

## 5.31.2020 The Feast of Pentecost (John 6:53-69)

Happy Feast of Pentecost! Happy Birthday to the Church! This morning we celebrate Pentecost, a day often referred to as the birthday of Christ's Church, because it marks the day that Almighty God poured out His Holy Spirit in a miraculous and visible way upon the first Christians. Pentecost is a birthday celebration, but it's the guests at this party who receive the gift. Like Christmas, when we celebrate the human birth of our Infinite Lord, and receive the gift of God's only Son, or Easter, when we celebrate His victory over sin and death, and by grace through faith, we receive the freely-given gift of Salvation, on Pentecost we come to celebrate the birthday of His Church, yet we receive the most unimaginable gift of all, the gift of God's Holy Spirit given to live in us. Pentecost marks the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send the Holy Spirit (Luke 24:49; John 14:26), and with His promise fulfilled, the God of Heaven and Earth lives in us.

God lives in us! This is the super-natural, extra-ordinary truth that we celebrate today, and what I would ask you to consider as we contemplate the miracle of Pentecost, is the unfortunate fact of how inclined we are to want to return to normal, to what is natural and ordinary, even after experiencing the super-natural and the extra-ordinary. I was reminded of this recently while reading about Israel's exodus from captivity and slavery in Egypt. As you know, God set His people free through a series of miracles that culminated with the parting of the Red Sea. Now, it's difficult for us to even begin to imagine all the Israelites witnessed as they left the life of slavery behind, and while the Bible does speak of the way they rejoiced and sang praises to God when they arrived safely on the other side of the sea (Exodus 15:1-21), their attitude of excitement and thankfulness toward Him, for all that God had done for them, didn't last.

After only three days of walking in the wilderness, the Israelites appeared to forget about the miraculous ways that God manifested His omnipotent power and His steadfast love for His people. The book of Exodus speaks about how the people grumbled and complained and quickly turned on Moses because they couldn't find drinking water (Exodus 15:24). The Israelites had seen the God of Heaven and Earth stretch out His arm and deliver them from slavery through terrible plagues and the parting of the Red Sea. They'd experienced

what can only be described as super-natural and extra-ordinary, yet, as crazy as it seems, after just a few days of hardship they wanted to go back to Egypt. They wanted to get back to normal, back to the natural, ordinary life of captivity and slavery that they'd been living, and this mindset, this desire to turn away from God and return to what felt normal, was repeated over and over again throughout their story.

Our New Testament reading this morning also describes people who chose to get back to normal, rather than follow God on a journey through the super-natural and extra-ordinary mysteries of faith. The verses we read today are taken from Jesus' Bread of Life discourse in the sixth chapter of John. It's there that our Lord said to His disciples, "*Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except ye eat the flesh of the Son of man, and drink his blood, ye have no life in you. Whoso eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, hath eternal life; and I will raise him up at the last day. For my flesh is meat indeed, and my blood is drink indeed. He that eateth my flesh, and drinketh my blood, dwelleth in me, and I in him. As the living Father hath sent me, and I live by the Father: so he that eateth me, even he shall live by me. This is that bread which came down from heaven: not as your fathers did eat manna, and are dead: he that eateth of this bread shall live for ever*" (John 6:53-58).

There's nothing normal about that statement, and like the Israelites in the time of Moses, who could either choose to trust the God who had so miraculously freed them, or rebel against Him, the disciples Jesus was speaking to that day had a choice to make. They could choose to believe the One who up to that point in His earthly ministry had made the blind see (Matthew 9:27-31), the lame walk (John 5:1-15), cleansed lepers (Mark 1:40-45), fed the five thousand (John 6:1-15), and raised the dead (Mark 5:21-43). They could choose to believe Him when He said, "*Whoever eats My flesh and drinks My blood has eternal life...*" I am "*the bread which came down from heaven... He who eats this bread will live forever.*" They could choose the super-natural and the extra-ordinary, or they could get back to normal, and sadly, just a few verses later we learn that many of His disciples, when they heard His words said, "*This is a hard saying; who can hear it?*" and "*from that time many of His disciples went back, and walked no more with Him*" (John 6:60; 66).

It's important to note the fact that the many who went back, who *walked no more with Him*, weren't people who were hearing Jesus for the first time, these were many of His disciples. They were people who were following our Lord, the Son of God, and like the Israelites who'd been set free from slavery in Egypt and were being led by God to the Promised Land, these disciples were being set free from slavery to sin and were being led by God on this great exodus whose end is eternal life. And again, like the Israelites, who grumbled and complained and wanted to return to a life of slavery every time they encountered hardship, these disciples of Christ, when faced with a *hard saying*, a stumbling block to their faith, chose to turn back and walk *no more with Him*, instead of believing the God they believed in. They chose to get back to what felt normal and ordinary, rather than believing that Jesus Christ, the Divine Second Person of the Holy Trinity clothed in human flesh, could literally give them His Body and His Blood to eat and drink to the end that they may live forever.

When we think of the many disciples who walked no more with Jesus, who turned away from Him so that they wouldn't have to confront our Lord's teaching about Holy Communion: "*This is My Body... This is My Blood...*" (Luke 22:19-20; Matthew 26:26-28; Mark 14:22-24; 1 Corinthians 11:23-25), or when we think of the Israelites who longed to go back to a life of slavery rather than continue the sometimes difficult journey to the Promised Land, what we discover is how inclined we are to want to return to normal when things get difficult. With the difficulty we're facing at this time, how many of us want to get back to normal? However, a good question to be asking ourselves right now is this: Does God want us to get back to normal? Back to church yes, but back to normal, definitely not, because there is nothing normal about our faith. There's nothing normal about God the Father sending His Son to be born of a virgin. There's nothing normal about the Infinite Son of God living a human life that we could never live, dying the death that we deserve, or rising to new life after three days in the tomb. There's nothing normal about eating and drinking the Son of God, and there's nothing normal about the event we celebrate today.

On the Day of Pentecost God poured out His Holy Spirit on the Church. On that day we received the most unimaginable gift of all, and there is nothing normal about the super-natural, extra-ordinary truth that the God of Heaven

and Earth lives in us.