

# The Holy Spirit in the Liturgy

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## THE HOLY SPIRIT, SPIRIT OF CHRIST AND THE CHURCH

All the life of the Church is a partaking in the mystery of Christ, in his redemptive sacrifice, in his bitter passion and glorious resurrection. She is furthermore an incorporation into the mystery of Pentecost, a receptacle of the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are poured out on the Church by the priestly intercession of Jesus, the great High Priest. Vladimir Lossky writes, 'If Christ is "the head of the Church which is his body", the Holy Spirit is he "that filleth all in all". So the two definitions which St. Paul gives show two different poles within her which correspond to the two divine Persons. The Church is *body* in so far as Christ is her head ; she is *fullness* in so far as the Holy Spirit quickens her and fills her with divinity, for the Godhead dwells in her bodily as it dwelt in the deified humanity of Christ. We may say then with Irenaeus, "Where the Church is, there is the Spirit : where the Spirit is, there is the Church" (*The Mystical Theology of the Eastern Church*, pp. 156f.). What then is the significance for the Christian of the presence and action of the Holy Spirit in the Church's life, and in particular in her essential and formative act, the Eucharistic liturgy ?

Let us try first of all to define the Orthodox Church's conception of the Holy Spirit's activity in the Church.

(a) The Holy Spirit testifies to Christ, leads us to him, and unites us with him, and effects our adoption by the Father.

(b) The Holy Spirit is sent to us through the agency of Christ by the Father. He is present in the Church *in Person*. It is important that we should dwell on these two complementary aspects of the Holy Spirit's activity.

The Holy Spirit is pre-eminently the Spirit of the Son. If on the one hand he proceeds from the Father (John 14-15), on the other hand he rests on the Son ; he dwells in him as an unction in the fullness of his presence from all eternity. But the Spirit of the Son is that of Christ, the Word Incarnate. The Holy Spirit who already filled the righteous men and prophets of the Old Testament rests on the Messiah. At Christ's baptism in the Jordan, this presence of the Holy Spirit on the Son is manifested. All the earthly life of Christ is under the sign of the Holy Spirit,

from the moment of his virginal conception at Nazareth, throughout all the stages of his hidden life, of his public ministry, of his passion, and lastly of his resurrection and ascension. The Holy Spirit descends on Christ as an anointing, but this Messianic anointing continues and reflects the eternal anointing of the divine Word by the Spirit. So Christ is pervaded by the Holy Spirit, is clothed with him as with light (Transfiguration): their intimacy is such that even the visage of the Holy Spirit is hidden from us, his proper name remains unknown to us, his being is mysterious and unknowable. The peculiar mission of the Holy Spirit is to reveal the face of Christ, to render him present, to *re-present* him, to testify to him, to unite us to him.

From this direction of the Holy Spirit towards Christ, however, it does not follow that the coming of the Holy Spirit has a subordinate character, instrumental to Christ's work. Although the Holy Spirit does not *manifest* his Person, he is *truly present and active* in the Church's life. If the Holy Spirit comes to testify to Christ, it is no less true to say that Christ sends us the Holy Spirit, and that the very object of the redemptive incarnation and the ascension in glory is to prepare for the coming of *the other Comforter*. 'The word of Christ prepared for that of the Holy Spirit' (Lossky). The Church is no less under the seal of Pentecost than under the sign of the cross and resurrection. The whole life of the Church, all her prayer, is marked, as we shall see, by this twofold character. There is reciprocity and not subordination between the coming of the Holy Spirit and that of Christ. This reciprocity has been partly distorted in the West by *filioquism*, the insertion of 'and the Son' after 'proceeding from the Father' in the Nicene Creed. I must here emphasize my conviction that the orthodox doctrine of the procession of the Holy Spirit *a Patre solo* is the only one that can sound as ground and justification for this interpenetration and this reciprocity of the divine Word and the Holy Spirit in the whole life of the Church, in its prayer, in its very structure.

