Coptic Orthodox Patriarchate of Alexandria

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Bashans / Baounah **|Issue 114|** **June 2025**

Under the auspices and guidance of H.G. Bishop Mina bishop of Mississauga, Vancouver and west of Canada

PENTECOST A MAJOR FEAST IN THE ORTHODOX CHURCH

Fr. Anthony Mourad

Why is Pentecost a major feast celebrated in the Coptic Orthodox Church? We can maybe say that it's an important historical moment in the lives of the apostles, but why celebrate it today in the liturgical life of the Church? Well, the truth is many of us may have difficulty in answering this question because we have yet to discover the significance of this extremely important moment in the life of the Church. To better understand it, let's begin by examining a few key things.

Firstly, the specific name of Pentecost. This word is borrowed from the Greek name of the Jewish festival Shavuot. Shavuot is a Hebrew word the simply means "weeks" and so it signifies the festival of weeks mentioned in the Old Testament. It is one of the three major Jewish pilgrimage festivals which holds two important meanings to the Jews: 1) It marks the wheat harvest in Israel as mentioned in Exodus 34:22, and 2) it commemorates the anniversary of the day when God gave the law and the commandments to Moses and the people of Israel. This Jewish feast is held 50 days after Passover of the Jews, and so it was called Pentecost by the Hellenic Greek community – simply meaning "fiftieth day".

The Early Church held on to this tradition of calling it Pentecost because 50 days after the Great Christian Passover – the crucifixion and resurrection of the Lord Jesus Christ – we see that the Lord now grants humanity a new gift, different from that which was given to Moses. While in the Old Testament humanity receives the law written on tablets of stone, in the New Testament the apostles and humanity now receive the indwelling Holy Spirit, the Life-giver and Comforter which was promised to us by the Lord.

Part 2:

In the book of Acts, we hear about how the apostles of the Lord along with the Holy Virgin Mary gathered together in prayer 50 days after the Passover. St Luke describes to us the following event:

“When the Day of Pentecost had fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. 2 And suddenly there came a sound from heaven, as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. 3 Then there appeared to them divided tongues, as of fire, and one sat upon each of them. 4 And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit…” (Acts 2:1-4)

Now, this descent of the Holy Spirit is of crucial importance for us to understand. Humanity had long been in a state of alienation from God. In Genesis chapter 2 we read of how God formed man of the dust of the ground and breathed in him the breath of life, which the Church, and more specifically St Cyril of Alexandria, teaches us that this breath was God’s very own Holy Spirit. Now after the fall, the Lord says in Genesis chapter 6 that His Spirit cannot dwell with man forever because of our current state… And so ever since the fall, we have lost the indwelling of the Holy Spirit because we have estranged ourselves from God. And while we still see the Spirit of God aiding the people, working alongside them, even visiting them, the human being can no longer be a temple of the Holy Spirit because of the fall! However, ever since the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ and God’s perfect plan of salvation, we now have new hope.

In the feast of Theophany, we see the Lord Jesus Christ as a perfect man, be the first human being since the fall to receive the Holy Spirit. He makes way for us to now also receive God’s Spirit within us. In His death and resurrection, He defeats the great enemy of mankind which is death and offers a new path to reconciliation and eternal life with God. And in His ascension, the Lord has reconciled the heavenly with the earthly as He takes what is ours and seats it at the right hand of the Father. Every step has been accounted for and now, for the first time since Adam and Eve, on the great day of Pentecost, we see humanity receiving the Holy Spirit who not only works alongside them but dwells within them! It is this moment in the life of the Church that then enables us today to baptize new believers in the name of the All-Holy Trinity and then through chrismation, impart to them the Holy Spirit to dwell within them for the rest of their lives. And so, every believer has participated in their very own death and resurrection with Christ in baptism and has also had their very own Pentecost in receiving the Holy Spirit in Chrismation.

Part 3:

Now the feast of Pentecost that we celebrate is so important that we often refer to is as the birthday of the Church – when the Church of God Almighty was now ready, born of God to enter into the world and preach the gospel of salvation. Born of God now because our time of maturity had finally arrived because we were granted to given the Holy Spirit once again. And the world would have been incapable of hearing the message of God from us unless we had the Spirit of God dwelling within us and guiding our every step.

