

THE KNEELING PRAYERS

or

THE VESPERS OF PENTECOST

INTRODUCTION

The liturgical peculiarity of Pentecost is a very special Vespers of the day of Pentecost itself. Usually this service follows immediately after the Divine Liturgy and is "added" to it as its own fulfilment. The service begins as a solemn "summing up" of the entire celebration. We hold flowers in our hands symbolizing the joy of the eternal spring, initiated by the coming of the Holy Spirit. This joy reaches its climax in the singing of the Great Prokeimenon: "Who is so great a God as our God?"

Then, having reached this climax, we are invited to kneel. This is our first kneeling since Easter. It signifies that after these fifty days of Paschal joy and fullness, of experiencing the Kingdom of God, the Church is now about to begin her pilgrimage through time and history. It is evening again, and the night approaches, during which temptations and failures await us, when, more than anything else, we need Divine help, that presence and power of the Holy Spirit, Who has already revealed to us the joyful End, Who now will help us in our effort towards fulfilment and salvation.

All this is revealed in the three prayers which the Priest reads as we all kneel and listen to him. In the first prayer, we bring to God our repentance, our appeal for forgiveness of sins, the first condition for entering into the Kingdom of God.

In the second prayer, we ask the Holy Spirit to help us, to teach us to pray and to follow the true path in the dark and difficult night of our earthly existence.

Finally, in the third prayer, we remember all those who have completed their earthly journey, but who are united with us in the eternal God of Love.

The joy of Easter has been completed and we again have to wait for the dawn of the Eternal Day. Yet, knowing our weakness, and humbling ourselves by kneeling, we also know the joy and the power of the Holy Spirit Who has come. We know that God is with us, that in Him is our victory.

In this way the feast of Pentecost is completed and we enter "the ordinary time" of the year. Yet, every Sunday from now on will be called "After Pentecost" - and this means that it is from the power and light of these fifty days that we shall receive our own power, the Divine help in our daily struggle. At Pentecost we decorate our churches with flowers and green branches - for the Church "never grows old, but is always young." It is an evergreen, ever-living Tree of grace and life, of joy and comfort. For the Holy Spirit - "the Treasury of Blessings and Giver of Life - comes and abides in us, and cleanses us from all impurity," and fills our life with meaning, love, faith and hope.

Father Alexander Schmemmann (1974)

TERMS USED IN THE FOLLOWING SERVICE

Hades: A Greek term which parallels the Hebrew 'Sheol' or the 'place of shadows', the abode of the dead. Immediately following His resurrection Christ entered Hades to free the righteous dead waiting there, so that they might enter Paradise. This showed forth the immense power of His life-giving death in defeating the forces of evil, destroying sin and the hold death had over mankind prior to Christ's Resurrection.

Tartarus: Tartarus lies far beneath the disk of the world. Deeper than Hades, kingdom of the underworld. It is used as the ultimate of prisons, unpleasant and inaccessible.

THE KNEELING SERVICE

**Choir: Who is so great a God as our God?
You alone are the God that does wonders.**

Priest: Again and again, kneeling down, we pray to the Lord.

All kneel

Priest: O pure and blameless Lord, You are without beginning, invisible and incomprehensible, unsearchable, unchangeable, immeasurable, and unbounded; You are without evil and are alone immortal; You dwell in the unapproachable light, Maker of heaven and earth and the seas and of all that was created; You grant to all, their petitions before being asked, and to You we pray and of You we ask, O Master and Friend of man, the Father of our Lord and God and Saviour Jesus Christ, Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate of the Holy Spirit and of Mary, the ever-virgin and glorious Theotokos. You first taught by words, and then having demonstrated by deeds, endured the saving Passion at that time, and granted to us, Your humble, sinful, and unworthy servants, a command and example that we should offer prayers with the bending of the neck and the knees for our own sins and the ignorances of the people. Therefore, O most merciful One and Friend of man, hear us on whatever day we call upon You, and especially on this day of Pentecost, on which, after our Lord Jesus Christ had ascended into heaven and sat at Your right hand, O God and Father, He sent down upon His Disciples and Apostles the Holy Spirit, Who alighted on each of them and filled them all with His inexhaustible and divine grace; and they spoke in other tongues of Your mighty acts, and prophesied. Hear us who beseech You, and remember us, the lowly and condemned and restore our souls from captivity, having You as our compassionate intercessor. Accept us who kneel down before You and cry out to You: We have sinned against You. We were cast upon You even from our mother's womb and You are our God. But since our days have wasted away in vanity, we have been stripped of Your aid, and have been deprived of every defence. Yet, taking courage in Your compassion we cry out to You: Do not remember the sins and ignorances of our youth, but cleanse us of our secret sins. Do not cast us away in our old age, when our strength has waned, and do not forsake us. And before we return to the earth, grant that we may return to You. Hear our prayer with Your kindness and grace. Measure our iniquities according to Your compassion and set the immeasurable depth of your loving kindness against our many transgressions. Look down from the height of Your holiness, O Lord, upon Your people who stand here and await from You Your abundant mercy. Visit us in Your goodness and deliver us from the oppression of the devil. Preserve our life with Your holy and sacred laws. Entrust Your people to a faithful

