

St. Gregory the Theologian “On Pentecost”

Wherefore we must keep the feast spiritually. We are keeping the feast of Pentecost and of the Coming of the Spirit, and the appointed time of the Promise, and the fulfilment of our hope. The dispensations of the Body of Christ are ended; or rather, what belongs to His Bodily Advent, and that of the Spirit is beginning. And what were the things pertaining to the Christ? The Virgin, the Birth, the Manger, the Swaddling, the Angels glorifying Him, the Shepherds running to Him, the course of the Star, the Magi worshipping Him and bringing Gifts, Herod's murder of the children, the Flight of Jesus into Egypt, the Return from Egypt, the Circumcision, the Baptism, the Witness from Heaven, the Temptation, the Stoning for our sake (because He had to be given as an Example to us of enduring affliction for the Word), the Betrayal, the Nailing, the Burial, the Resurrection, the Ascension; and of these even now He suffers many dishonours at the hands of the enemies of Christ; and He bears them, for He is longsuffering.

They who deem The Holy Spirit God are inspired by God(d) and are illustrious in their mind; and they who go further and call Him so, if to well disposed hearers are exalted. Confess, my friends, the Trinity to be of One Godhead; or if you will, of One Nature; and we will pray the Spirit to give you this word God. The Holy Ghost, then, always existed, and exists, and always will exist. He neither had a beginning, nor will He have an end; but He was everlastingly ranged with and numbered with the Father and the Son.

He wrought first in the heavenly and angelic powers, and such as are first after God and around God. For from no other source flows their perfection and their brightness, and the difficulty or impossibility of moving them to sin, but from the Holy Ghost. And next, in the Patriarchs and Prophets, of whom the former saw Visions of God, or knew Him, and the latter also foreknew the future, having their master part moulded by the Spirit, and being associated with events that were yet future as if present, for such is the power of the Spirit. And next in the Disciples of Christ, and that in three ways, as they were able to receive Him, and on three occasions; before Christ was glorified by the Passion, and after He was glorified by the Resurrection; and after His Ascension, or Restoration, or whatever we ought to call it, to Heaven. Now the first of these manifests Him--the healing of the sick and casting out of evil spirits, which could not be apart from the Spirit; and so does that breathing upon them after the Resurrection, which was clearly a divine inspiration; and so too the present distribution of the fiery tongues, which we are now commemorating. But the first manifested Him indistinctly, the second more expressly, this present one more perfectly, since He is no longer present only in energy, but as we may say, substantially, associating with us, and dwelling in us. For it was fitting that as the Son had lived with us in bodily form--so the Spirit too should appear in bodily form; and that after Christ had returned to His own place, He should have come down to us--Coming because He is the Lord; Sent, because He is not a rival God. For such words no less manifest the Unanimity than they mark the separate Individuality.

And therefore He came after Christ, that a Comforter should not be lacking unto us; but Another Comforter, that you might acknowledge His co-equality. For this word Another marks an Alter Ego, a name of equal Lordship, not of inequality. For Another is not said, I know, of different kinds, but of things consubstantial. And He came in the form of Tongues because of His close relation to the Word. And they were of Fire,

perhaps because of His purifying Power (for our Scripture knows of a purifying fire, as any one who wishes can find out), or else because of His Substance. For our God is a consuming Fire, and a Fire(a) burning up the ungodly;(b) though you may again pick a quarrel over these words, being brought into difficulty by the Consubstantiality. And the tongues were cloven, because of the diversity of Gifts; and they sat to signify His Royalty and Rest among the Saints, and because the Cherubim are the Throne of God. And it took place in an Upper Chamber (I hope I am not seeming to any one over tedious), because those who should receive it were to ascend and be raised above the earth; for also certain upper chambers(g) are covered with Divine Waters,(d) by which the praise of God are sung.

This Spirit shares with the Son in working both the Creation and the Resurrection, as you may be shewn by this Scripture; By the Word of the Lord were the heavens made, and all the power of them by the breath of His Mouth;(b) and this, The Spirit of God that made me, and the Breath of the Almighty that teacheth me;(g) and again, Thou shalt send forth Thy Spirit and they shall be created, and Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.(d) And He is the Author of spiritual regeneration. Here is your proof:--None can see or enter into the Kingdom, except he be born again of the Spirit,(e) and be cleansed from the first birth, which is a mystery of the night, by a remoulding of the day and of the Light, by which every one singly is created anew. This Spirit, for He is most wise and most loving,(z) if He takes possession of a shepherd makes him a Psalmist, subduing evil spirits by his song,(h) and proclaims him King; if he possess a goatherd and scraper(q) of sycamore fruit,(k) He makes him a Prophet. Call to mind David and Amos. If He possess a goodly youth, He makes him a Judge of Elders,(l) even beyond his years, as Daniel testifies, who conquered the lions in their den.(m) If He takes possession of Fishermen, He makes them catch the whole world in the nets of Christ, taking them up in the meshes of the Word. Look at Peter and Andrew and the Sons of Thunder, thundering the things of the Spirit.

They spoke with strange tongues, and not those of their native land; and the wonder was great, a language spoken by those who had not learnt it. And the sign is to them that believe not,(a) and not to them that believe, that it may be an accusation of the unbelievers, as it is written, With other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people, and not even so will they listen to Me(b) saith the Lord. But they heard. Here stop a little and raise a question, how you are to divide the words. For the expression has an ambiguity, which is to be determined by the punctuation. Did they each hear in their own dialect(g) so that if I may so say, one sound was uttered, but many were heard; the air being thus beaten and, so to speak, sounds being produced more clear than the original sound; or are we to put the stop after "they Heard," and then to add "them speaking in their own languages" to what follows, so that it would be speaking in languages their own to the hearers, which would be foreign to the speakers? I prefer to put it this latter way; for on the other plan the miracle would be rather of the hearers than of the speakers; whereas in this it would be on the speakers' side; and it was they who were reproached for drunkenness, evidently because they by the Spirit wrought a miracle in the matter of the tongues.