

HOW WE GOT AND LOST THE HOLY SPIRIT

The Book of Genesis tells us: And the LORD God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul. Gen 2:7

St. Cyril tells us that God gave the Holy Spirit to man when He *breathed into his nostrils the breath of life*

The Creator of all, taking dust of the ground and having formed man, breathed upon his face the breath of life. And what is the breath of life, save surely the Spirit of Christ Who saith, I am the Resurrection and the Life?

The Holy Spirit that was given to man is the reason of his incorruption for the Holy Spirit is the giver of life:

This rational living thing on the earth, I mean man, was formed from the beginning in incorruption. And the cause of his incorruption and of his abidance in all virtue was evidently that the Spirit from God indwelt him; for He breathed upon his face the breath of life, as it is written.

Not only was the Holy Spirit the source of man's incorruption but also the source for man's *abidance in all virtue*. The holy Spirit also was the source of the divine image in man. Man was created in the image and likeness of god and this image and likeness was given to man when he received the Holy Spirit as a breath of God.

God created man, in the Image of God created He him. But that through the Spirit he was sealed unto the Divine Image, himself again taught us, saying, And breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. For the Spirit at once began both to put life into His formation and in a Divine manner to impress His own Image thereon.

The Spirit not only gave life to man but also impressed his own image on man, so that man became in the image of God.

As long as man kept the gift of the Holy Spirit abiding in him, he kept that divine image through the holy Spirit that was abiding in him:

And he was in Paradise, as it is written, still keeping the Gift, and eminent in the Divine Image of Him That made him, through the Holy Spirit That indwelt him.

So to summarize: God gave His Holy Spirit to man when He breathed in his nostrils the breath of life. The Holy Spirit had the following results in man:

1. Man became a living soul, the Holy Spirit the giver-of-life gave life to man
2. Not only was man given life by the Holy Spirit but also incorruption.

3. The Holy Spirit impressed God's image on man
4. As long as man kept the gift, the Holy spirit kept him abiding in all virtues.
5. Life, incorruption, the image of God and abidance in virtue were assured to man as long as he kept the gift which is the Holy Spirit.

THE FALL:

When man disobeyed God, God recalled the gift of the Holy Spirit from man:

But when perverted by the wiles of the devil, he began to despise his Creator, and by trampling on the law assigned him, to grieve his Benefactor, He recalled the grace given to him,

But he having from that ancient deceit turned aside unto sin, then by degrees in succession ... he suffers the loss of the Spirit.

So, the Holy spirit was not withdrawn suddenly from man (he would have died instantly) but rather was withdrawn by degrees and in succession. So what was the result of the loss of the Holy Spirit on man?

He that was made unto life then first heard Dust thou art, and unto dust shalt thou return.

Death entered into the world. Man lost his incorruption and became corruptible and ultimately would die. But there was something else that happened to man:

And now the Likeness to God was through the inroad of sin defaced, and no longer was the Impress bright, but fainter and darkened because of the transgression.

The likeness of God was defaced, not completely lost but the image became faint and darkened because of the transgression. And one more thing:

And so at length (man) became not only subject to corruption but also prone to all sin.

So, as a result of the fall:

1. Man lost the Holy Spirit gradually
2. Man lost his incorruption and became mortal
3. The image of God in man became faint and darkened
4. Man became sinful that is prone or susceptible to all sin.

The situation progressed (or regressed) in the generations that followed Adam and Eve:

But when the race of man had reached to an innumerable multitude, and sin had dominion over them all, manifoldly despoiling each man's soul, his nature was stripped of the ancient grace; the Spirit departed altogether.

We said that in Adam there was a gradual withdrawal of this gift from God which is His own Holy Spirit, but in time, because of the multiplication of sin upon the earth, the Holy Spirit was completely withdrawn from mankind as we are told in Gen 6:5;

And GOD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually.

As a result: Gen 6:3

And the LORD said, My spirit shall not always strive with man, for that he also is flesh:

The results were catastrophic:

The reasonable creature fell into extremest folly, ignorant even of its Creator.

