

Fire & Light

St. Symeon Orthodox Church

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June 19, 2016

Pentecost

Apostle Jude, Brother of the Lord

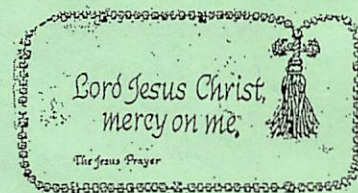
St. Paisios the Great (5th C)

St. Job, Patriarch of Moscow & All Russia (1607)

Fast - Free Week

"Prayer is spiritual breathing; when we pray we breathe in the Holy Spirit - 'praying in the Holy Spirit.' Thus all church prayers are -- the breathing of the Holy Spirit; as it were spiritual air and also light, spiritual fire, spiritual food and spiritual raiment."

~ St. John of Kronstadt



➤ **Many Years! Newly Illumined Peter Rutherford!**

✘ Holy Baptism - next Saturday, June 25 - 3:00pm - Child Sophia Ghilan

✘ Holy Baptism - Saturday, July 16 - Child David Johnson

"**The Holy Spirit dwells in the Saints** and remains with them forever, if they cleanse the eye of their understanding by cleaving to every sound doctrine and by resolutely pursuing every virtue, and thus maintain the grace within themselves. For Christ says that those who are in the world, that is, those who are preoccupied with the things of this world and choose to love earthly things, are unable to contain or to behold the Spirit."

St. Cyril of Alexandria (444 AD)

Unreal Christian Contemplative Practices

Fr. Seraphim Rose, *Orthodoxy and Religion of the Future*

It is deeply indicative of the spiritual state of contemporary mankind that the "charismatic" and "meditation" experiences are taking root among "Christians." An Eastern religious influence is undeniably at work in such "Christians," but it is only as a result of something much more fundamental: the loss of the very feeling and savor of Christianity.

The life of self-centeredness and self-satisfaction lived by most of today's "Christians" is so all-pervading that it effectively seals them off from any understanding at all of spiritual life; and when such people do undertake "spiritual life," it is only as another form of self-satisfaction. This can be seen quite clearly in the totally false religious ideal both of the "charismatic" movement and the various forms of "Christian meditation" — all of them promise (and give very quickly) an experience of "contentment" and "peace." But this is not the Christian ideal at all, which if anything may be summed up as a fierce battle and struggle. The "contentment" and "peace" described in these contemporary "spiritual" movements are quite manifestly the product of spiritual deception, of spiritual self-satisfaction — which is the absolute death of the God-oriented spiritual life. All these forms of "Christian meditation" operate solely on the psychic level and have nothing whatever in

(over)

common with Christian spirituality. Christian spirituality is formed in the arduous struggle to acquire the eternal Kingdom, which fully begins only with the dissolution of this temporal world, and the true Christian struggler never finds repose even in the foretastes of eternal blessedness which might be vouchsafed to him in this life; but the Eastern religions, to which the Kingdom of Heaven has not been revealed, strive only to acquire psychic states which begin and end in this life.

In our age of apostasy preceding the manifestation of Antichrist, the devil has been loosed for a time (Rev. 20:7) to work the false miracles which he could not work during the "thousand years" of grace in the Church of Christ (Rev. 20:3), and to gather in his hellish harvest of those souls who "received not the love of the truth" (II Thess. 2:10). We can tell that the time of Antichrist is truly near by the very fact that this satanic harvest is now being reaped not merely among the pagan peoples, who have not heard of Christ, but even more among "Christians" who have lost the savor of Christianity. It is of the very nature of Antichrist to present the kingdom of the devil as if it were of Christ. The present-day "charismatic" movement and "Christian meditation," and the "new religious consciousness" of which they are part, are forerunners of the religion of the future, the religion of the last humanity, the Religion of Antichrist, and their chief "spiritual" function is to make available to Christians the demonic initiation hitherto restricted to the pagan world.