Guardian Angel. Gather us all into Your kingdom, grant forgiveness to those who put their trust in You, and forgive us and them our sins. Purify us by the operation of Your Holy Spirit, and destroy the enemy's devices which are against us.

Blessed are You, O Almighty Master, Who has enlightened the day with the light of the sun and illumined the night with the glow of fire; You have made us worthy to pass through the whole day and draw near to the beginning of the night; hear our petitions and those of all Your people.

Forgive all of us our sins, both voluntary and involuntary, and accept our evening entreaties. Send down the multitude of Your mercy and compassion upon Your inheritance. Encompass us with Your holy Angels; arm us with the armour of Your righteousness; surround us with Your truth; protect us by Your power, and deliver us from every grievous circumstance and from every conspiracy of the adversary. Grant to us that this evening, together with the approaching night and all the days of our life, may be perfect, holy, peaceful, sinless, and without doubt and vain imaginings; by the intercession of the holy Theotokos and all the Saints who, from ages past, have been well-pleasing to You.

All stand

Deacon: Help us, save us, have mercy on us, raise us up and protect us, O God, by Your grace.

People: Lord Have mercy

Deacon: Calling to remembrance our all-holy, pure, most blessed and most glorious Lady, Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, together with all the saints, let us commit ourselves and each other, and our whole life, to Christ our God.

People: To You O Lord.

Priest: For Yours it is to have mercy and to save us; O our God, and to You, we send up glory, to the Father and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages.

People: Amen

Deacon: Again and again, kneeling down, let us pray to the Lord.

All kneel

Priest: O Lord Jesus Christ our God, You have granted Your peace to mankind, and while still present with us in this world, You granted to us believers the gift of the All-holy Spirit for an inheritance that shall never be taken away from us; and on this day You openly sent down this grace upon Your Disciples and Apostles and with tongues of fire You strengthened their lips with eloquence, through which we, together with all mankind, have received the knowledge of God by the hearing of the ear, each in his own tongue, and we have been illumined by the light of the Spirit, and have been set free from error as from darkness; and by the distribution of the perceptible tongues of fire and their supernatural energy; we have become Your Disciples by believing in You; and we have been illumined to speak with divine authority about You, with the Father and the Holy Spirit in one Godhead, one Power, and one Authority. Therefore, O Splendour of the Father, the Likeness of His Essence, His unchangeable and

immutable Nature, You are the Fountain of salvation and grace. Open my lips, sinner that I am, and teach me how and for whom I should pray; for You are the One Who knows the multitude of my sins, but Your compassion shall overcome the boundlessness of them. For behold, I stand before You in fear, casting my soul's despair into the sea of Your mercy. Govern my life, O You Who govern the whole creation by a word, and by the power of Your indescribable wisdom, O tranquil Haven to those who are tempest-tossed, make known to me the way in which I should walk. Grant to my thoughts the spirit of Your wisdom, and bestow upon my folly the spirit of Your understanding. Overshadow my deeds with the spirit of Your fear and renew a right spirit within me, and by Your governing Spirit strengthen my unstable mind, that I may be worthy each day to do Your commandments, being guided by Your righteous Spirit to that which is profitable, to ever keep in mind Your glorious presence that searches through my actions. Do not let me be deceived by the corrupting pleasure of this world, but strengthen me to yearn for the enjoyment of the treasures to come. For You said, O Master, "Whatever you ask in My Name you shall receive unhindered from God the Father, Who is co-eternal with Me". Therefore, I, a sinner, implore Your goodness at the coming of Your Holy Spirit. Grant to me those things I have prayed for that are for salvation: Yes, O Lord, You are the Good One Who abundantly bestows all riches and benevolence. For You are the One Who grants us supremely more than we ask. You are the Compassionate and merciful One, Who without sin has become a Partaker with us in the flesh, and Who, in Your love for mankind, has compassion on those who kneel before You, having become an offering for our sins. Grant, O Lord, Your compassion to Your people, and incline Your ear to us from Your holy Heaven; sanctifying us by the might of Your saving right hand, shield us with the shelter of Your wings, and do not turn away from the works of Your hands. Against You only have we sinned, yet You only have we worshipped. A strange god we have not learned to worship, nor have we lifted our hands to another god. Forgive our transgressions, O Master, and accept our prayers while we kneel. Extend to us all a helping hand, and accept the prayer of all as acceptable incense rising before Your most righteous kingdom.

