



# GREEK ORTHODOX METROPOLIS OF NEW JERSEY

## ΙΕΡΑ ΜΗΤΡΟΠΟΛΙΣ ΝΕΑΣ ΙΕΡΣΕΗΣ

Sunday of Pentecost 2009

The Reverend Clergy

Honorable Archons of the Ecumenical Patriarchate,  
Esteemed Members of the Metropolitan Council,  
Esteemed Members of the Parish Councils, Philoptochos Societies,  
Faculty and Students of the Catechetical and Greek Afternoon Schools,  
Directors and Participants of all Youth Organizations, and all devout  
Orthodox Christians of the Greek Orthodox Communities of our  
Holy Metropolis of New Jersey

My Beloved in the Lord,

The day of Pentecost has come - the fiftieth day since the Resurrection of our Lord. Yet, even before the coming of Christ, the feast of Pentecost was observed by the people of ancient Israel. Pentecost was a harvest celebration that came fifty days after the Passover Sabbath, and was one of the major pilgrimage festivals that brought people from all over the world to Jerusalem, to offer their first fruits of sacrifice in the Temple. Pentecost was the time of year when the sickle was put to the harvest, and the harvest was brought to Jerusalem.

It was at just this time of year that the Apostles were also gathered in Jerusalem, following the Resurrection of Christ. But the harvest for this Pentecost would not be stalks of wheat. It would be human beings. And the sickle that did the harvesting would not be a metal tool, but the Holy Spirit itself. The event is described in the Acts of the Apostles as follows: *"When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability."* (Acts 2:1-4)

This event occurs very early in the Acts of the Apostles, so it is often called the "birthday" of the Church. For it is after Pentecost that the Apostles are given a new ability to preach and to work in the name of Christ, and the Church begins to grow in stature and in strength like a young child newly born. But it might be even better to speak of Pentecost, not as the Church's birthday, but as its baptism. For John the Baptist had earlier said, *"I baptize you with water; but one who is more powerful than I is coming...He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire."* (Luke 3:16) What else are the tongues of fire and the coming of the Spirit at Pentecost than the fulfillment of this prophecy? Pentecost, therefore, is the Church's promised baptism in the Holy Spirit and in fire.

And, if the Church is baptized by such an anointing with the Holy Spirit, then the life of the Church imitates the life of Jesus. For, when Jesus was baptized by John the Baptist, *"the Holy Spirit descended upon him in bodily form like a dove."* (Luke 3:22) Thus, the disciples begin as Jesus began, with the anointing of the Holy Spirit. The disciples also end as Jesus ended. For the ministry of Jesus concludes with a long journey to imprisonment and death in Jerusalem, and, in the Acts of the Apostles, the ministry of Paul concludes with a long journey to imprisonment and martyrdom in Rome. (Acts 27-28) From beginning to end, the life of Jesus serves as the pattern for the life of his followers. It is not a pattern that leads to death and failure, however, but to new life and to resurrection. St. Paul tells us elsewhere, *"Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who have died."* (1 Cor. 15:20) And, if Christ is the first fruits of the harvest, then we must return to the idea mentioned above that Pentecost was originally a harvest festival. And what is the fruit of this harvest? St. Paul tells us that, *"the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control...And those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires. If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit. Let us not become conceited, competing against one another, envying one another."* (Gal. 5:22-26)

We are all called, my beloved, to harvest these fruits of the Spirit in our own lives today, in 21<sup>st</sup> century America. This means more than just being nice people and good citizens. It means that we must live transfigured and transformed lives. It means to put aside our greed, our selfishness, and our boundless desire to possess the things and the people around us. When reviled, we must not curse, but bless. When mocked, we must respond with kindness. When deprived, we must endure. It takes a tremendous amount of energy to endure even the petty slights and insults that come to us each day. But this is our martyrdom. It is not the martyrdom that ends with a glorious death in one single act of self renunciation. It is the slow death of a thousand cuts. Every word we utter is our opportunity for martyrdom. Every conversation, every interaction is an opportunity either to wound others, or to heal the sins of the world; to ignore those who need our help and friendship, or to serve our brethren for whom Christ died. If it were up to us alone, we could never live such a life with integrity and consistency. But we are not alone. We have been anointed with the Holy Spirit that was bestowed so richly upon the Disciples at Pentecost, and we have been called to harvest the fruits of this Spirit in our lives. Let us not wait another day to labor in the fields of our hearts and to harvest these fruits. For, as our Lord has said, *"I tell you, look around and see how the fields are ripe for the harvest."* (John 4:35)

With Paternal Love and Blessings,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Metropolitan Evangelos". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style. The word "Metropolitan" is written in a smaller, more compact script, while "Evangelos" is written in a larger, more prominent script. The signature is centered horizontally and is positioned above the printed name.

† E V A N G E L O S  
Metropolitan of New Jersey