What has brought humanity — and indeed Christendom — to this desperate state? Certainly it is not any overt worship of the devil, which is limited always to a few people; rather, it is something much more subtle, and something fearful for a conscious Orthodox Christian to reflect on: it is the loss of the grace of God, which follows on the loss of the savor of Christianity.

How much, then, must Orthodox Christians walk in the fear of God, trembling lest they lose His grace, which by no means is given to everyone, but only to those who hold the true Faith, lead a life of Christian struggle, and treasure the grace of God which leads them heavenward. And how much more cautiously must Orthodox Christians walk today above all, when they are surrounded by a counterfeit Christianity that gives its own experiences of grace and the Holy Spirit and can abundantly quote the Scriptures and the Holy Fathers to "prove" it! Surely the last times are near, when there will come spiritual deception so persuasive as to deceive, if it were possible, even the very elect (Mt. 24:24).

Against this powerful "religious experience" true Orthodox Christians must now arm themselves in earnest, becoming fully conscious of what Orthodox Christianity is and how its goal is different from that of all other religions, Christian or non-Christian.

Orthodox Christians! Hold fast to the grace which you have; never let it become a matter of habit; never measure it by merely human standards or expect it to be logical or comprehensible to those who understand nothing higher than what is human. Let all true Orthodox Christians strengthen themselves for the battle ahead, never forgetting that in Christ the victory is already ours.

Is the Orthodox Church Charismatic?

One of our members told me recently that when he is asked about the 'Charismatic Movement', he simply says 'the Orthodox Church is charismatic.' The Holy Spirit is totally central to our understanding of everything. The eternal dynamic relationship of love among the three Divine Persons, the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, is the basis for everything that is. We believe that Man is not fully human without the Holy Spirit; He is created to share in the Life of God by the Spirit dwelling in Him. Every Orthodox Christian is anointed with blessed oil as the 'Seal of the Gift of the Holy Spirit', which is understood as a sharing in the anointing of the Holy Spirit which Our Lord Jesus Christ received at His Baptism. (Cf. Luke 3:21-22, 4:18).

In the worship of the Orthodox Church, we constantly sing about the Holy Spirit. Many services begin with this prayer to the Holy Spirit:

O Heavenly King, the Comforter, the Spirit of Truth, Who art everywhere and fillest all things, Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life, Come and abide in us, cleanse us from every impurity, and save our souls, O Good One.

Practically every prayer and hymn speaks of Him. Above all, it is the Holy Spirit who, as we pray in the Liturgy, descends 'at the third hour' as He did on the Holy Apostles at Pentecost (cf. Acts 2:15), to transform us and our Gifts of Bread and Wine to be the Body of Jesus Christ.

Every candidate for Baptism in the Orthodox Church has four lengthy exorcisms pronounced over him, and it is not unusual for exorcisms to be used at other times as pastoral need may suggest. The Anointing of the Sick is routinely administered both publicly and privately, and it is not unusual to hear medically unexplainable healings attributed to such ministries. Orthodox frequently hear accounts of signs and wonders, of supernatural gifts of healing, wisdom and knowledge, even in the present day.

But such gifts (called in Greek *charisma*) are not a new revival among Orthodox. We have literature

St. Seraphim of Sarov
The Acquisition of the Holy Spirit

God's all-saving will consists in doing good solely to acquire the Holy Spirit, as an eternal, inexhaustible treasure which cannot be rightly valued... This is the oil in the lamps of the wise virgins which could burn long and brightly, and these virgins with their burning lamps were able to meet the Bridegroom Who came at midnight, and could enter the bridechamber of joy with Him. But the foolish ones, though they went to market to buy some oil when they saw their lamps going out, were unable to return in time, for the door was already shut. The market is our life; the door of the bridechamber which was shut and which barred the way to the Bridegroom is human death; the wise and foolish virgins are Christian souls; the oil is not good deeds but the grace of the All-Holy Spirit of God which is obtained through them and which changes souls from one state to another - that is, from corruption to incorruption, from spiritual death to spiritual life, from darkness to light, from the stable of our being (where the passions are tied up like dumb animals and wild beasts) into a temple of the Divinity, into the shining bridechamber of eternal joy in Christ Jesus our Lord, the Creator and Redeemer and eternal Bridegroom of our souls.