Pentecost is more than an historical event. If the cross and the resurrection have had their place once and for all, the heavenly intercession, the supplication of Jesus the great High Priest at the right hand of the heavenly Father continues perpetually: it forms the heavenly aspect of our redemption. The Son never ceases his priestly supplication for mankind, for his brothers. That is why the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost is only *inaugurated*, and cannot be considered absolutely as closed.

The rushing wind and the tongues of fire in the Upper Room indicate no more than the *advent* of the new era of Pentecost, of the Messianic time, the last days, the kingdom of God. This new state of affairs is final: it forms the *status patriae*, the standing of the country, in which the Church finds herself, the eschatological fullness which is granted her by him who fills all in all. This notion of a 'continuing Pentecost' in the sacramental and

eucharistic life of the Church is important, and occurs frequently in the Fathers. ‘The aim and goal of the whole work of our salvation by Christ was that believers should receive the Holy Spirit’ (St. Simeon the New Theologian). ‘What is the effect and the result of Christ’s sufferings, his speeches, and his acts?’ asks the Byzantine liturgist, Nicholas Cabasilas. ‘If we consider them in relation to ourselves, it is nothing else than the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Church . . . In the Upper Room the Church received the Holy Spirit after the ascent of Christ to heaven. Now she receives the gift of the Holy Spirit after the hallowed gifts have been accepted at the heavenly altar; God, who has received them favourably, sends us in return the Holy Spirit as he promised, for the Mediator is the same, today as then, and there is also the same Holy Spirit.’

The Church, the body of Christ, the temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 3: 16-17) proclaims then, on the one hand, the coming and the fullness of the kingdom of God by the quickening and unfailing presence of the Holy Spirit; on the other hand, she beseeches and calls down (epiclesis), besides the coming of this kingdom, the descent of the Holy Spirit, which she ever awaits.

#### THE CHURCH’S LITURGICAL AND EUCHARISTIC DIMENSION

It is the correlation and interchange of the Word of God and the Holy Spirit which grounds the Church in its unity and diversity. The redemption is the basis of the hierarchical unity of the Church’s members in the one body of Christ; Pentecost is the affirmation of the multiplicity and absolute value of the individuals united to God in the Holy Spirit.

The Church of the Upper Room and of the first period in Jerusalem offers the most perfect example of the first Christians’ unity. The centre of this unity is Christ, bodily absent since the ascension but present by the Holy Spirit, who testifies of him, and imbues the Church’s members in a single body (1 Cor. 12:3). This unity of Christians in a single body is by nature eucharistic. It is round the Eucharist, presided over probably by the Apostle Peter, that the Christians of Jerusalem assemble, always together, with one heart and soul (Acts 2:42-46; 4:32-35). So the Holy Spirit is the unifying cement of the Church, the body of Christ, and it is in the Eucharist that this unity is made actual. Here are some ancient epicleses which well illustrate this idea.

‘Send down, Lord, we beseech thee, thy Holy Spirit on the sacrifice of the fellowship. Gather it, unite it, and grant to all the holy people who partake in it to be filled with the Holy Spirit’ (*Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus of Rome). ‘Grant that all we who partake in this one Bread and this one Chalice be united one to another in the fellowship of the one same Holy Spirit’ (St. Basil the Great). ‘The Holy Spirit comes at the call of the faithful, when he vouchsafes to confer or to increase the gift of

charity and accord. It is in this capacity that he is known everywhere, and so to speak, properly the Holy Spirit . . . So when in the course of the sacrifice of the Body and Blood of Christ the holy Church prays for the Holy Spirit to be sent to her, she then requests the gift of charity which enables her to preserve the unity of the Spirit in the ‘bond of peace’ (Fragment of *Fulgentius* of Ruspe).

The unity of the Church’s members does not mean uniformity. This *one body* of the Church in the fellowship of its members with the Spirit of Christ respects and builds up the diversity and the riches of the human persons who form part of it. It is thus that the Holy Spirit, all unknown as he is and not revealed in his Person, multiplies his gifts according to the capacity of each, stirs up the most diverse vocations, and determines their respective offices in regard to the fellowship. The Holy Spirit is not only the cement of unity, but also the gift of fullness to each *human person*, who is thus marked ‘with the seal of a relation, personal and unique, with the Trinity’ (Lossky).