In the creed, we recite and say that the Lord Jesus Christ did all things “for us and for our salvation…” And indeed, even this sending of the Spirit is for the Salvation of the world and has made His kingdom accessible to all. Now that we are reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, and the Lord having granted His Holy Spirit to dwell within us, we are now that much closer to the kingdom of God. My beloved, It is truly a marvelous thing for us as Christians to believe that the Heavenly King, the comforter, the Spirit of truth, the life-giver, He is both present within us and fills all things. You carry Him within you every moment of your life because of this great feast. And so, you now have access to Kingdom of Heaven both here and now! Notice how the Church

recites the hymn "Let us Praise (also known as Asomen)" after the feast of Pentecost! It is chanted all throughout the entire Apostles fast as a reminder of the joy that we carry within us. In this hymn, we say the words

"He made the two into one, that is the heaven and the earth.

He ascended into the heavens and sent to us the Paraclete,

The Spirit of truth, the Comforter. Amen Alleluia."

There is no more ceiling between me and the kingdom of God, it is truly at hand – ready for the taking. The Spirit of God dwells in me, I am a temple of the Holy Spirit, and so life with God begins now – not later!! St Cyril of Jerusalem speaks of the incredible moment of Pentecost that the apostles have lived. He says that the Lord wanted to ensure that what happened that day would serve as a witness to the fact that these people now have the living God working with them. He says the following:

"And lest people should be ignorant of the greatness of the mighty gift coming down to [the apostles], there sounded as it were a heavenly trumpet. For suddenly there came from heaven a sound as of the rushing of a mighty wind, signifying the presence of Him who was to grant power to people to seize with violence the kingdom of God, that both their eyes might see the fiery tongues and their ears hear the sound. And it filled all the house where they were sitting; for the house became the vessel of the spiritual water; as the disciples sat within, the whole house was filled." [St Cyril of Jerusalem: CATECHETICAL LECTURE 17.15]

While we celebrate Pentecost as a historical event in the life of the Church, we also celebrate it as a daily reminder of the Holy Spirit that we have living and working within us. God within us my beloved! A bold claim indeed. No one else would dare make such a claim. But to the Christian, the celebration of Pentecost is one where we declare that we have faith that God now works with us,

THE JOYFUL FIFTY DAYS

by Metropolitan Serapion ***(Continued)***

THE FEAST OF THE HOLY ASCENSION - DAYS 40-49
"But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ, who, by the power that enables Him to bring everything under His control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like His glorious body." (Phil. 3:20-21)
The ascension of Christ was a bodily ascension, because in His divinity He is everywhere and does not ascend or descend. As it says in the Liturgy of St. Gregory "And You ascended into the heavens in the flesh…". This ascension is evidence of His divinity and of His glorified body that is not subject to physical laws. Christ performed this event before His disciples, which further strengthened their faith in Christ being the Son of God.
Christ's return to sitting at the right hand of the Father is often mentioned throughout this season. It means that He is returning to the power and glory of the Father; it is His place that He is worthy of. It is a restoration from, while being God, making Himself of no reputation since the time of His incarnation. This event is important for us because, just as Christ assuming the human nature

broke the curse on humanity, the ascension of His glorified body also establishes the ascension of our glorified bodies at the end of days.

Spiritual exercise:

We fast not because we hate the body. In fact, spiritual exercises are how we incorporate the body with the spirit to manifest our faith and love to God. For this very reason, the body also deserves to be glorified with the spirit at the General Resurrection when we are taken to Heaven with Him. Just because we are in a time of joy and rather than focusing on asceticism does not mean we should stop involving the body in the manifestation of our spiritual relationship with God. Involve your flesh with frequent liturgies and praises to keep it pure for the end of days.

THE FEAST OF PENTECOST - THE 50TH DAY

"But you shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me" (Acts 1:8)

The feast of Pentecost is the feast of the Holy Spirit. As Christ ascended into heaven He tells His disciples not to fear because He will send down the Holy Spirit as their Comforter. Thus the Holy Spirit descended on the holy and pure apostles in the form of tongues of fire. Pentecost is considered the day that the Church was established. On this day we are filled with the Holy Spirit Who guides us, supports us, purifies us, and gives us strength. It is with the power of the Holy Spirit, the Paraclete, that the disciples were able to go throughout the earth and bring the people to Him. Likewise, it is with the Holy Spirit that we too are given strength to continue renewing our spiritual lives and serve everyone in the world around us.