from every century from the Apostles until now, and there has never been a time when there were not holy men and women who cast out demons, prophesied, and worked healings and wonders, and who witnessed to their fervent belief in the Last Things by violent separation from the 'cares and riches and pleasures' (cf. Luke 8:14) of the present world. There was never a time when the Holy Spirit was not prominent in Orthodox worship and thought. Many Orthodox writers define the Church as simply, 'life in the Holy Spirit.' The nineteenth-century Russian monk St. Seraphim of Sarov is noted for saying, 'the aim of the Christian life is the acquisition of the Holy Spirit.'

But with Orthodox the experience of spiritual gifts is not usually spoken of much. Like Our Lord Himself, many workers of wonders forbade others of speak of them. Some even feigned madness or mental deficiency to avoid being praised for their piety. One reason is that the Orthodox spiritual writers from all centuries emphasize that we are engaged in an 'unseen warfare' with the demons until our last breath, and the greatest spiritual dangers for the serious Christian are vanity, pride, and delusion. Spiritual gifts, like prayer, fasting, and almsgiving, are best done in secret (cf. Matthew 6:1-6).

Any Orthodox teaching about the Holy Spirit and the spiritual life, any gift of wisdom or miraculous occurrence is not 'of private interpretation' (cf. 2 Peter 1:20) but is balanced in the context of the whole and complete teaching of the Holy Trinity, the Work of Christ, and the Life of the Church as experienced by Christians throughout the ages.

Yes, the Orthodox Church is charismatic; She is herself the life of grace (*charis*) in the Holy Spirit. But her Lord says to her: *Rejoice not that the spirits are subject unto you, but rather rejoice that your names are written in heaven. (Luke 10:20).*

Make every effort never to be deprived of grace, even for a single moment. - St. John of Karpathos

The Accord of All with The Lord's Mother

by Fr. Michael Polsky

"Then returned they (from the Mount of the Ascension)...and they went up into an upper room, where abode (all the Apostles)... These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with certain of the women and Mary the Mother of Jesus, and with His brethren. (Acts 1:14)

After the Lord's Ascension, there came about a fundamental change in the mutual relations of all the first believers. The Holy Apostles had been inseparably close to the Lord, and after them there often followed many women (Luke 8:1-3; Matt. 27:55). Now the orphaned community is all gathered together, not travelling, and they are to be found in one place. And the Mother of Jesus and His brothers are with them. The "unbelief," doubts and uneasiness of His brothers are at an end, as is their closeness according to the flesh with the Great Man. There comes instead a general concord, which is now expressed in prayer and supplication. There were many women among them, for the company numbered about "an hundred and twenty" (Acts 1:15), but only one of them is mentioned by name, the Mother of the Lord, and this even though formerly several of them were accounted for by name. It is fitting that now she alone has a mention, just as it is that earlier in His lifetime she was not mentioned in the number of the female companions of the Lord. That was not her time; she observed her Son from afar; she saw Him at home every time He was in His hometown; then she came to His Cross. Now she, as an active member of the Christian community, is together with the Apostles and all the community. This is why she alone is mentioned here. This fact was therefore worthy of note. The Lord is not with them in the flesh; the Mother of the Lord is. There came about an exceptional solidarity within the whole community and the Lord's Mother took her own appropriate place therein, putting her prayers and supplications behind the general cause. The concord of all was now a concord with the Mother of the Lord in the strength of her participation in the common assembly.