Man became unaware of his own creator. The whole human nature became corrupted and needed to be recreated once again:

For since our forefather Adam being turned aside by deceit into disobedience and sin, did not preserve the grace of the Spirit, and thus in him the whole nature lost at last the God-given good.

GOD'S PLAN FOR SALVATION:

In order for man to regain his incorruptibility and gain immortality and the image of God and the ability to abide in all virtue and resist sin, man had to regain the Holy Spirit:

But the Creator of all, ... pities the corrupted world, and being Good hastened to gather together ... His runaway flock upon earth; and decreed to re-create human nature anew to the pristine Image through the Holy Spirit. For no otherwise was it possible that the Divine Impress should again shine forth in man, as it did before.

Man had to be created once again through the Holy Spirit. This was the only way that he could regain the image of God that he lost. Man had to receive and keep the Holy Spirit, unlike Adam who received but later lost the Holy Spirit.

How can this be accomplished?

THE WORD HAD TO BECOME MAN:

But since the Holy Spirit which is able to form us unto the Divine Impress, has fled away from the human nature, the Saviour gives us this anew bringing us again unto that ancient Dignity and reforming us unto His own Image. For therefore does Paul too say to: Little children of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you.

Since only the holy Spirit can form that divine image in us once again, the Saviour had to renew us by reforming us to his own image. We have to be re made into the image of Christ or in other words (according to St. Paul) Christ must be formed in us. So the giving of the Holy Spirit and the coming of Christ tom earth had to coincide:

(When) the Only Begotten (came) upon earth with Flesh, that is, made Man of a woman according to the Holy Scripture, God the Father began to give again the Holy Spirit, and Christ first received the Spirit as First-fruits of the renewed nature. For John bare record saying, I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven and It abode upon Him.

Christ had to receive the Holy Spirit on our behalf when he was baptized for an important reason: not only did the Holy Spirit descend on Him but It abode on Him. That means the Holy Spirit stayed permanently on Him and this is our guarantee that we will receive and keep the Holy Spirit:

God the Word Who knows not turning, become Man, in order that by receiving as Man He might preserve the Good permanently to our nature.

Because Christ is unchangeable, He had to become man in order that by receiving the Holy Spirit as Man He might preserve the Gift permanently to our nature. Unlike Adam who after receiving the Holy Spirit, lost the gift. Only through the incarnation of Christ and His receiving of the Holy Spirit on our behalf can the gift be guaranteed to abide in us forever as the Lord promised us in John 14:16

And I will pray the Father, and he shall give you another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever.

St. Cyril summarizes this beautifully:

The Only-Begotten was made therefore Man, that in Him first, the grace of the Holy Spirit might be preserved securely to our whole nature, the Word of God lending us the Stability of His Own Nature, because the nature of man had been condemned in Adam as powerless and falling most easily into perversion.

WHY DID CHRIST RECEIVE THE HOLY SPIRIT?

Last Sunday we spoke about how Adam received and then lost the Holy Spirit which he received as a gift from God when God breathed in his nose. We also explained how the Word of God became Incarnate, took our humanity which is changeable and made it His own in order to lend to us the stability of His own nature, so that we can, not only receive the Holy Spirit once again but to keep it, unlike Adam who received and later lost the Holy Spirit. It was for this reason that Christ, who is the giver of the Holy Spirit to all, Himself received the Holy Spirit after he was baptized in the Jordan. Now let us try to understand what happened when Christ received the Holy Spirit. The Gospel of St. Mark tells us:

And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit like a dove descending upon him: And there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

The first thing is that *the heavens opened* and this is very significant. For the heavens were closed when Adam transgressed and was driven out of Paradise which is the third heaven according to St. Paul. Now, that the second Adam came and through His obedience to God the Father erased the disobedience of the first Adam, Heaven was opened. Christ, who is God who became man reconciled heaven with earth and the heavenly with the earthly making the two into one. Here is how St Cyril explains this:

And the Evangelist says that the heavens were opened, as having long been closed. For Christ said, "Forthwith shall ye see the heavens opened, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man." For both the flock above and that below being now made one, and one chief Shepherd appointed for all, the heavens were opened, and man upon earth brought near to the holy angels.

