

In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

Some parishioners have asked me about the season that we are in. We have completed the season of the 40 day fast known as Great Lent. This was followed by Palm Sunday, Holy Week and Great and Holy PASCHA. The week after PASCHA is referred to as Bright Week which is also known as New Week. The following is known as Thomas Sunday.

According to Protopresbyter Dr. George D. Dragas, (who is the Dean and Professor of Patristics and Church History at Holy Cross Orthodox Seminary) since ancient times, the 50-day period from Pascha to Pentecost has been called Pentecost because what began with the Lord breathing the Holy Spirit on His Disciples was consummated with the full descent of the Spirit upon the Disciples and the whole Church.

Thus, the Church was fully born and began to grow. The word, Pentecost means “the fiftieth” and is used to designate the great event of the Outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles and the Church on the 50th day after the Resurrection of Christ, just ten days after His Ascension into Heaven.

His Grace, Bishop Basil and most others refer to the period between PASCHA and Pentecost as the Paschal Season.

As, I’m sure that you have noticed, we also do not say the prayer “O Heavenly King” at the beginning of services, nor do we say this prayer in our private prayers during this period. We will again say this prayer on Pentecost. During this period, all prostrating and kneeling is prohibited as a tangible confession of the Resurrection of Christ. It is only on the actual day of Pentecost that prostrating and kneeling is resumed during the Kneeling Vespers. This a special Vespers service, which consists of prayers for the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Later on, another week was added to these 50 days in order to celebrate the post-feast of the Feast of Pentecost. Thus, today the period of movable Feasts after Pascha spans eight weeks, to include the Sunday of All Saints which is the Sunday after Pentecost, and is divided into three parts:

- The 40 post-festal days of Pascha,
- The Feast of the Ascension, together with its post-festal period, and
- The Feast of Pentecost together with its own post-festal period.

The hymns of this period are contained in the special Pentecostal book, known as the Pentecostarion.

The first Sunday following Pascha is the Sunday of St. Thomas. In some places you'll see this referred to as the second Sunday of Pascha, since the first Sunday of Pascha is Pascha itself.

The second Sunday following Pascha is the Sunday of the Myrrh-bearing Women. This is referred

to as the third Sunday of Pascha. It is dedicated to the women who brought myrrh to the tomb of Christ. It is also dedicated to the secret disciples of the Lord, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus, who arranged for and assisted in the Lord's burial. All these sacred persons clearly demonstrate to us that people from all walks of life can be disciples of the Lord and enjoy the privilege of taking care of His body and become primary witnesses of the Lord's mighty Resurrection.

The third Sunday following Pascha is the Sunday of the Paralytic. This is referred to as the fourth Sunday of Pascha. The healing of the paralytic at the pool of Bethesda shows Christ's authority over the Sabbath because it was on the Sabbath day that He healed the paralytic.

The Wednesday after the Sunday of the Paralytic falls exactly in the middle of the 50 days of the period of Pentecost and is consequently called Mid-Pentecost. It is a Festal Day, and according to ancient custom, it draws its meaning from the Gospel prescribed for it. This Gospel lesson contains the speech of the Lord made in the Temple, in the middle of the feast of the Tabernacles, which explains His authority over the Sabbath in terms of the divine origin of both His teaching and His existence.

Central to this are the Lord's words to the people of Jerusalem:

"I did not come on My own. The One Who sent Me is truthful, and you do not know Him. But I know the One Who sent Me, because I came from Him" (7:28).

Also central are the words the Lord uttered on the last day of the Feast which anticipate the Outpouring of the Spirit at Pentecost:

"If you are thirsty, come to Me and drink! Have faith in Me, and you will have life-giving water flowing from deep inside you"

The fourth Sunday following Pascha is the Sunday of the Samaritan Woman. This is referred to as the fifth Sunday of Pascha. The conversation of the Lord with the Samaritan woman at Jacob's well near Sychar reaches its high point when the Lord discloses his identity:

"I Who speak to you am He (that is the Christ)."

And at the end of the story, the Samaritans openly declare,

"we know that this is indeed the Savior of the world."

Today is the fifth Sunday following Pascha. It is the Sunday of the Healing of the Man Born Blind. Today is referred to as the sixth Sunday of Pascha. The healing of the blind man demonstrates the divine power of Christ and the fact that He came from God:

For "This is the first time in history that anyone has ever given sight to someone born blind. Jesus could not do anything unless He came from God"

On the Wednesday after the Sunday of the Man Born, we celebrate the apodosis or completion of the post-festal period of Pascha. The services of this day, which includes a paschal liturgy, are sung in a manner identical to that of the New or Bright Week. This is actually the 39th day after Pascha, the eve of the Ascension Day, when we sing the Resurrection Hymn, Christ is Risen and exchange the Resurrection greeting for the last time.

This coming Thursday is the 40th day after Pascha, when the Ascension of the Lord into Heaven is commemorated. The feast of the Ascension, then, marks the end and the sealing of the work of the Lord on Earth, as well as the Ascension of human nature to heaven and consequently foreshadows the forthcoming Gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. It is celebrated until the Friday of the following week. We begin fasting on Wednesdays and Fridays again, but we still do not kneel or make prostrations. Also, we do not say the prayer "O Heavenly King".

Next Sunday is the sixth Sunday following Pascha, also referred to as the seventh Sunday of Pascha. It is dedicated to the 318 Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council of Nicaea (325 AD) and is consequently known as the Sunday of the Holy Fathers.

Then comes the Christian feast of Pentecost which corresponds to the Jewish feast which bears the same name, and in which the first fruits of Israel's new crops were offered to God. The Christian feast commemorates the first fruits of the preaching of the Apostles, which followed the descent of the Holy Spirit upon them on the day of Pentecost, and on account of which the first Christian Church was born and established with three thousand souls.

Ever since Pentecost, the Spirit abides in the Church and regulates the Church's life and growth. The Spirit brings the entire constitution of the Church together as the Body of Christ. As the Comforter, He is the pledge of Christ's return and final victory with the entire body of the Church. Fasting is not observed during the week of after Pentecost.

The Sunday after Pentecost is known as the Sunday of All Saints. This feast was placed very appropriately after Pentecost because the Church was watered and increased through the witness and blood of the Martyrs. Later, when the Church honored others as Saints besides the Martyrs, the moveable feast after Pascha acquired a more general character and was changed into a feast in honor of all the Saints.

During the days after the Sunday of All Saints, a fast is observed for the Feast of the Holy Apostles. From the Monday after the Sunday of All Saints to the 28th of June we fast. During this fast we do not eat meat, poultry, dairy products, and eggs. We are allowed to have fish, wine and oil on all days except Wednesdays and Fridays. The fast ends at sundown on June 28.

I hope that all of you can be with us to celebrate the Ascension of our Lord on Wednesday evening. We will be having a potluck dinner following the service.