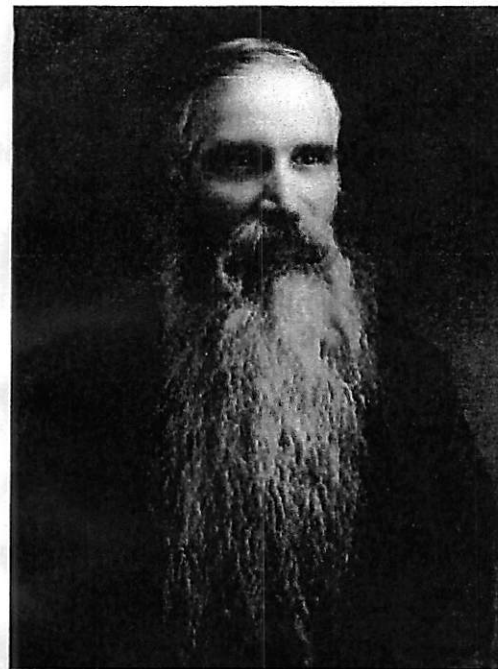
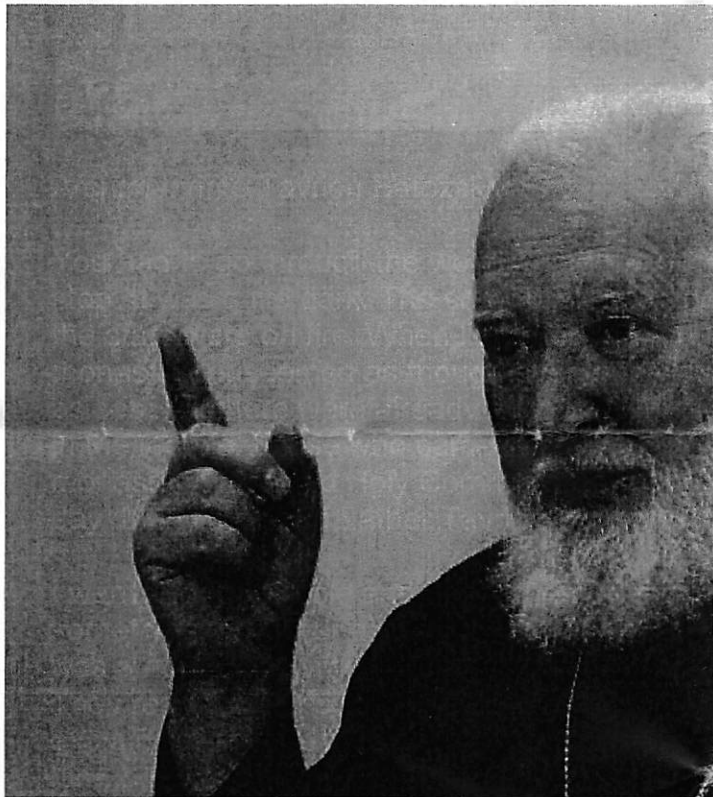
THE ICON OF PENTECOST



The icon of Pentecost has many striking features which warrant our consideration. In the very center some icons show an empty seat. This represents Christ who remains invisibly present in his Church (Matt. 18:20; 28:20). Others show the Virgin Mary, who iconographically represents the entire Church, to show that all who are members of Christ's Church are recipients of the Holy Spirit. The apostles are seated peacefully around this seat showing the inner reality of what the Day of Pentecost brought. If you recall at the tower of Babel the tongues were confused and men divided (Gen. 11:1-9). Our Lord on the day of Pentecost sends the Holy Spirit upon the faithful and along with their speaking in tongues there was unity and peace instead of division. This is why the fragmentation of Christianity is so antithetical to what Christ came to bring when he sent us the Holy Spirit. On each side of the central chair is St. Peter and St. Paul. Although St. Paul was not there at the day of Pentecost, he was put in the icon to signify his equality with the other Apostles, and especially with St. Peter. The old man at the bottom is called Cosmos (World). He represents the world that has grown old because of sin. His crown represents the reign of sin. He is surrounded in darkness because of the blindness it brings. He is dressed in red representing the human and animal sacrifices done before idols or man's false worship. The man is holding twelve scrolls. These represent the teachings of the Apostles who were empowered on the day of Pentecost to preach the Good News of Christ to ends of the Earth.

