

The Descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles mankind draws its first breath of the Spirit of God by St. Theophan the Recluse

The descent of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles was mankind's first inspiration of breath from the Spirit of God. Remember Ezekiel's prophecy about the valley full of human bones (Ezekiel 37:1-14). Remember how, by his word, bone joined to bone, how the bones were then covered with sinews, flesh and skin, but how they as yet had no breath in them. And Ezekiel "prophesied unto the wind." He prophesied, "and the breath came into them, and they lived" (Ezekiel 37:9-10). That valley full of bones is fallen mankind, which, estranged from God, did not have life in it. As the prophet said, it did not have breath in it.

However, the Lord did not abandon mankind. Through a variety of providential actions, He prepared it for life. By the time Our Lord and Savior had appeared, mankind could be described as completely prepared for new life; it resembled a solid body, with bone upon bone, covered with sinew and skin, lacking only breath. The Holy Gospels clearly state that little more was needed, and that the time for it to quicken had arrived.

Why was the Holy Spirit yet lacking? Because Jesus had not yet been glorified. But then the Lord was Resurrected and Ascended in glory to Heaven. The Spirit of God descended, and, drawing It in, mankind came alive. The Apostles, all the Church gathered together in the Upper Room on Mt. Zion, were the lips through which mankind drew its first breath of the Spirit.

In ordinary respiration, air is inhaled into the lungs. It passes through a large channel to progressively narrower ones until it has spread throughout. The lungs receive the life-giving air, and the process of respiration, inhaling and exhaling, is the actual means by which its life-giving power is distributed.

So it is with the Holy Spirit. Once mankind has inhaled the Spirit of God, it continues to breathe with it. The Holy Church is the set of lungs where this takes place. The Holy Mysteries of God and other actions of sanctification comprise the channel into the lungs. The rhythmic movement of the chest is the annual rhythm of all of the church's liturgical actions, e.g. Great Lent and its attendant rites, followed by the celebrations of the Pentecostarion, followed once again by the fast, and then festal days, and so on, just like the rhythmic movement of the chest.

The Church of Christ, the Christian faithful - wherever they might be - thus breathe. Because Christianity exists within mankind, all of mankind draws breath from It, but not everyone communes of the quickening action of that Divine Breath. This is because one part of mankind has damaged organs of respiration, while another does not submit itself to the benevolent influence of this respiration.

Full inspiration requires that the pathways in the lungs be neither damaged nor clogged. Likewise, for the Spirit of God to have Its full effect upon man, the organs He Himself had ordered to communicate Himself must be whole. That is to say, all of the Divine Mysteries and liturgical functions, as established by the Holy Apostles under the inspiration of the Spirit of God, must be preserved intact. Where they have been

damaged, the breathing of the Spirit of God is incomplete, and, it follows, does not impart Its full effect. ...

At the same time, let us not exalt ourselves, asserting that we possess the healthy means to breathe with the Spirit of God, true Holy Mysteries and the real structure and organization of the Church. Wherever we do not breathe the Spirit of God, there is no life. The Church breathes with this Spirit, and we must as well. The lips through which the Divine Spirit is received, the heart that opens to receive It, is living faith.

Participation in the Mysteries and liturgical actions according to the order of the Holy Church brings one into contact with It. To make It one's own, one must act upon Its inspiration expressed in the demands of conscience and the Commandments of the Gospel. One who follows that way of life breathes with the Spirit and is enlivened by It. True evidence of spirituality is prayer, that which is justly called the breathing of the Spirit. One who prays well, in a collected manner and fervently, both in church and at home, breathes with the Spirit.