What has been said above about the Eucharist may enable us to understand that it forms the very being of the Church. Where the Eucharist is, there is the Church. The Church is so profoundly rooted in the Eucharist that it is by the eucharistic action of the community that it is truly ‘church’. The Church is present in fullness, in all her catholicity, where the eucharistic sacrifice is carried out. So we can say that the ecclesiology of the primitive Church was specifically eucharistic.

It is this eucharistic nature of the Church that determines the hierarchical ministry. The Eucharist is not just one of the manifold functions of the hierarchy. It is not the clergy that distribute the Eucharist among other duties, liturgical and administrative. On the contrary, it is the Eucharist, as primordial fact that constitutes the Church, which determines the priestly ministry. ‘The Eucharist’, says the Archpriest Bulgakoff, ‘is a “*leitourgia*”, a work in common, a service in common’. According to the rite of the Orthodox liturgy in which the prayers of the minister and the faithful unite, alternate and succeed one another, the sacrament is performed by the community, by all the people together with the minister, and the power to perform the “transformation” is exerted not by a magical act *ex opere operato*, without the knowledge of the faithful and without their co-operation, in a word, without relation to the Church, but as a “*liturgy*”, a work in common . . . It is the Church which, in the fullness of her abiding Pentecost, has begotten the hierarchy, in conformity with the Spirit of God who dwells in her . . . All the gifts, including the hierarchical gifts, are given to the whole Church in her catholicity, and it is because of that that the Church has been able to call up the divers organs for divers functions, and to constitute the hierarchy.’

The Holy Spirit is not only poured down, but he acts. He is present in Person. He gives himself freely, personally. The distinction in the apostolic communities between hierarchic and charismatic ministries corresponds to a profound and permanent reality of the Church, as Body of Christ and Temple of the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of order, but he is not subject to the hierarchy. This, in communion with the faithful, forms a people unique, elect, sanctified by the Spirit, gathered by him, in the body of Christ . . . Prophecy is a Pentecostal gift, an unction of the Spirit of God on the whole Church. To the extent that the priesthood deviates from its prophetic vocation of the word, the Spirit raises up *charismata* outside the priesthood, but always for the building up of the people of God.

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE SACRAMENT OF THE EUCHARIST

But if the Holy Spirit remains permanently on the eucharistic community, if his quickening gifts are poured on it freely without ceasing, this supply has nothing of the automatic about it: it is always the fruit of the Church's prayers, her ardent invocation in the sacraments. In this respect the Spirit is Master of his gifts, the Church remains in continual expectancy, on the road, like the apostles during the unique period between Ascension and Pentecost. The Church's prayer is 'epicletic', petitionary. So there is no opposition between the action of grace (eucharist) and invocation (epiclesis). Separation of the two is merely formal: the affirmation and the desire complete one another, the narration and the invocation join one another in the Church's liturgy, which, starting from the fullness bestowed once for all in the historical Easter and Pentecost, makes her way towards the longed-for and awaited fullness of the last Advent. It is in this way that every Eucharist is an action of grace, a proclamation of the benefits achieved by God. No less is it in its completeness an *epiclesis* an ardent prayer of the eucharistic community.

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE EPICLESIS

A. *Historical Remarks.* The eucharistic epiclesis is, I think, a universal fact in the oriental liturgies; modern liturgists agree in recognizing this. In the occidental liturgies the case is different. The epiclesis is attested in the Mozarabic, Gallican and Celtic liturgies, and probably in the liturgy of Milan, though it is wanting in St. Ambrose's *De Sacramentis*, but it is quite absent in its explicit aspect of invocation of the Holy Spirit from the Roman canon at the end of the fifth century. An epiclesis is, however, present in the *Apostolic Tradition* of St. Hippolytus of Rome, as the best MSS. bear witness, in spite of the contrary opinion of the great Anglican liturgist, Dom Gregory Dix. We might then witness the strange phenomenon of a regression of the epiclesis in the West, which began at the end of the third century, and is an accomplished fact by the end of the fifth. It is probable that

this process belongs to the Church of Rome and that it developed progressively in the West under the influence of the sacramental theology of St. Ambrose.