Spiritual Life Cannot Be “Bought,” Even with Some Sort of Deed

Alexander Filippov | 03 October 2015
Highlights of the Rector of Saint Tikhon's Orthodox University Archpriest Vladimir Vorobyov's annual conversation with first-year students.



Archimandrite Tavrion Batozskiy

You had to go through the woods from the bus stop. It was quite dark. The snow glistened and the stars were on fire. When I entered the monastery, it seemed as though everyone was asleep, but there were already a lot of pilgrims in the temple. Those who came to the monastery, received Holy Communion every day. Many criticized Father Tavrion for that.

I went into the temple and heard them reading something, and after a while realized that it was a homily of Symeon the New Theologian. They read the place where St. Symeon explains: if anyone says that the Holy Spirit in him, but it is not noticeable, then — it is not true, because the presence of the Holy Spirit in one's heart can not be confused. It's like a fragrance in the nostrils or light to the eye.

Suddenly, Father Tavrion came out from the altar and said : “You know, I give my blessing for all to take communion frequently. When I come to the Last Judgment, God will ask me: “How could you give communion to everyone every day? From where have you gained such a confidence?” I will answer him: “I warned them. The words of St. Symeon is a warning. ”

It means: Don't fool yourself. If you don't feel the presence of the Holy Spirit, this means He is not in you. In this case, don't go to

What is spiritual life?

– How can we understand whether or not the Holy Spirit is a person? At the end of January 1978, I went to a wonderful starets, Archimandrite Tavrion Batozskiy. He was seriously ill with cancer, and I didn't know if I would see him or not.

communion frequently. You are not ready to live the grace of a spiritual life.

Apostle Paul speaks a little differently about this: "Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him" (Rom. 8: 9). Spiritual life is not broad intellectual interests. It is not literature, nor theater, nor a conservatory. It is life with the Holy Spirit in the heart.

The presence of the Holy Spirit can be recognized by the signs that led the Apostle Paul and then Seraphim of Sarov. It is a heartfelt world. It is the joy of the Lord. It is the love of God and people. It is piety, chastity and purity.

When a person's heart is free of the passions, it belongs to God and is easy on the soul, because with God, there is nothing to fear. God is always joyful. When a man is with God, he does not want anything foul or vile, such as drunkenness, drugs, fornication, or unclean resentment. He can't have despair and depression.

Being captive to sin is difficult. With God, there is no captivity, even if a person is in jail. Still, with God, there is freedom. As confessors of the twentieth century mention: "With God, good is always everywhere."

– How does one attain a spiritual life?

– You can't give a definite answer. Spiritual life cannot be "bought," even with some sort of deed. "The Spirit breathes where He will." "... it is not by measure that He gives the Spirit" (John 3: 34). God wants to give each person the grace of the Holy Spirit — and always gives it, whenever a person can hold it in his heart.

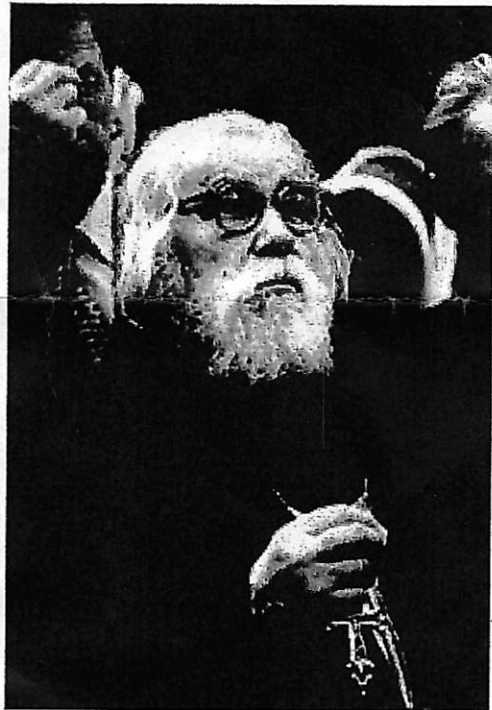
When a person aspires to be considered worthy of the grace of God and asks God for it, then, even if he is not a saint, but has a pure heart and loves God, God gives him His grace.