Lord, O Lord, You have delivered us from every arrow that flies by day, save us from everything that walks in darkness, and accept the lifting up of our hands as an evening offering. Prepare us to pass blamelessly through the course of the night, untempted by evils. Deliver us from every worry and fear that comes to us from the devil. Grant to our souls reverence, and to our thoughts mindfulness of the examination at Your terrible and just judgment. Nail down our flesh with the fear of You, and mortify our members that are on earth, that in the stillness of the night we may be lighted by the contemplation of Your precepts. Drive from us every shameful imagining and harmful passion, and raise us at the hour of prayer, established in the Faith, and advancing in Your commandments.

All stand

Deacon: Help us, save us, have mercy on us, raise us up and protect us, O God, by Your grace.

People: Lord Have mercy

Deacon: Calling to remembrance our all-holy, pure, most blessed and most glorious Lady, Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, together with all the saints, let us

commit ourselves and each other, and our whole life, to Christ our God.

People: **To You O Lord.**

Priest: Through the good pleasure and grace of Your only-begotten Son, with Whom You are blessed, together with Your All-holy and good and life-creating Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages.

People: **Amen.**

Deacon: Again and again, kneeling down, let us pray to the Lord.

All kneel

Priest: O Christ our God, the ever-flowing, life-giving, and illuminating Fountain; creative Power, co-eternal with the Father, You have fulfilled Your purpose for us mortals in a manner transcending beauty; and You shattered the indestructible bonds of death and the bolts of Hades, and trampled down the multitude of evil spirits; You offered Yourself as a blameless Sacrifice on our behalf, offering Your pure, spotless, and sinless body: Through this indescribable and awesome ministry You granted us life everlasting, O You Who descended into Hades, and shattered the everlasting bars, revealing an ascent to those who were sitting below; Who with the bait of divine wisdom hooked the author of evil, the dragon of the deep, binding him in Tartarus with bonds of darkness, and by Your infinitely powerful might imprisoning him in unquenchable fire and outer darkness; O Wisdom of the Father, You of great Name, You Who reveal Yourself to be a great Helper to those who are in distress; a luminous Light to those who sit in darkness and the shadow of death; You are the Lord of everlasting glory, the beloved Son of the Most High Father, eternal Light from eternal Light. O Son of righteousness; hear us who pray to You, and grant rest to the souls of Your servants, our fathers, brethren, and the rest of our kinsmen according to the flesh, and all those who are of the household of the Faith who have fallen asleep before us, for whom we also now celebrate this memorial; for in You is all might, and in Your hands are the ends of the earth. O Almighty Master, God of our fathers, Lord of mercy and Creator of all the races of men, the living and the dead, and of all human nature, composed and decomposed. In Your hands are life and death, the course of life here on earth, and translation yonder; You set the years for the living and appoint the time for death; You bring down to Hades and bring back up; You bind with weakness and loose with power; You provide the present things for our benefit, and You govern the future as is appropriate; You give life through hope of resurrection to those who are wounded with the sting of death; You are the Master of all, our God and our Saviour, O Hope of all the ends of the earth and of those who are away on the seas, O You Who on this last and great day of salvation, the day of the Feast of Pentecost, have revealed to us the mystery of the holy Trinity, one in essence and co-eternal, indivisible and unmingled, poured forth upon Your holy Apostles with Your Holy Spirit, in the likeness of tongues of fire, establishing them as proclaimers of the good tidings of our pious Faith, making of them confessors and preachers of true theology; You have granted to accept our prayers of supplication for the forgiveness of those who are imprisoned in Hades on this all-perfect and saving Feast; You grant us great hope that to the dead, held in the bondage of grief, You shall send rest and consolation from Your presence. Hear us, lowly and wretched, who pray to You, and grant rest to the souls of Your servants who have fallen asleep before us, in a place of light, a place of verdure, in a place of refreshment, where there is no sorrow of any kind, nor suffering nor sighing. Establish their souls in the tabernacles of the righteous, and grant to them

peace and rest; for it is not the dead who praise You, O Lord, nor shall those who are in Hades dare to offer thanks to You, but we, the living, bless You and entreat You, O Lord, and offer to You prayers of reconciliation and sacrifices on behalf of their souls.