It is difficult to comment on the reasons for this retreat in the doctrine of the Spirit, so strangely coinciding with the growing consciousness all over eastern Christendom of the Person and action of the Holy Spirit in the Church, and particularly in the Eucharist. St. Cyril of Jerusalem and St. Basil of Caesarea give very clear witness to this consciousness of the Spirit. One should not, however, overemphasize this progress of dogmatic formulations in the Orient, for the imprecision of the ante-Nicene Church's formulations does not imply any lack of dogmatic understanding of the function of the Holy Spirit. The New Testament itself bears witness in too signal a manner to a doctrine of the Spirit plainly revealed and lived out in the apostolic communities to allow one to speak of a non-differentiation or confusion of the Persons of the Word and the Holy Spirit, or to have the right to deduce from it the absence of an epiclesis of the Holy Spirit in the primitive liturgical texts. It is moreover interesting to note that this retreat of the epiclesis at Rome is limited to the eucharistic canon alone, and does not extend to the rites of consecration of the oil of catechumens, to the holy oil of confirmation, and to the blessing of fonts. The epiclesis is there clearly expressed. It is the consecration of oil that offers the most impressive parallelism with the eucharistic canon (*Sursum corda, Gratias agamus, Vere dignum et justum est, epiclesis*).

One last remark concerns the actual canon of the Roman Mass. That the prayer *Supplices te rogamus* coming after the words of institution presents a profound analogy with the eastern epicleses allows of no doubt. As much as the oriental epicleses, the *Supplices te rogamus* amounts to an invocation, a petition of the Church that God would accept the Church's sacrifice on his altar on high before the face of the divine Majesty. The attempt has been made to interpret this holy Abgel as a figure of the Holy Spirit. This is plausible, but it is only a conjecture that is far from being generally adopted. The idea of accepting the sacrifice in the heavenly sanctuary in order to pour blessings upon the Church, this very idea is quite familiar to the Byzantine liturgies, for it is found again in the prayers after the consecration, but with explicit mention of the Holy Spirit. Without being in a position to give a precise decision, it seems to us probably that the prayer *Supplices te rogamus*, even in its existing state, offers traces of a more ancient conception which thought of the consecration as happening after the words of institution. Otherwise any prayer for the acceptance of the sacrifice cannot be explained in a convincing manner.

*B. Theology of the Epiclesis.* As we have seen above, the liturgy in its totality has a character as much epicletic as eucharistic. The gift of 'grace', or rather of the double presence of Christ

and the Holy Spirit on the Church, has nothing of the automatic about it. It calls for the earnest supplication of the Church, of the whole people gathered around the Eucharistic feast. All the prayers of the eucharistic liturgy, including those before and after the Canon, have this epicletic character: before it, that the Holy Spirit may strengthen us to invoke the Father and to consecrate the Body and Blood of Christ; after the consecration, that the Father may accept our sacrifice and shower upon the faithful the fullness of his grace.