Spiritual exercise:

After we are reunited with Christ, we are taught that we cannot just sit in bliss and keep Him to ourselves. Christianity is a communal life and it is our duty to share Christ whom you keep in your heart. We have already received the Holy Spirit through the Sacrament of Confirmation with the Holy Mayroon oil, but here we are receiving strength from the Holy Spirit to carry the name of Christianity to all people through what we say and how we act as Christians. It was the Holy Spirit that spoke through the prophets. It is only by the Holy Spirit that anyone can serve and deliver Christ to others regardless of our own efforts. Pray that God would give you strength through His Holy Spirit in preparation for the Apostles Fast, a period where we focus more heavily on serving the world.

RITES

- During the entire Joyful 50 days, the church is dressed in white, and the festal tune is used
- There are no Wednesday and Friday fasts and no prostrations.
- The Synaxarium reading is skipped, as well as the audible mention of the names of those who departed after the Commemoration of the Saints in liturgy, as they focus on death while the church is instead focusing is on the Resurrected Christ.

RESURRECTION

- The hymn "All you heavenly hosts…" is chanted after the Acts reading, as the church calls on the angels to open the gates of Paradise so that Christ may enter with those who were in Hades.

- The hymn “Christ is Risen” is chanted as the Icon of the resurrected Christ enters the altar from outside along with the deacons. They circle the altar 3 times with the icon, representing the angels and those who were in Hades entering Paradise with Christ.
- Then the procession continues around the whole church 3 times, representing Christ remaining on Earth for 40 days along with the sighting of others who also rose from the dead.
- Then all of the deacons enter the altar to complete the procession with a final circle around the altar, representing Christ taking them along with Him back into Paradise.
- The Trisagion ends in “Who rose from the dead, have mercy upon us.” for all 3 verses.

ASCENSION

- The procession during this period starts still with the icon of the resurrected Christ entering the altar with the deacons, and ends there after circling around the altar 3 times, representing Christ’s return to heaven after forty days.
- “And ascended into the heavens” is added onto the Trisagion for all 3 verses.

PENTECOST

- A procession is done during Matins after the priest prays, "O God have mercy..."
- There is no procession during the divine liturgy as Christ has already ascended into heaven.
- Like the Ascension, “and ascended into the heavens” is added onto the Trisagion for all 3 verses.
- After the Divine Liturgy, the church prays the Prostration Prayers.

Rites:

THE INCENSE CIRCUIT OUTSIDE THE ALTAR

After incensing before the clergymen, the Incense Tour around the Church begins. Most churches nowadays have four rows of pews, with three aisles between them; to the North, south, and central. When the community of Incense finishes, the priest walks to the North of the sanctuary door to the iconostasis and offers incense before the icons of the angels, the apostles and saints. Here he prays **such prayers as:**

- "Hail to Archangel Gabriel", while standing before Archangel Gabriel's icon,
- "Hail to the martyr, St. George", before the icon of St. George,
- "Hail to the martyr, Saint Mina", before the icon of Saint Mina, or
- "Hail to the Saint Abba Antonious", before the icon of Abba Antonious.

He continues as such until he reaches the door of the northern sanctuary where he bows and raises incense saying,

- "Hail to the sanctuary of God the Father."

He then continues offering incense before the icons on the North side of the iconostasis.
After offering incense before the icons to the North of the sanctuary the priest proceeds Westward among the congregation, offering incense and blessing them, saying, During Vespers Incense: "The blessing of the Vespers incense be with us, Amen."
During Morning Incense: "The blessing of the Morning incense be with us, Amen." He then walks to the North-West corner of the Church behind all the seats at the back and then walks South until he

reaches the centre walkway. He walks down the centre walkway towards the East until he reaches the middle sanctuary door, then he turns South to the iconostasis and offers incense to the icons there. He continues incensing before the icons on the South side of the iconostacis until he reaches the Southern sanctuary door where he bows and offers incense to the icons.
Moving from the Southern door the priest then he proceeds Westward down the Southern-most aisle of the Church, offering incense to the congregation and blessing them while repeating the phrase, "The Holy blessing of Vespers Incense/Matin Incense be with us, Amen.".
The congregation respond with silent words of repentance, such as, "Lord Jesus Christ forgive me my sins of which I am aware, and those of which I am unaware", or maybe, "O God, forgive me for I am a sinner", or they may pray the Repentance Psalm (Ps.51), which begins, "Have mercy upon us O God...." The priest continues down the Southern walkway in a Westerly direction, until he reaches the back of the Church where he then turns North and travels behind the pews to the centre aisle. Again, he walks down the centre toward the East, while offering incense and blessing the congregation as before.

