PENTECOST

The new Shofar

Those in whom the Spirit comes to live are God's new Temple. They are, individually and corporately, places where heaven and earth meet.
N.T Wright

The Church as a Continuous Pentecost

Throughout centuries the Church has been described using a range of images. As the vessel through which salvation flows it is a ***sanctuary*** where divine grace meets human faith. This imagery has been shaped by both powerful biblical narratives and enduring spiritual traditions, affirming the Church's role as a living embodiment of God's covenant with humanity. Church is something God is doing.

One such rich model of the Church that comes to us from the early Fathers is that of ***the Ark of Salvation***. It is a model prefigured in the Old Testament, in both Noah and Moses. **Saint Cyprian of Carthage** (258 AD) wrote *the one ark of Noah was a type of the one Church* using a symbolism found in Noah's ark as well as the infant Moses floating on the Nile River. The origins of this symbolism can be found in the Old Testament's portrayal of Noah's ark. Genesis calls it a ***tevah,*** an Egyptian word used in only one other place in the Hebrew Scriptures, namely, to designate the little box in which the infant Moses floated on the Nile. The juxtaposition of the two stories seems clearly intentional. ***First***, in respect to both Noah and Moses, the ***tevah*** is a floating container that preserves life from the peril of drowning. That is to say, from the threat comes from water. ***Second,*** in each the container is daubed with pitch to keep out the threatening water (**Exodus 2:3, 6:14;**). **Third,** both stories contribute to the ongoing biblical theme of God's deliverance of His servants in times of crisis.

The Church and the Ark

Early theologians used it in describing the Church founded by Christ. Saint Cyprian of Carthage writes, *If anyone who was outside the ark could have escaped, so would he escape who was outside the Church*. In the 4th century, **Saint John Chrysostom** (died 407 AD) continues the use of this imagery in his Homily on Lazarus: *The narrative of the Flood is a mystery, and its details are a type of things to come. The ark is the Church; Noah is Christ; the dove, the Holy Spirit; the olive branch, the divine goodness. As in the midst of the sea, the ark protected those who were within it, so the Church saves those who are saved*. The Church is the ark, as real and concrete as an ark of wood and as essential for salvation from the floods of this world as a ship is for those drowning at sea. This is a powerful contemporary image.

As the ark of salvation, prefigured in the Old Testament and fully realized in the New Testament and the life of the Church, the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church enjoys a character which no human institution may claim.

The *theanthropic* body of Jesus

There is a range of questions about Jesus and the way of salvation he brought to fulfilment: Who is Jesus Christ? Is Jesus both God and human? What in him is God and what is human and many more. These are no easy answers to these questions, but fortunately answers are revealed to us by the Holy Spirit, ***the Spirit of Truth***. The Spirit reveals the truth about Jesus, about the God in him and the human being and about what he bestowed upon us. Revelation takes us far beyond what our eyes have seen, our ears have heard, and our hearts have ever felt.

Through his incarnate life on earth, Jesus established his ***the-an-thropic*** body, the Church. **Theanthropic** is a word used in the Orthodox Church to describe the combining of the human and the divine, the spiritual and the physical. The life and ministry of Jesus prepared the world for the advent of the divine presence who was to make his home in the human institution that continued after the Ascension of Jesus into heaven. Christ's Church is much more than an institution, much more than a human coming together. The Church has an empowering soul, and that empowering comes from the Holy Spirit, the soul of this body. The Body of Christ, the Church, is the spiritual, divinely instituted and divinely sustained continuation of the mission of Jesus himself. This is why Pentecost is such an exciting feast.

Pentecost, the Spirit comes

On the day of Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended from heaven onto the ***theanthropic*** body of the Church and remains within it as its life-giving soul. This visible ***theanthropic*** body of the Church was constituted by the Holy Apostles with their belief in Jesus Christ as the saviour of the world and as perfect God and perfect human being. The descent of the Holy Spirit and all his activity in the theanthropic body of the Church comes from Jesus and because of Jesus. That ennobles all we do in the name of Jesus. Our earthly realities are never greater than the divine realities that are at work within us because of the Spirit.

The divine and human elements of Christ's Church originate in the divine and human person of our Lord, and it is this combining of both the divine and the human that helps us understand the full nature of who we are. In Christ we become, in the words of **Psalm 8**, *little less than gods.* Pentecost defines the Church of the Holy Apostles as being ***theanthropic***, as being both spiritual and human, physical and divine, caught up in both elements within the human community. Caring for souls and embracing the lepers, bandaging both the broken body and the struggling soul.

The era of the Spirit which dawned at Pentecost continues unabated in the Church. Today. It was not just an event in the past. It is a living reality. The Spirit ensures the free flowing of divine gifts and life-giving powers. Everything in the Church exists in the Holy Spirit, from the most minute to the most stupendous. If we are present, there the Spirit is at work bringing all creation to know love and serve the Lord.