So that life with God gains permanence, deeds are needed, or as the ancients said — asceticism.

This does not mean that it is necessary to go into the desert. It means that people do not indulge their passions, they limit themselves on the earth, to make room for the Holy Spirit. God doesn't come to be in "second place" in the heart of man. He needs to be given "first place."

– Did you meet with other starysts?

– Not once. Usually you go to a staryst with questions that require an answer. You come, for example, to Father Ioann (Krestyankin), and need to wait (there was always a line to see him). Finally, you go to him in his cell and ... all the questions disappear instantly. All that is troubling instantly becomes so small, and the heart is filled with grace.



Fr. Ioann (Krestyankin)

Holy starysts are all different. One staryst listens and is silent, praying to God for you. Father Ioann, was the opposite. He often didn't give those who came to see him the chance to say a single word, He talked quickly, in a machine-gun sort of speech, and even gasped a little. He spoke, sitting on a sofa while doing something else, as I sat on a bench.

Listening to him, you suddenly realize that he answers all of your questions — the ones that you wanted to ask, and even those you didn't think to ask — talking about your thoughts as if seeing right through your soul.

HOLY TRADITION

One of the distinctive characteristics of the Holy Orthodox Church is its changelessness, its loyalty to the past, its sense of living continuity with the ancient Church. This idea of living continuity may be summed up in one word: Tradition. As St. John of Damascus says, "We do not change the everlasting boundaries which our fathers have set, but we keep the Tradition, just as we received it" [On the Holy Icons, II, 12]. To an Orthodox Christian, Tradition means the Holy Bible; it means the Creed; it means the decrees of the Ecumenical Councils and the writings of the Fathers; it means the Canons, the Service Books, the Holy Icons, etc. In essence, it means the whole system of doctrine, ecclesiastical government, worship and art which Orthodoxy has articulated over the ages (Timothy Ware, *The Orthodox Church*, p.204).

We take special note that for the Orthodox, the Holy Bible forms a part of Holy Tradition, but does not lie outside of it. One would be in error to suppose that Scripture and Tradition are two separate and distinct sources of Christian Faith, as some do, since there is, in reality, only one source; and the Holy Bible exists and found its formulation within Tradition.

As Orthodox, however, while giving it due respect, we realize that not everything received from the past is of equal value. The Holy Scriptures, the Creed and the dogmatic and doctrinal definitions of the Ecumenical Councils hold the primary place in Holy Tradition and cannot be discarded or revised.

Here we must also distinguish between Tradition and traditions. At the Council of Carthage in 257, one of the Bishops remarked, "The Lord said, I am Truth. He did not say, I am custom" [The Opinions of the Bishops on the Baptizing of Heretics, 30]. Many traditions that have been handed down are merely cultural variations, theological or pious opinions...

Orthodox loyalty to Tradition [the things of the past] is not something mechanical or lifeless, however. Tradition is a personal encounter with Christ in the Holy Spirit, as Bishop Kallistos affirms. Tradition is not only kept by the Church, it lives in the Church, it is the life of the Holy Spirit in the Church. Thus Tradition must be seen and experienced from within. Tradition is a living experience of the Holy Spirit in the present. While inwardly unchanging (since God does not change), Tradition constantly assumes new forms, supplementing the old, but not superseding it.

Our Lord tells us that "when the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all the truth" (John 16:13) and this promise forms the basis of Orthodox respect for Holy Tradition.

Thus, as Fr. Georges Florovsky expresses this idea: Tradition is the witness of the Spirit; the Spirit's unceasing revelation and preaching of good things.... To accept and understand Tradition we must live within the Church, we must be conscious of the grace-giving presence of the Lord in it...