AUDIO SERMONS

The POWER of the Altar in Your Life

FR. RAPHAEL HANNA

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AtdPuBIHrvM&list=PL7hSMcATprMUq-2p-j-RWZP38vmiJi7dC&index=4&ab_channel=KPNITAPSTLC

SAINT OF THE MONTH:

"Whose faiths follow, considering the outcome of their conversation?" Heb 13:7

ST. SARAH

St. Sarah was from the city of Antioch, the wife of a man whose name was Socrates, one of the governors of Emperor Diocletian. This Governor had denied Christ to please Diocletian, pretending before his wife that he did that because of his fear from the Emperor. Sarah had two sons, she could not baptize in Antioch, because of her fear from the Emperor and her husband. She took them and sailed to Alexandria to baptize them there. God willed to reveal the greatness of her faith as a lesson to the generations to come. God brought forth a great tempest and the ship was about to be wrecked and

drown. Sarah was afraid that her sons would be drowned without being baptized. She prayed a long prayer, then she wounded her right breast, took some of her blood, anointed them making the sign of the cross upon the foreheads, and over the hearts. Then she dipped them in the sea three times saying: "In the Name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit." After that, the winds died down, a great calm came on the sea, and the ship sailed toward Alexandria. When she arrived, took her sons, went to the church, and handed them to Pope Peter, the seal of the martyrs. He baptized them, together with the children of the city. When the Pope carried one of her sons to baptize him, the water froze. The Pope went on baptizing other children and came back to her sons, but the water froze again. The same thing occurred on the third attempt. The Pope was amazed and asked their mother about her story. She told him about all what happened to her at sea and what she did for her sons. He glorified God and said: "It is indeed one baptism."

When the woman returned to Antioch, her husband denounced what she had done. He related what happened to the Emperor accusing his wife with adultery. The Emperor brought her and reproached her saying: "Why did you go to Alexandria to commit adultery with the Christians?" The Saint answered him: "Christians do not commit adultery, and do not worship idols, and after this do what you wish, for you will not hear another word from me." The Emperor asked her: "Tell me what did you do in Alexandria?" When she did not answer him, he ordered to tie her hands behind her, and to place her two sons on her belly, and to bum all three of them. She turned her face to the east and prayed. They burnt her, with her sons. She delivered up her pure soul along with her sons, and they all received the crown of martyrdom.

May the blessings of her prayers be with us all, and Glory be to God forever Amen.

Sayings of the Fathers:

- Prayer is union with God in every moment and circumstance of life, so that life becomes one continuous, unbroken, and undisturbed prayer.

  St. Basil the Great

- When Christ and the Spirit dwell in us, we experience this in various ways: in joy or tears, in stillness or ecstasy. There are many forms of God's presence, but the fruit of the Spirit is always the presence of Christ the Giver of unity who lives in the Church and in the heart of the believer.

  St. Macarius

- From the moment of the second birth, the Holy Spirit becomes the nurturer of the new soul, for He is the One who gave it birth through baptism.

Fr. Bishoy Kamel

Question and Answer:

By: *H. H. Pope Shenouda III*

Question

Is it possible that the Holy Spirit descends on us hypostatically? Can He unite with us hypostasis? What can this hypostatic unity be, and with whom can it take place?

Answer

We use the term "Hypostasis" when we talk about the three persons of the Holy Trinity, and each of these persons has the divine nature.
It is said about the three persons of the Trinity, "these three are one" (1 Jn. 5: 7) .. And the Son, the Lord Jesus said, "I and my father are one" (Jn. 10:30) that is: one in the Godhead and in essence….

