

THE CHURCH DURING THE HOLY PENTECOST

Blessed Father Bishoi Kamel

Christ arose and raised us up with Him and ascended unto Heaven and sat at the right hand of His Father - He raised us up with Him and made us sit with Him in heavenly places.

The purpose of the Church during this Holy Pentecost is to help us live and experience the Resurrection. The Resurrection is not a story but a life in which the Christian strongly feels his resurrection from sin' daily weaknesses, anger, hatred, glory of personal honor, and worldly lusts. Then, we can say that we rose with Christ. We died with Christ (crucified) so we live (He rose) not us, but Christ lives in us. The Church has thus prepared a practical method that takes us from one week to the other until we actually participate with Christ who sits at the right hand of His Father.

The experiences of the seven weeks of Pentecost are arranged according to the Sunday readings so that they all revolve around the person of Jesus Christ, thus we are strengthened in Him and our resurrection is completed:

- 1st Sunday :The Lord Jesus is *our Faith* and our recovery from doubt.
(John 20:19-31)
- 2nd Sunday :The Lord Jesus is *the bread of our life*.
(John 6:35-45)
- 3rd Sunday :The Lord Jesus is *the water of our life*.
(John 4:1-42)
- 4th Sunday :The Lord Jesus is *the light of our life*.
(John 12:35-50)
- 5th Sunday :The Lord Jesus is *our way of life*.
(John 14:1-11)
- 6th Sunday :The Lord Jesus is *the conqueror of the world*.
(John 16:23-33)
- 7th Sunday :The Lord Jesus is *the sender of His Holy Spirit*.
(John 15:26 - 16:15)

The Resurrection has destroyed doubt and the lack of faith, and hence the Church was formed. In this place of sojourn, the body of Christ (I am the bread of Life), is the true nutrition of the Church, and any other food would do her more harm than good. The Lord Jesus alone, is the water that quenches her thirst (I am the living water) because the worldly water increases her thirst and does not quench it. Thus the Church should proceed in the light of Christ, (I am the light of the world) confident that the Lord Jesus is the way to life (I am the way) and that Jesus by Whom the Church lives, has conquered the world (I have conquered the world), and that He ascended unto Heaven to send us His Holy Spirit, and seat us with him in the heavens.

In the Old Testament By the same strong heavenly arrangement, the people of Israel experienced the crossing over and life with God until He led them to Canaan. These people, before the crossing, were subject to the sins of fear, suspicion and the attachment to the flesh pots as a source of nutrition for them, and the dependence on the water of the river as the only source for quenching their thirst. But the crossing of the Red Sea drew the line between the worldly life and the new life by the power of God - the crossing of the sea is a symbol of Baptism and Baptism is our share in the Resurrection with Christ.¹

The first week of Pentecost:

The teachings of the Church in the first week deal with the power of faith in the resurrection of the body. Faith is necessary for walking in the wilderness, for encountering Amalek, and for trust in the power of God to sustain the people by providing them with food and drink. Faith is necessary for the cure from the bites of snakes (by gazing upon the brass serpent - symbol of the Cross). Finally, the power of faith is an absolute necessity for entering Canaan.

And thus, the Lord Jesus strengthened His disciples' faith (in the first week), by entering the room while the doors were closed to teach them that the Resurrection is the ability to come out of a closed grave - the creation of life from death, success from failure, and faith after despair. It is the emerging of purity out of the human weakness. It is absolute faith. It is life itself to us Christians.

By the end of the week, He dispelled Thomas' doubt by allowing him to touch His life giving wounds. Thus my brethren, in the first week, we should fix our eyes on the Risen Lord and His wounds, trusting and believing that He will raise us, will do the impossible with us. *It is the week of Faith.*

Second Week

The people were in need of food in that desert so God sent them the manna from heaven and here the gospel of the second Sunday reaffirms that he who eats the Lord has life and that there is no life for man without His Body. The manna was enough to sustain the people, but was not a guarantee for everlasting life. (Your fathers ate manna in the desert and died). In the Christian Resurrection there is never death but

as Christ is living by the Father so do we when we eat His Body and live by Him for ever. What is the use of speaking about the Resurrection, if the resurrected person has to die later? Resurrection means conquering death - it means everlasting life and our nourishment in the Resurrection is the ever-living Body of Christ.

Brethren, this week is the week of confirmation in the resurrected Christ. Eat His body and be firm in the strength of His resurrection, be firm in life and live by Him.

Moreover, all worldly food will leave us nothing but death. So what is the use of racing after the poisonous foods of this world? What is the use of racing after the passing glories, positions and lusts of this world?!!!