Tradition is not only a protective, conservative principle; it is primarily the principle of growth and regeneration... Tradition is the constant abiding of the Spirit and not only the memory of words. (Sobornost, the Catholicity of the Church, excerpt from "These Truths We Hold.")

The Church: The Body of Christ

✠ Men, women and children, profoundly divided as to race, nation, language, manner of life, work, knowledge, honor, fortune... the Church recreates all of them in the Spirit. To all equally she communicates a divine aspect. All receive from her a unique nature which cannot be broken asunder, a nature which no longer permits one to take into consideration the many and profound differences which are their lot. In that way all are raised up and united in a manner which is truly Catholic. In her none is in the least degree separated from the community, all are grounded, so to speak, in one another by the simple and indivisible power of faith ... Christ, too, is all in all, He who contains all in Himself according to the unique, infinite and all-wise power of His goodness - as a center upon which all lines converge - that the creatures of the one God may not live as strangers or enemies one with another, having no place in common, where they may display their love and their peace.

St. Maximus the Confessor

Sources of Holy Tradition

The Bible - The Liturgy - The Councils - The Fathers -The Saints The Canons - Church Art

The ongoing life of God's People is called **Holy Tradition**. The Holy Tradition of the Old Testament is expressed in the Old Testamental part of the Bible and in the ongoing life of the People of Israel until the Birth of Christ. This Tradition is fulfilled, completed and transcended in the time of the Messiah and His founding of the Christian Church.

The New Testament or Christian Tradition is also called the **Apostolic Tradition** and the **Tradition of the Church**. The central written part of this Tradition is the New Testament writings in the Bible. The Gospels and the other writings of the Apostolic Church form the heart of the Christian Tradition and are the main written source and inspiration of all that developed in later ages.

This Christian Tradition is given over from people to people, through space and time. **Tradition** as a word means exactly this: it is that which is "passed on" and "given over" from one to another. **Holy Tradition** is, therefore, that which is passed on and given over within the Church from the time of Christ's Apostles right down to the present day.

Although containing many written documents, Holy Tradition is not at all limited to what is written; it is not merely a body of literature. It is, on the contrary, the total life and experience of the entire Church transferred from place to place and from generation to generation. **Tradition is the very life of the Church itself as it is inspired and guided by the Holy Spirit.**

Not everything in the Church belongs to its Holy Tradition for not everything in the Church is done by the grace of the Holy Spirit, and not everything in the Church pertains essentially and necessarily to the Kingdom of God. Some things in the Church are just temporal and temporary things, merely human customs and traditions of no eternal and everlasting value. Such things in themselves are not sinful or wrong. On the contrary, they may be very positive and very

helpful to the life of the Church as long as they are not taken to be what they are not. Thus, it is very important in the Church to make the distinction between traditions which are merely earthly and human and passing away and the genuine Holy Tradition which pertains to the heavenly and eternal Kingdom of God.

It is also important to recognize that there are also things in the Church which not only do not belong to Holy Tradition, but which are not even to be counted among its positive human traditions. These things which are just sinful and wrong are brought into the life of the Church from the evil world. The Church in its human form, as an earthly institution, is not immune to the sins of its unholy members. These deviations and errors which creep into the life of the Church stand under the judgment and condemnation of the authentic and genuine Holy Tradition which comes from God.

Among the elements which make up the Holy Tradition of the Church, the **Bible** holds the first place; next comes the Church's Liturgical life and its prayer; then its dogmatic decisions and the acts of its approved Churchly Councils; the writings of the Church Fathers, the Lives of the Saints, the Canon Laws, and finally the Iconographic Tradition together with the other inspired forms of creative artistic expression such as music and architecture.

All of the elements of Holy Tradition are organically linked together in real life. None of them stands alone. None may be separated or isolated from the other or from the wholeness of the life of the Church. All come alive in the actual living of the life of the Church in every age and generation, in every time and place. **As the Church continues to live by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, the Holy Tradition of the Church does not change because God does not change. "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today and forever!" The Orthodox Church continues to be His Body - His People- living by Holy Tradition!**