That is why all through these blessed days we sing: He made the two into one, which is heaven and earth. The same is also recorded to us in the Liturgy of St. Gregory, where we are told: *Thou hast reconciled the earthly with the heavenly, and made the two into one, and fulfilled the economy in the flesh.* Since Christ had reconciled the heavenly with the earthly and made the two into one, then it was appropriate that the heavens would be opened once again.

The second thing is that the Holy Spirit appeared *like a dove*. Or *in the bodily shape like a dove* as we are told in Luke 3:22. Now there are many questions that need to be answered. First, why did the Holy Spirit have to appear. St. Cyril tells us that He had to appear so that John the Baptist could recognize Christ:

And John bare record, saying, I saw the Spirit descending from Heaven like a dove, and It abode upon Him. And I knew Him not: but He That sent me to baptize with water, the Same said unto me, Upon Whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, the Same is He Which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.

But there is another point, the Holy Spirit appeared in a bodily form like a dove because the Holy Spirit is God and no one can see God. That is why the Holy Spirit appeared like a dove:

For since he said above, that no man hath seen God at any time, and now says that the blessed Baptist saw the Spirit descend from Heaven upon the Son, he adds of necessity, I saw the Spirit, but in the form of a Dove, not Himself by Nature.

Our liturgical tradition gives us an understanding of why the Holy Spirit appeared like a dove, in the Doxology of the Virgin where we sing: *The Spirit of comfort: Which came upon your Son: In the waters of Jordan: In the type of Noah. For Noah's dove: has declared unto us: the peace of God: towards mankind.* Here the dove that Noah sent after the flood and which flew away from the ark in the morning but returned back in the evening bearing the olive branch as a token of peace, is a type or symbol of the Holy Spirit that flew away from the Human race at the beginning of its history, but in the last days flew back and settled on Christ as a representative of humanity.

John the Baptist heard the voice of the Father declaring: *Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* St. Cyril tells us that God the Father was not here telling us about the Sonship of Christ but rather declaring the economy or the plan of salvation: that man is once again accepted into the adoption of sons by God:

For He spake unto Christ at the time of holy baptism, as though having by Him and in Him accepted man upon earth to the sonship, "This is My beloved Son, in Whom I am well pleased." For He Who is the Son by nature and in truth, and the Only-begotten, when He became like unto us, is specially declared to be the Son of God, not as receiving this for Himself:-for He was and is, as I said, very Son:-but that He might ratify the glory unto us. For He has been made our firstfruits, and firstborn, and second Adam: for which reason it is said, that "in Him all things have become new.

So when we are baptized and receive the Holy Spirit, we also hear the voice of God the Father telling each one of us, *Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* Because Christ as the first fruit of our new birth has secured this glory for us when he received the Holy Spirit as one of us. When we receive the Holy Spirit we become true sons of God and we have boldness and daring to call God Abba, Father like Christ did when He became man for our sakes.

Now we have to make a point very clear: Christ did not need to receive the Holy Spirit because He Himself is the giver of the Spirit. God the Father is our witness on this point since He told John the Baptist: *Upon Whom thou shalt see the Spirit descending and remaining upon Him, the Same is He Which baptizeth with the Holy Ghost.* If Christ is the one who baptizes with the Holy Spirit, and it was He Himself who breathed in the mouth of His disciples and told them *Receive the Holy Spirit,* in the same way that He did to Adam when He created him, then it is obvious that He had no need for receiving the Holy Spirit. He received it as one of us in order that in Him we all may receive and keep the Holy Spirit.

When the Word of God became Man, He received the Spirit from the Father as one of us, (not receiving anything for Himself individually, for He was the Giver of the Spirit); but that He Who knew no sin, might, by receiving It as Man, preserve It to our nature, and might again inroot in us the grace which had left us. ... For It had fled from us by reason of sin, but He Who knew no sin, became as one of us, that the Spirit might be accustomed to abide in us, having no occasion of departure or withdrawal in Him.