Third Week

One of the necessities for the People in the wilderness is water without which they would die of thirst. This is why God sent them water out of the rock. We wonder how a Christian can live in this world without the water of the Holy Spirit. The human being has emotions and feelings and needs, that have to be filled, and unless he reaches the state of fullness by the Holy Spirit, he will eventually thirst after the world and its water of which whosoever drinketh shall thirst again. This is the subject of the gospel of the third week, about the Samaritan woman. Our Lord Jesus revealed the nature of His Holy Spirit by saying that He is *rivers of living waters flowing with eternal life* - thus His nature is life itself, action, reviving and inundating others (with life). *It is necessary for the Christian during this week to experience being filled by the Holy Spirit through prayer, and meditation on the Scripture and relinquishing this world, so he can feel an inner spiritual motion that would fill all his needs whether emotional, psychological or spiritual.* The Church calls "The Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely (Rev. 22:17). Thus in the Resurrection we should feel this inner motion of the Holy Spirit in our lives so we can overflow and touch others. *Any person who speaks about the Resurrection without feeling the flow of the living water within him is a person who lives death itself unawares. Every Christian in the Church has rivers of living water flowing from within him. But where are they? where are they?* Man always desires to draw from the outside and in ignorance thinks he does not own rivers within him. The Saints have discovered those springs. Brethren, let us go within to those springs of life to taste the strength of the Resurrection and drink from its over-flowing Spirit, to taste from the springs of love that gush from the Lord's side on the Cross, so we never would thirst again for the water of this world.

Fourth Week

The fourth very important matter for the people in the desert is a pillar of fire to light their way through the darkness of the desert. This is the subject of the gospel of the fourth Sunday where Jesus says, "Walk while ye have the light . . . I am come a light into the world, that whosoever believeth in me should not abide in darkness."

The Resurrection is a procession in the light because he who walks in the dark stumbles, falls and dies. Brethren, we should live this week in the blessings of the light, the light of the Gospel, the light of the Holy Spirit, the light of the Church and its teachings. Let us beware of getting carried away by the dark currents of thought of this world, its lusts and cares after all worldly needs. Let us beware of the darkness of untruthfulness, hypocrisy, flattery, evasion, contempt, and hatred. Let us walk in the light of the love of God, and in simplicity. This is the true experience of the Resurrection during this week.

Fifth Week

The last four pillars (Faith, Manna, Water from the rock, and the pillar of fire) are enough to prepare for us a clear road leading to Canaan. This is the gospel of the fifth week where the Lord Jesus says, "*I am the way*". When he says, "*I am the way*" it does not mean that He has come to draw for us a map of the road, or be a guide on the road, but he said, "*I am the way*", and to clarify this we refer to the Apostle's words, "*For we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones*" (Eph. 5:30) and according to the extent the members are attached in Him so is the extent of the security of our path. The fifth Sunday is the Sunday before Ascension Thursday, and because of that the Church explains to us how to be lifted up to heaven. Christ is the Head of the Church and he ascended into heaven and we are permanent members in His body and hence we say, "*As for us we dwell in heavenly places*". Since the head ascended to heaven and sat on the right hand of the Father, and as the body and limbs are attached to Him, the Church can rightfully say while estranged in the wilderness, "*He raised us up together and made us sit together in heavenly places*" (Eph. 2:6). In short, we do not look for a way because *Jesus is our way, may we dwell in Him* and may our thoughts be centered around Him Who has raised us to Heaven and prepared for us a place at the right hand of the Father, so we may experience heaven with Him while still here on earth. - Amen.

The Sixth Week

The people passing through the desert road should seek the victorious God to fight Amalek, and should beware of the desire for the flesh pots, onions, leeks, and the golden calf. Moses has conquered Amalek by raising his hands in the form of a cross and Moses defeated the people's lusts by looking forward to the land of Canaan. The theme in Church this Sunday is, "*I have overcome the world*", "*In the world ye shall have tribulation*". When the strong faithful Christians are sure that He has already conquered the world, they are strengthened in their efforts and by the sign of the Cross, they defeat Amalek, and by meditation on divine and heavenly matters, they will stay away from the lusts of this world. By dwelling in Christ they say, "*I am not alone, because the Father is with me*". We are now dealing with a defeated Satan, and a conquered world and a sin condemned in the flesh. *We do not seek an outside*

victory because the victory is within us in Christ. He conquered for us and by Him we have inner victory. He calls us in the gospel of this Sunday, "Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name; ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full" . Life in the power of Resurrection knows nothing except victory, joy and renunciation of the world.

Seventh Week

We find no equivalent for this week in the wilderness of the Old Testament. It is the Father's gift sent to us through His Beloved Son - *It is His Spirit*. With what longing and fervor of heart does the Church live this week in memory of the Holy Spirit the Comforter, Who came down in the form of tongues of fire? The Christian without the Holy Spirit lives as an orphan; "I will not leave you comfortless". This week's message deals with the filling by the Holy Spirit. This starts first by repentance. "And grieve not the holy Spirit of God whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption . . ." (Eph. 4:30 - 5:3). The second step for being filled by the Holy Spirit consists in prayer, thanksgiving, praise and obedience with submission (Eph. 5:18 - 21).

This Sunday ends the Holy Pentecost. Thus the Church has gradually led us from the Resurrection, to the confirmation, to the journey on the road, and finally to being filled by the Holy Spirit when our lives will overflow with living waters gushing from within the Church and upon the Church. After this starts the fast of the holy Apostles. This fast is offered by us to the Church for the sake of the spreading of the Gospel and the Kingdom of God. The souls who have achieved fulfillment, offer their humble prayers and fastings as a sacrifice of love for the sake of the Church which Christ bought by His Blood, for the sake of the peace of the Church, its Fathers, and its assemblies, for the sake of the preaching and spreading of the Gospel, for the sake of the unity of heart for love and for all the Church. Amen.

Translated by Lily Soliman

Note

1. See *The Voyage to Canaan*, by the same author in Coptic Church Review, Vol. 3, No. 2