Just as much as the words of institution, the epiclesis proper is inseparable from the eucharistic liturgy in its completeness. It signifies nothing outside its context. Assuredly the anaphora as a whole has a consecratory character, just as it is in the whole course of Christ's earthly life, from the virginal conception at Nazareth and the birth at Bethlehem, that mankind's redemption becomes actual. Nevertheless the Orthodox Church proclaims with one voice its profound faith in consecration by epiclesis, which is the conclusion and culminating point of the eucharistic canon. This conviction always goes in step with an attitude of discretion and respect towards the sacrament which does not permit search into the mode of conversion of the elements. So the words of institution have not consecratory value in Orthodoxy as in the Roman Church. The opinion maintained by St. Thomas Aquinas is well known, according to which Christ's words even pronounced outside their liturgical context have the force of consecration. This is natural and logical granted that, according to Latin theology, Christ's words are pronounced by the priest *in persona Christi*, for the reason that the priest represents Christ, is his vicar. Such a definition of the priestly ministry is unacceptable to the Orthodox, for the president of the eucharistic assembly does not consecrate alone, *ex sese*, before a congregation present but passive: the eucharist is liturgical, that is to say, it is the common action of the whole assembly in whose name and with which the minister acts. He cannot then be the vicar or representative of Christ. It is the assembly which in its wholeness incarnates the local church in all its fullness and catholicity, that is to say, the Body of Christ, or the spouse of Christ. It is the assembly in its entirety, priesthood and faithful, which unites itself to Christ in the eucharistic communion. (In analysing the ancient inscriptions and sacramental texts of the West, Father H. de Lubac shows that 'by way of us, it is always she, the one Church, which appears as the great subject as well as the great minister of all the sacraments').

The epiclesis is therefore the completion of the eucharistic prayer, not to the exclusion of the words of institution, not in opposition to them. But they are an indivisible part of the great narration, which in the Roman Mass begins with these words, '*Oui pridie quam pateretur*', and in the liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, 'He who having come and having made all his

dispositions with regard to himself, on the night when he was betrayed . . . We cannot then speak of the epiclesis *in place* of narration, just as we do not choose between Easter and Pentecost, or between the Holy Spirit and Christ. We consider that the rejection of the epiclesis upsets the balance to the detriment of the part played by the Holy Spirit in the liturgy and his presence there. The presence of the epiclesis on the contrary takes nothing from the reality and fullness of the presence of Christ in the gifts and in the faithful ; the Spirit of Pentecost makes actual the abiding presence of Christ in the Church, according to the Saviour's promise.

#### THE HOLY SPIRIT IN THE COMMUNION

We have spoken up till now of a presence of Christ and the Holy Spirit as correlative and inseparable in the liturgy, and in general, in all the Church's life. It follows then that the Eucharist brings us into communion not only with Christ but also with the Holy Spirit. In fact, if the Holy Spirit descends in Person not only on the gifts but on the faithful who partake in the eucharistic worship, this signifies that the Church communicates with Christ, whom the Holy Spirit makes present in the consecrated gifts, and that the Church communicates with the Holy Spirit, whom the Father sends by the intercession and request of Jesus the great High Priest. So the Eucharist is not only the sacrament of the *real presence* of the Son by the Spirit, but also and no less of the Holy Spirit by the Son. When we speak of communion with Christ and with the Holy Spirit, we must clearly underline the unique character of our communion with Christ and communion with the Holy Spirit. The divine Persons are not interchangeable. The consecrated bread and wine become the Body and Blood of Christ. This identification cannot apply to the Holy Spirit. But that takes nothing from the real presence of the Holy Spirit ; only the presence is different.

The prayers of the Byzantine liturgies abundantly make good our conclusion. We frequently find mention of *communion of the Holy Spirit* in the course of the Eucharist :

1. The Trinitarian Benediction at the end of the Eucharistic Canon : 'The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit, be with you all' (2 Cor. 13:14).
2. The Epiclesis of St. John Chrysostom : 'in order that the (consecrated) gifts may become for those who receive them purification of soul, remission of sins, communion with thy Holy Spirit, fullness of the Kingdom of the Heavens, but not judgement or damnation.'
3. The Epiclesis of St. Basil : 'and that we who partake in this one Bread and this Chalice may all be united by it in the communion of the one Spirit, and that not one of us partake of the

Holy Body and the Holy Blood of Christ to his judgement or damnation.

4. Prayers for preparation for communion (St. John Chrysostom): 'Make us worthy to partake of the dread mystery ... for remission of our sins, for the pardon of our transgressions, and for the communion of the Holy Spirit, for the inheritance of the Kingdom of the Heavens ...'