There is also a hypostatic unity between the divinity and humanity in the nature of Christ.
But we do not say that there is a hypostatic unity between the Holy spirit and any person, for this means to unite with the Godhead and acquire the divine attributes and be able to do whatever God alone can do, being united Hypostatically with God's Spirit…
However, we can say that the Holy Spirit descended hypostatically, temporarily, on the Virgin Mary for a double divine purpose:

To form within her womb a body for the Lord Christ, so we say in the Creed and in the Holy Mass, (.. and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of the Virgin Mary and became man..)
To sanctify her womb so that the babe born of her would not inherit the original sin so can perfect the redemption which requires Him to die for the sins of others…
So the angel Gabriel said to her "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Highest will overshadow you: therefore also that Holy One who is to be born will be called the Son of God." (Lk. 1:35)
The Holy Spirit, after forming a body in the Virgin's womb, united hypostatically with this body since the very first moment of the Holy pregnancy.

A whisper in your ear

From the Sayings of Pope Tawadros

- How beautiful it is to be a person who brings a smile to others whenever they remember you.
- When you are at the peak of anger, do not make decisions; and when you are at the height of happiness, do not make promises.
- Before being cultured, be respectful — for respect is half of culture.
- If you are an artist in your silence, you will become creative in your speech.
- I have come to read hypocrisy in the eyes of many… I simply smile and walk away.
- Poverty is not only about money — true poverty is the poverty of minds and morals.

- I am not ignorant of what is happening around me, but it is not worth my attention.

VERSE OF THE MONTH

Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for My sake will find it.
Mathiew 10:39

THE CHURCH COMMEMORATES THIS MONTH "SYNAXARIUM"

- Commemoration of the Entry of the Lord Christ to Egypt (24 Bashans) .....1 June
- Martyrdom of St. Colluthus of Antinoe (Known as Abu Colta) (25 Bashans) .....2 June
- Departure of Pope Youannis the Second, the 30th Patriarch of the See of St. Mark (27 Bashans) .....4 June
- Departure of Pope Mikhail the First, the 68th Patriarch of Alexandria (30 Bashans) ..... 7 June
- Feast of Pentecost (1 Baounah) ..... 8 June
- Consecration of the Church of St. Leontius of Tripoli (1 Baounah) ..... 8 June
- Commemoration of the Appearance of the Bodies of St. John the Baptist and Elisha the Prophet (2 Baounah) ..... 9 June
- Departure of St. Martha of Egypt (3 Baounah) ..... 10 June
- Martyrdom of Saints Anba Beshay (Ebshoy) and Anba Botros (Peter) (5 Baounah) ..... 12 June
- Martyrdom of St. Theodore the Monk (6 Baounah) .....13 June
- Martyrdom of St. Abaskhiroun the Soldier (7 Baounah) .....14 June
- Martyrdom of George (Girgis) the new martyr (8 Baounah) ..... 15 June

- ❖ Relocation of the Relics of St. Mercurius to Cairo (9 Baounah) ……...16 June
- ❖ Martyrdom of St. Dabamon (10 Baounah) ……...17 June
- ❖ Commemoration of the Closing of the Pagan Temples and Opening of the Churches (10 Baounah) ……...17 June
- ❖ Commemoration of the honorable Archangel Michael (12 Baounah) ……..…..…19 June
- ❖ Commemoration of the Archangel Gabriel, the Announcer (12 Baounah) ……20 June
- ❖ Consecration of the Church of Mari Mina at Maryut (15 Baounah) ……..22 June
- ❖ Turning Over the Relics of the Great St. Mark the Apostle (15 Baounah) ……..……..22 June
- ❖ Departure of St. Abba Nofer the Anchorite (16 Baounah) ……..……..23 June
- ❖ Return of the Relics of the Great St. Mark to the New St. Mark Cathedral (17 Baounah) ……..……..24 June
- ❖ Martyrdom of St. Bishai Anoub (19 Baounah) …… 26 June
- ❖ Departure of St. Cedron (Kardonos), the Fourth Patriarch of Alexandria (21 Baounah) ……..……28 June
- ❖ Commemoration of the Virgin St. Mary (21 Baounah) …… 28 June
- ❖ Consecration of the Church of Saints Cosmas, Damian, Their Mother, and Brothers (22 Baounah) ……..……29 June

CHURCH SERVICES SCHEDULE:

Please check church website in the first page

YOUTUBE SERVICE STREAMING ADDRESS:

https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC_Ml2B3NKLi1Y8P3nQR5Amw/video