O Great and Eternal God, holy and loving towards mankind, You have made us worthy to stand at this hour before Your unapproachable glory, praising and glorifying Your wonders: Be gracious to us, Your unworthy servants, and grant us grace that with a humble and contrite heart we may offer You the thrice-holy glorification, and gratitude for Your great gifts which You have provided and always provide for us. Remember, O Lord, our weakness, and do not destroy us in our iniquities; but in our humiliation show us Your great mercy, that fleeing from the darkness of sin, we may walk in the day of righteousness, and being equipped with the armour of light, we may persevere unassailed by all the assaults of the evil one, and with boldness offer to You, the only true God and Lover of mankind, glory for all things. For, O Master and Creator of all, great indeed is this truth, the great Mystery, the temporary decay of Your creatures, and their subsequent restoration to eternal repose. In all things we acknowledge Your favour; at our entrance into this world and at our going out from it, O You Who by Your unfailing promises held out to us the hope of resurrection and everlasting life, through Your unfailing promise, which shall be ours to enjoy at Your Second Coming. For You are the Author of our resurrection, the impartial Judge of our life's work, the Lover of mankind, the rewarding Lord and Master, You Who out of Your exceeding condescension and compassion became a partaker with us of flesh and blood, through which You willingly accepted the experience of suffering temptation, and having been tempted through Your sufferings, You Yourself became a Helper for us who are tempted, guiding us into Your own passionlessness. Therefore O Master, accept our prayers and supplications and grant rest to each of our fathers, mothers, brothers, sisters, children, blood relatives, and kinsfolk, and all those who have fallen asleep in the hope of resurrection and life everlasting. Establish their souls and their names in the Book of Life; in the bosom of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob; in the land of the living, in the kingdom of heaven, and in the paradise of bliss, guiding them all into Your holy dwelling-places by Your radiant Angels, and raise our bodies on the day that You have appointed, according to Your unfailing holy promises; for there is no death, O Lord, for Your departing servants who have departed from the body and come to You, O God, but rather a translation from things sorrowful to things better and more delightful, and to repose and joy. And if we have sinned in anything against You, be merciful to us and to them, for there is none without stain before You, even if he lives for only a day. You alone are without stain, Jesus Christ our God. You appeared on earth without sin, and through You we all hope to attain mercy and the remission of our sins. For this reason, O righteous God and Lover of mankind, remit, pardon, and forgive our offences and theirs; committed both voluntary and involuntary, which we have committed either wilfully or through ignorance, by the outward senses or in secret, whether by word, deed, or thought, or in any of our states and moods. As for those who have preceded us, grant them freedom and rest, and bless us who are present here, granting us a good and peaceful end. Open to us the wings of Your compassion, mercy, and love for mankind; and in Your awesome presence make us worthy of Your kingdom.

O God, great and Most High, You Who alone possess immortality and dwell in the unapproachable light; You have fashioned all creation in wisdom, You have separated the light and the darkness, appointing the sun to rule the day, and the moon and stars

for dominion of the night; You have counted us sinners worthy on this day to come into Your presence with thanksgiving, to offer You our evening adoration: O man-befriending Lord, direct our prayers like incense before You, and receive them as a sweet fragrance. Grant that the present evening and the approaching night may be peaceful and serene for us. Clothe us with the armour of light, and deliver us from nightly fears, and from everything that walks in darkness. The sleep, which You have given us for rest because of our weakness, make free from every diabolical imagining. Yes, O Master of all, You provide good things, grant that, lying solemnly in our beds, we may recall at night Your most holy Name; and being illumined by the contemplation of Your commandments, we may rise up with joyfulness of soul to glorify Your goodness, offering up prayers and supplications to Your loving kindness, for our own sins, and for those of all Your people. Therefore, visit us with mercy through the intercession of the holy Theotokos. For you are a good God and the Lover of mankind, and to You we give glory, to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Spirit, now and for ever, and to the ages of ages. Amen.

All stand

Deacon: Help us, save us, have mercy on us, raise us up and protect us, O God, by Your grace.

People: **Lord Have mercy**

Deacon: Calling to remembrance our all-holy, pure, most blessed and most glorious Lady, Theotokos and ever-virgin Mary, together with all the saints, let us commit ourselves and each other, and our whole life, to Christ our God.

People: **To You O Lord.**

Priest: For You are the Repose of our souls and bodies, and to You we give glory, to the Father, and to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and to the ages of ages.

People: **Amen.**

Troparion for Pentecost, Tone 8

Blessed are You, O Christ our God, * You have revealed the fishermen as most wise * by sending down upon them the Holy Spirit; * through them You drew the world into Your net. * O Lover of Man, glory to You.

Kontakion for Pentecost, Tone 8

When the Most High came down and confused the tongues, * He divided the nations; * but when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all to unity. * Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the all-holy Spirit!