This theme of the Holy Spirit being *accustomed to abide in us* is an ancient tradition in the Church going back to Saint Irenaeus:

Wherefore He did also descend upon the Son of God, made the Son of man, becoming accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race, to rest with human beings, and to dwell in the workmanship of God, working the will of the Father in them, and renewing them from their old habits into the newness of Christ.

You see the remarkable consistency of the Fathers even using the same expression. The Holy Spirit became separated from mankind for thousands of years and now, descending upon the Son of God who became the Son of Man He became *accustomed in fellowship with Him to dwell in the human race*.

But, how can the Holy Spirit by descending on Christ become accustomed to dwelling on us? St. Cyril, again following St. Athanasius and St. Irenaeus tells us that we were all in Christ in the same manner that we were all in Adam:

Therefore through Himself He receives the Spirit for us, and renews to our nature, the ancient good. ... (**for all we were in Him, in that He was made Man**): so does He also receive the Spirit for our sakes, that He may sanctify our whole nature.

Our human nature was summed up or capitulated in Christ when He became man and that is how, when He received the Holy Spirit, the Holy Spirit through fellowship with Him became accustomed to fellowship with us, **for we were all in Him, when He was made Man**. In the same manner that we were all in Adam when he was created.

St. Cyril delights in repeating this point that Christ received the Holy Spirit not for Himself but for us:

And the Spirit also again came down as at a second commencement of our race: and upon Christ first, Who received it **not so much for His own sake as for ours**: for by Him and in Him are we enriched with all things.

He Who for our sakes became incarnate, was anointed with the spiritual oil of sanctification, and the actual descent of the Spirit, receiving It **not for Himself, but for us**. For inasmuch as the Spirit had taken its flight, and not made His

abode in us because of our being flesh.

But He received It, how? for we must investigate what is said. Was it then as not having? we say not so, God forbid. For the Spirit is the Son's Own, and not supplied from without, ... but exists in Him naturally even as in the Father, and through Him proceedeth to the saints, ... for the whole human nature was in Christ, in that He was Man ... The Only-Begotten therefore receives the Holy Ghost not for Himself (for His and in Him and through Him is the Spirit, as we before said) but, since He, having been made Man, had our whole nature in Himself, that He might uplift it all transforming it unto its old state.

But it was not only that we may return to our old state that Adam had, but as we said last time, not as Adam had the Spirit and lost it. Rather Christ became man, taking our human nature and making it His own, then lending us the stability of His own nature, so that when we receive the Holy Spirit it can abide in us. For John saw the Holy Spirit not only descending on Christ but also abiding on Him:

He therefore testifies, both that he saw the Spirit descending from Heaven upon Him, in the form of a Dove, and that It abode upon Him. ...

The Only-Begotten was made therefore Man as we, that in Him first ... the grace of the Spirit ... might be preserved securely to our whole nature, the Only Begotten and Word of God the Father lending us the Stability of His Own Nature, because the nature of man had been condemned in Adam as powerless. As then in (Adam) the loss of good things passes through unto the whole (human) nature: in the same way ... in (Christ) will ... the abidance of the Divine Gifts be preserved to our whole race. ... having our whole nature in Himself, in that He was Man and One of us.

Through Adam's instability, the whole human nature which was in him lost the grace of the Holy Christ. But through Christ's stability, Who also had our whole nature in Him, we regain not only the Divine gift but the abidance of that gift will be preserved to our whole race.

THE HOLY SPIRIT RESTORED TO US

In the First sermon on the Holy Spirit we said that God gave man the Holy Spirit when He breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. We also said that the Holy Spirit became the source of man's life, incorruption, the image of God and the abidance in virtue. But man, unfortunately lost the gift of the Holy Spirit through sin, and gradually but finally, the Holy Spirit flew away from the human race. Man became mortal, lost his incorruption, the image of God in him was not lost but faded and became tarnished, and the abidance in virtue became almost impossible.

In the second sermon we learned how Christ, God incarnate, received the Holy Spirit not for Himself but on our behalf in order that the Holy Spirit becomes accustomed to fellowship with the human race once again, and how Christ lent the stability of His own nature to our changeable nature, so that not only we can receive the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of chrismation but we can keep the gift and not lose it like our father Adam did.

