

*'That they all may  
be one'*



## The Holy Spirit in Eastern Liturgy

Eucharist is supremely thanksgiving, in token of all that the Father has done for us in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. It is *anamnesis*, a calling to mind of the full mystery of our redemption, a making present, now, of all that that entails, and appropriating it to ourselves by the grace of God.

The western believer, however, tends to get stuck with the Last Supper. Rightly, Holy Communion is seen as an act of obedience to the injunction of Christ to partake of the blessed bread and wine in remembrance that he has died for us, but the sacrament of course is far richer than that. The majority of ancient liturgies remind us that we are to recall not only our Lord's passion and death but also his "glorious resurrection and ascension" as we "look for his coming again". If Pentecost is not specifically mentioned here in the *anamnesis* it is because the presence and power of the Holy Spirit pervade the whole action of the liturgy, which is deemed, in fact, to be a renewal of Pentecost and a communion in the Spirit, just as much as a sharing in the mystery of Christ. The Holy Spirit has, as it were, a holistic function in a liturgy which is in its entirety an invocation of the Spirit, a 'constant pneumatology' as it has been termed.

The ancient Liturgy of Saint John Chrysostom, prayed and treasured still by Orthodox believers, is a living embodiment of the Tradition. Above all it is doxological. Over and over again the blessed Trinity is invoked and praised. The Third Person is as conspicuous as the Second, his name occurring some thirty times at least it is estimated. Part of the concluding words of the *Prothesis* (the preliminary preparation and blessing of the gifts before the liturgy proper begins) are in the words of a familiar Orthodox prayer addressed to the Holy Spirit:

*O Heavenly King, the Paraclete, the Spirit of truth, who art everywhere present and fillest all things, the Treasure of good things and Giver of life, come and dwell in us, and cleanse us from all stain, and save our souls, O Good One.*

And then, as the liturgy itself begins, the priest proclaims:

*Blessèd be the kingdom of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, now and ever and unto ages of ages. R. Amen.*

Thus the tone is set.

The litanies which follow are interspersed with doxologies, and an antiphon pleads: “Save us O Good Paraclete”, as the action of this section, termed the *Liturgy of the Catechumens*, proceeds. Next comes the *Little Entrance* (procession with the gospel book) the Scripture readings and further litanies. Then, when the catechumens have been bidden to depart (only baptised believers may be present for the Eucharist itself) the priest prays secretly for the grace and blessing of the Spirit while litanies and the *Cherubic Hymn* (“Let all mortal flesh keep silence”) are sung. This is the significant moment of the *Great Entrance*, the procession of the already prepared and blessed bread and wine which are to be offered. Meanwhile the priest and deacon assure each other in prayer that they will be strengthened by the Spirit to fulfil their momentous task: “The Holy Ghost shall come upon thee, and the power of the Highest shall overshadow thee” - the very words used by the angel to Mary at the annunciation.

Shortly afterwards, in the *Prayer of Oblation*, the priest prays that the Good Spirit of God’s grace should rest upon himself and the deacon, upon the gifts and upon all the people, a prayer in advance that the consecration should come to its full term. The *Kiss of peace* follows and the *Creed*, interspersed with further Trinitarian affirmations. Then comes the *Dialogue to the Preface* - “Lift up your hearts” and the *Preface* itself with its constant Trinitarian references - “For all these things, we give thanks to Thee, and to thine Only -Begotten Son, and the Holy Ghost . . .”

The *Sanctus* follows and the *Words of institution*, surrounded by a wealth of Trinitarian and Christological references. Then the *anamnesis*: “the Cross, the Tomb, the Resurrection on the third day, the Ascension into heaven, the session on the right hand, the second and glorious coming again”. All this builds up to the moment of the *epiclesis*, the unique moment of the invocation of the Spirit on the “bloodless sacrifice” which is being offered and on the people:

Priest: . . .we beseech Thee and pray and supplicate; send  
down Thy Holy Ghost upon us, and on these proposed gifts . . .  
Lord who didst send down Thy Holy Ghost the third hour on the  
Apostles, take Him not from us . . . but renew Him in us who pray to  
Thee.

Thus Pentecost is renewed within the Eucharist. The Spirit as much as the Risen Christ is present and to be 'received':

Blessèd art Thou, O Christ (the priest continues) who didst fill the  
fishermen with all manner of wisdom, sending down upon them the Holy  
Ghost . . .

When the Highest came down and confounded the tongues,  
He divided the nations (ie at Babel); when he distributed the tongues of fire, He  
called all to unity, and with one voice we praise the Holy Ghost. . .

And now, in rising crescendo, the moment of the *epiclesis* itself is reached. The priest makes the sign of the cross three times over the gifts and in answer to the deacon's plea: "Sir, bless the holy bread" asks of God:

*Make this bread the precious Body of Thy Christ.*

Deacon: *Amen, Sir, bless the holy cup.*

Priest: *And that which is in this cup, the precious Blood of Thy Christ.*

Deacon: *Amen. Sir, bless.*

Priest: *Changing them by Thy Holy Ghost.*

Deacon: *Amen, Amen, Amen . . .*

Priest: *So that they may be for those that participate, for  
purification of soul, forgiveness of sins, **communion of** the Holy Ghost,  
fulfilment of the kingdom of heaven, boldness towards Thee, and not to  
judgement nor to condemnation.*

And straightway there are intercessory prayers for the departed, remembrance of the saints and mementoes for the living. The *Our Father* follows and then further prayers, for the worthy reception of the sacramental gifts as the priest announces: "Holy





So indeed, “wherever the Spirit of God is, there is the Church”,  
Blessèd be God.