witnessed the Light of Pascha shining through renewed souls as they experienced the cleansing and grace of the Holy Spirit. The whole Church became bright as these newly illumined Christians were re-born before our eyes.

“But whenever *it* shall turn to *the* Lord, the veil is taken away. Now the Lord is the Spirit; and where the Spirit of *the* Lord *is*, there *is* freedom. But we all, with unveiled face reflecting as a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, even as from *the* Lord, *the* Spirit (2 Cor. 3:16-18).”

- Chrismation is our personal Pentecost that makes a person into the temple of the Holy Spirit. Our souls are united to God through the Holy Spirit.
- Our bodies receive the body and blood of Christ by the Holy Spirit revealing the bread and wine as His Life.
- Our thinking becomes transformed through the renewal of our minds by God’s abiding grace.

St. Gregory finishes his teaching with, “It is justly promised that He shall teach all things, because, unless the Spirit is present in the heart of a listener, the teacher’s utterance is useless. No one should attribute to his teacher what he understands from him, because, unless there is an inner teacher, the one outside is exerting himself in vain.

John says this: ‘But the anointing which you received from Him abides in you, and you have no need that anyone be teaching you; but as the same anointing teaches you concerning all things...you shall abide in Him (1 Jn. 2:27).’ No one is instructed by a voice when his heart is not anointed by the Spirit.”

This is why the last words of Jesus to Peter were, "Do you love me?" The veil of ignorance is taken away by the grace of the Holy Spirit who instructs us in love that involves the laying down of our lives for one another.

Christ is Risen! Holy Spirit *come* and *abide* in us! *Teach* us how to love another!
+Fr. Andrew