5. Prayers for preparation for Communion (St. Basil the Great): 'Teach us to live in thy fear ... that we may be united with the Holy Body and Blood of thy Christ, and having worthily received, may possess Christ dwelling in our hearts, and become the temple of thy Holy Spirit.'

6. 'Having prayed for unity of faith and communion of the Holy Spirit.'

7. 'Deem them worthy to partake without damnation in thy spotless and life-giving mysteries for the remission of their sins and the communion of the Holy Spirit' (St. Basil the Great).

8. Prayer of thanksgiving from the Office of Pentecost: 'We have seen the true light, we have received the heavenly Spirit, we have found the true faith, in worshipping the indivisible Trinity; it is this Trinity that has saved us.'

The frequency of the mention of the Holy Spirit cannot fail to strike us. There is more in it than a coincidence or an image. The Church bears witness in her liturgy and recalls to our theological awareness that the Eucharist is the sacrament of Pentecost, of the fullness of the Holy Spirit, and that it is only in this Pentecostal presence of the Holy Spirit that we are incorporated into the body of Christ and receive from the Father the adoption of sons.

Early commentators on the liturgy do not fail to develop this theme. 'Once descended', writes Nicholas Cabasilas in his *Explanation of the Divine Liturgy*, 'the Holy Spirit has not afterwards abandoned us, but he is with us, and will be to the end. That is why the Saviour sent him, that he may dwell with us for ever: "the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it seeth him not neither knoweth him; but ye know him, because he dwelleth with you and is in you" (John 14:17). It is the Spirit who by the hand and tongue of priests consecrates the Mysteries. But the Lord is not content to send us the Holy Spirit to dwell with us: he has himself promised to dwell with us "even unto the end of the world" (Matthew 28:20). The Paraclete is present invisibly, because he carries no body; while the Saviour by the means of the glorious and holy mysteries lends himself to our sight and touch, because he has taken our nature and will bear it for ever.'

One last remark concerns what may appear as a *double* descent of the Holy Spirit. The epiclesis is generally understood as an invocation with a view to the descent of the Holy Spirit before

all on the gifts offered upon the altar. In addition to this, the prayers before the communion may be considered as so many epicleses with a view to the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the faithful. Have we to do with two descents of the Holy Spirit? This leads us to put a question essential to the understanding of the eucharistic mystery. What is the connection between the consecration and the communion? In the actual practice of our churches, and the Orthodox churches are, alas, no exception to this wellnigh universal rule, the eucharistic action is dissociated from the communion in which it necessarily terminates. To such an extent are we accustomed to assist at the Eucharist, or to celebrate before an 'attendance', that we often no longer notice that abstention from eucharistic communion is a fact not only abnormal and undesirable, but one that goes counter to the deepest essence of the Eucharist, the sacrament of fellowship. It is precisely this rediscovery of the epicletic aspect of the Eucharist, which in turn brings in the doctrine of the Spirit, which can in our opinion enable us to return to the practice of the primitive Church, where the eucharistic communion was the necessary act of every member in communion with the Church. Church and Eucharist are indivisible. The Eucharist is for the Church and in the Church: the Church is by nature eucharistic. 'There is an identity of reality', writes Nicholas Cabasilas, 'between the Church and the holy Mysteries. If one could see the Church of Christ, in so far as she is united to him and partakes of his sacred flesh, one would see nothing else but the body of the Saviour.'

This truth is confirmed in the perspective of the presence of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Consecration and communion, both are the fruit of the sanctification by the Holy Spirit of the gifts and the faithful. The gifts are sanctified and transformed into the Body of Christ by the working of the Holy Spirit, to become heavenly food, and to transform the eucharistic congregation into the body of Christ. The descent of the Holy Spirit on the gifts and on the faithful is one operation; it is not made two except in our understanding and discursive logic, and finally by our sin of abstention.

In depriving ourselves and our children of the communion of the Body of Christ, we by the same act cut ourselves off from the offering of the Church, from the sanctification of the Holy Spirit; we refuse his life-giving communion which grounds the Church of the Eucharist in the Eucharist, the Church of Pentecost in Pentecost.

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