In this sermon we want to learn what does the Holy Spirit that we receive in the sacrament of the Myron do to us. Of course we will retain all that Adam lost when he sinned. We regain our incorruption, the image of God in us is renewed and abidance in virtues becomes possible through the Holy Spirit dwelling in us. But we were not only restored to the state in which Adam was, but because of the incarnation we got many extras that Adam did not have: St. Cyril summarizes these additional benefits to us:

Greater therefore than John himself does Christ say that he is who is lesser in the kingdom of Heaven, i. e. the new baptized, who has not as yet attained excellence in work;---in this only that the blessed Baptist was yet born of a woman, but the other is begotten of God as it is written, and has become partaker of the Divine Nature, having indwelling in him the Holy Ghost and already called a temple of God.¹

St. Cyril tells us that the newly baptized, (the lesser in the kingdom of heaven) is greater than John the Baptist who is the greatest man born of a woman because:

1. The Baptist is born of a woman, the baptized is begotten of God
2. The baptized has indwelling in him the Holy Spirit, unlike the Baptist.
3. The baptized is called the temple of God, something the Baptist was not
4. The baptized has become a partaker of the Divine Nature.

St. Cyril further explains to us:

In the holy Prophets there was a certain rich shining upon and

¹St. Cyril: Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Book 5, chapter II, 39, pp 551,552

torch-illumination from the Spirit, mighty to lead them to the apprehension of things to come and the knowledge of things hidden: but in those who believe on Christ, we are confident that not torch-illumination simply from the Spirit, but the Spirit Itself dwells and has His habitation. Whence rightly are we called temples too of God, though no one of the holy Prophets was ever called a Divine Temple.²

In the prophets of the Old Testament (including John the Baptist) the Holy Spirit was shining like a lamp (from outside) but in us the Holy Spirit Himself *dwells and has His habitation*, therefore we are called temples of God, while no one in the Old Testament was given this name. Because the Holy Spirit dwells in us we become adopted children of God:

For no longer are we children of flesh and blood, but rather call God our Father;----therefore it is, and very justly, that as being now in honour, and possessing the glorious privilege of adoption, we have been made partakers of the divine nature by the communication of the Holy Ghost.³

This adoption that we gain from the Holy Spirit dwelling in us makes us partakers of the divine nature. Becoming partakers of the divine nature is a misunderstood concept. In 2 Peter 1:3-5 we are told:

His divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue: Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

What St. Peter is telling us here is:

1. God's divine power has given to us *all things that pertain unto life and godliness*
2. By which we are given *exceeding great and precious promises*
3. If we use this gift of God which is *all things that pertain unto life and godliness*, we can attain to the *exceeding great and precious promises*: becoming *partakers of the divine nature*.
4. God's gift of *all things that pertain unto life and godliness*, is attained through *knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue*

God has given us all the tools that we need to pursue godliness, which if we use them (by living in godliness) we will attain the *great and precious promises* which is becoming *partakers of the*

²St. Cyril: Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Book 5, chapter II, 39, p 550

³St. Cyril: Commentary on the Gospel of St. Luke, sermon XII, p 50

divine nature. But these tools are given by God to those who know Him *Who has called us to glory and virtue*. You see: we have to know God who called us, then He will give us all the tools that lead us to life and godliness, and if we use these tools to live a godly life then we can attain the promise of becoming partakers of divine nature. It is important to note that He Who called us, called us to *glory and virtue*. The glory is becoming partakers of the divine nature and the virtue is what we have to pursue in order to gain the glory. That is why St. Peter continues in 2 Peter 1:5: “giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge.” You see, faith alone does not work. Faith gives us the gift of God which is *all things that pertain unto life and godliness*. But we have to use this gift to add virtue to our faith, and only then we can receive the *great and precious promises* which is becoming *partakers of the divine nature*.

