

Bishop Benedict's Mission Institute and Pentecost: *A Meditation*

On July 8, Bishop Benedict announced that in October the Eparchy would start a Mission Institute. The Hierarch writes, "When I was visiting Parishes, I shared this idea with our parishioners and received positive feedback. Also, we had a conversation about the Mission Institute at the Clergy Conference in Tucson, and I was very pleased to see how open everyone was to cooperation, and that was when I realized that there is no time to postpone the institute any longer." For anyone with a background in Scripture, this text can be reminiscent of the words of God to Moses in Exodus 7. The Lord God had seen the affliction of his people and had heard their cries. Bishop Benedict has visited his parishes and has seen and heard for himself the need for spiritual formation and evangelization in the Eparchy.

Some of the laity who have heard of this initiative probably thought "what does this have to do with me?" The answer is found in a scripture quote included in the bishop's letter: "Go

therefore, and make disciples all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19) This instruction was given not just to the apostles (the forerunners of the clergy) but all the disciples. The mission of every member of the Church is to go and teach and baptize. While the priests are the support personnel, the front line in this ministry is the laity. The priest is like a farmer. He waters the faithful in the mystery of Baptism, he prunes away their sins in the mystery of confession, and he feeds them in preaching and the Eucharist. Using all of these gifts, the laity is empowered to go out into the world.

How we go out into the world is also directed by Scripture. Our Lord calls his disciples in Matthew 5: 14, "You are the light of the world." We do not go around thumping Bibles or get into people's faces, but instead, we let the light of Mount Tabor given to us in the Mysteries of Initiation shine out in our lives. As a single candle can light up a room but only dimly, we do not do



this alone. As Bishop Benedict cited our Lord sending people out in twos, we too go forth in groups of two or more. The first group of ministers is a married couple. Husbands and wives minister to each other and in the group of two they minister through the light of faith in their lives in word and deed the love of God to their children.

These families of ministers need support. This is why we go to Church. The origin of the word (*ekklesia*) is a “place of assembly”. In the Church, the section in which the people stand is called the nave, coming from the word for ships. We are literally “in the same boat” together. We gather together for the Liturgy, which is “the work of the people”. It is together that our lights shine brighter. In the Divine Liturgy, it is the work of the people to offer to God, but it is also exhibits God's work for the people. In the Liturgy concerning the Holy Gifts is this phrase: “Holy Things for the Holy” as the “Lamb” is raised. The “Holy Things” is the Body of Christ, which is being mystically offered to God, who is All-Holy. It is also the Body of Christ, which is being given to us, the Holy People. God strengthens us to do this work. We are a light to the world—a city set upon a hill.

The Holy Spirit within us brings us together to pray because it is the Holy Spirit that moves all prayer. The Holy Spirit brings us together. When we were initiated into the Church, we did not come in alone. We were brought in usually by parents, but if not, by godparents. We were presented to God, and we were presented to the community, who took responsibility to witness to the new member the faith of the Church. We, as members of a Church, are never alone.

This is illustrated in the Icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit. We call it the Icon of Pentecost, but it is much more than that because of the details found within. We see rays of Light indicating the Divine Descent. It starts as one in the semicircle but comes out in many members. One of the messages of the icon is “Unity and Diversity”. All of those apostles who receive the Spirit are in different colors and face different directions. They are a diverse group but become one in the Holy Spirit. Just as our parishes should have a diversity of people, at least male and female, coming together as one.

We are one in faith, one in Baptism and one in the Lord (Ephesians 4:5). At the head of this gathering, there is a space. It should remind you of the Icon of the Holy Trinity because the bodies of Saints Peter and Paul outline a chalice. The invisible Christ is present in the Church.

Notice it is both Saints Peter and Paul at the head, and while St Peter (with the white beard to show age and authority) was there at Pentecost, Saint Paul was not even a Christian yet. Also in the group of twelve are Mark and Luke, two of the evangelists, who were not apostles. It was essential to have 12 because of the significance of the number, but you can find the four evangelists and St Paul because they hold books, but the rest hold scrolls to show teaching authority.



The apostles, upon the Descent of the Holy Spirit, are fortified by the gift of grace to enlighten the world and dispell its darkness.

Icons are not merely photographs or artistic depictions of events. They are teaching tools. While this icon gives the viewer an expanded view of Pentecost, it also answers the question of “Why?” The Holy Spirit brought together as one a Church for a purpose. The purpose is revealed with the king in the black area. In iconography, an area of darkness is without light—without Christ—Who is the Light. The man represents all of the people in the world without Christ, a people sits in darkness. The man is portrayed with a crown because he represents all the nations of the world. He is called King Cosmos. He holds twelve scrolls, which represent the teachings of the Church. He is waiting in the darkness for us, the Church, to open the scrolls for him and show him and to all people the Light of Christ.

Bishop Benedict's mission institute is the eparchial tool for the faithful of the Eparchy to carry out the mission given to the Church to bring the Light of Christ to those in darkness, whether in our families, our workplaces, our towns, and our nation.

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