But we have to understand that becoming *partakers of the divine nature*, does not mean that we partake of the divine essence. Let me give you an example: we can partake of the light of the sun and the heat of the sun which are attributes of the Sun but we cannot not partake of the essence of the Sun which is far removed from us. In the same manner we can partake of the attributes of God but not of His essence which is far removed from us. St. Irenaeus tells us that the essence of God is even beyond our comprehension.

We only partake of the divine attributes which God in His love has granted to us like incorruption, immortality, impassibility and divine knowledge, which are only promises as far as we are living, and will be fulfilled only in the heavenly Jerusalem after our resurrection. St. Cyril explains this beautifully:

If any man then think it a good and desirable thing to partake of the Divine nature and to have God Who is the Father of the universe indwelling and abiding in the shrine of the heart by His Son, in the Spirit, **let him thoroughly purge his soul, and wash away the stain of wickedness, by whatever means he can; and most of all, by all kinds of well-doing**. For then will he become truly the temple of God; and He will rest and abide in him, according to the Scripture.⁴

You see, *to partake of the Divine nature* which means to obtain the divine attributes of immortality, incorruption, impassibility and divine knowledge, is *a good and desirable thing*, and we are encouraged to covet it, but we have to **wash our souls from the stain of wickedness** by repentance and confession and then perform **all kinds of well-doing**. Only then will be true temples of God and only then will God abide in us and only then we will be on the way of attaining the promise of becoming *partakers of the Divine nature* in the life to come. But we cannot do that on our own, the Holy Spirit which we receive in the sacrament of chrismation, will direct us in this struggle, if we surrender ourselves to Him:

For if, giving up the natural life, we have surrendered ourselves wholly to the

⁴St. Cyril: Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Book 10, volume II, Introduction, 24, p 334

laws of the Spirit, is it not henceforth beyond question, that by denying, as it were, our own lives, and taking upon ourselves the transcendent Likeness of the Holy Spirit, Who is joined unto us, we are well-nigh transformed into another nature, so to say, and are become no longer mere men, but also sons of God, and heavenly men, through having been proved partakers of the Divine Nature?⁵

We have to give up the natural or worldly life and surrender ourselves totally to the Holy Spirit working in us and with us. If we deny our own lives and try to imitate the image of God that transformed into another nature the Holy Spirit impresses on our souls we are *transformed into another nature* only then we become *sons of God, and heavenly men* and become worthy of partaking of the divine nature. Saint Cyril summarizes for us the whole thing; commenting on John 15:5: “I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing.” He explains:

For just as the root of the vine ministers and distributes to the branches the enjoyment of its own natural and inherent qualities, so the Only-begotten Word of God imparts to the Saints as it were an affinity to His own nature and the nature of God the Father, by giving them the Spirit, insomuch as they have been united with Him through faith and perfect holiness; and He nourishes them in piety, and works in them the knowledge of all virtue and good works.⁶

In the same manner that the vine feeds the branches and thus gives to the branches the qualities of the vine, so does the Only Begotten who is the true vine give to us *an affinity to His own nature and the nature of God the Father*. A likeness to His nature which is the same as the nature of God the Father. Note that the nature here is the qualities or attributes and not the essence of God. This likeness to His nature, the Son gives to us by giving us the Holy Spirit. But this is conditional on us being united to Him for He told us: *without me ye can do nothing*. This unity or abiding in Him is *through faith and perfect holiness*. Which means faith and works of piety, godliness, by adding virtue to our faith. But as the sap of the vine nourishes the branches, it is the Holy Spirit that *nourishes us in piety*, and *works in us the knowledge of all virtue and good works*. The sap nourishes the branches but it is up to the branches to produce fruit, in the same manner, the Holy Spirit nourishes us with *the knowledge of all virtue and good works*, but it is up to us to produce fruits, for “Every branch that beareth not fruit he taketh away: and every branch that beareth fruit, he purgeth it, that it may bring forth more fruit.”

⁵St. Cyril: Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Book 11, volume II, Chapter XI, 20,21, p 552

⁶St. Cyril: Commentary on the Gospel of St. John, Book 10, volume II, Chapter 2, xv 1, p 363,364