

The Unity of the Spirit

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As we stand to pray the Agpeya every morning, the Church puts before our eyes this passage from the Holy Epistle of St. Paul to the Ephesians "I, therefore, the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called, with all lowliness and gentleness, with longsuffering, bearing with one another in love, endeavoring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all" (Ephesians 4:1-6). Reading this passage is a daily reminder that our main obligation is to keep the unity of the Spirit in our church. This can be fulfilled in two steps, first by our behavior towards each other and second by keeping the one true doctrine.

Our teacher St. Paul draws our attention that as Christians, members of the same Church, we do have unity of the Spirit. However, the challenge we are facing is how to keep this unity. To actually keep unity is to become one in spirit. Oneness does not come from being together in the same church, or from knowing each other's name, or attending church members' birthday or graduation parties or going out and eating together. An outward unity, which does not secure peace, cannot be the unity of the Spirit.

Oneness is produced by the Holy Spirit of God. The Holy Spirit, given to us by the Lord Himself, is the spiritual bond that holds us together. When Christians do not live in harmony with one another they are tearing this bond holding them together. In allowing the Holy Spirit to live within us and work in us without resisting or quenching Him we are submitting ourselves with all lowliness and humility to the will of the Lord.

St. Paul puts before us three qualities essential in everyone in order to be able to keep the unity of the Spirit.

- Lowliness or humility entails seeing one's self aright with all honesty. Lowliness is the willingness to die to self by submitting first to the Lord Jesus Christ and second to others. When we submit to God, He will give us that humble spirit that Christ Himself had when He left His throne in glory, came down to earth and died on the cross for the sake of other people. Lowliness is, truthfully believing that others are more important than one self. "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself" (Phil 2:3).

- Gentleness is an ability that grows out of lowliness. It is expressed in the calm spirit we have at all times when dealing with others even those who are talking about us wrongfully or hurting us. Gentleness could also be translated "meekness" and meekness is not weakness. Our Lord Jesus Christ taught us to imitate Him "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls" (Mt 11:29). Our goal is to be one day like our Lord Jesus Christ. Once we achieve this gentleness we will find rest both within us (for our souls) and with others. A humble and gentle spirit will strive to protect and preserve the unity of the Spirit while sparing us from trying to defend our rights or enforce our opinions. Believe that God is in control and He will not only defend you "But let all those rejoice who put their trust in You; Let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them" (Ps 5:11) but He will conform you into the image of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- Longsuffering is the product of the combination of lowliness and gentleness. It is the ability produced by the Spirit that enables us to take the unkind words that are said, and the unkind deeds that are done. Not only can we take them and tolerate the people who did them, but also we can love them in spite of themselves and not give up on them because there is still hope that God can change their hearts.

Taking these three qualities and summing them up, they come into one word, forbearance. St. Paul says we must bear one another in love. To bear is to endure and not let any provocation knock us down. St. Paul puts on view that being member in the church does not make us automatically perfect for perfect people don't need to be endured or forgiven. St. Paul does not explain how 'perfect people' can live together in unity, but how imperfect Christians can maintain the unity of the Spirit, namely, by enduring each other in love. "Bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do" (Col 3:13).

All of these are characteristics of our Lord Jesus Christ, which combine to produce the nature of our Lord Jesus Christ in us. Only when we have these characteristics do we find ourselves able to keep the unity. Anything that infringes on that unity is sin for it is tearing down what the Holy Spirit is seeking to bind together. Thus first we preserve the unity of the Spirit, first in the way that we are diligent in our behavior towards each other.

Secondly to preserve the unity of the Spirit we should be willing to adhere to the true doctrine. Notice that St. Paul in this passage to the Ephesians uses the word "one" seven different times "one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all." These seven words frame the doctrine that defines the Christian Church,

the body of our Lord Jesus Christ.

- One body: "For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body; whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free; and have all been made to drink into one Spirit" (1 Cor 12:13). All Christians, whether they were Jews or Gentile, male or female, slave or free are members in the body of our Lord Jesus Christ partaking of His Holy Body as the Holy Spirit works in the Church through the holy mysteries to unite man with God. "So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and individually members of one another" (Rom 12:5) and "let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to which also you were called in one body; and be thankful" (Col 3:15).

- One Spirit: Unity is led by the One Spirit of God to unify His people into one and prevents divisions among them making them one spirit with the Lord "But he who is joined to the Lord is one spirit with Him" (1 Cor 6:17). The One Spirit is the Spirit of Truth, the Spirit of God; the spirit of adoption as sons of God, which motivates and governs all who are of the One Body, in vital union with the one Head, our Lord Jesus Christ.

- One hope: The hope of our one calling which is our heavenly inheritance enjoying the eternal glory "The eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe" (Eph 1:18). One hope which inspires all the members of the one body of Christ, who have the one Spirit of the Truth, is the hope of eternal life by the resurrection. "That having been justified by His grace we should become heirs according to the hope of eternal life" (Titus 3:7).

- One Lord: St. Cyril the Great says that God wants us to unite with one another in the same way the Holy Trinity are One. God wants everyone to be united with Him as His children and call all saints in one perfect man.

- One faith: The Church's duty is to offer the true faith to the world. This faith is a treasure that should be kept through the ages without divergence or corruption. St. Irenaeus in his refutation to the heretics says "And this is most abundant proof that there is one and the same vivifying faith, which has been preserved in the Church from the apostles until now, and handed down in truth."

- One baptism: In baptism we become members in the One Body of Christ we are buried with Him to be raised with Him as the heavenly bride to the

- One Bridegroom. This is the baptism commanded by our Lord Jesus Christ (Mt 28:18-20; Mk 16:15-16), and preached and commanded by His apostles (Act 2:38; 10:48)

- One God and Father of all: One God the Father of all, above all, through all, in all. The Father, Who together with the Son and Holy Spirit, makes up the "Godhead". Our Lord Jesus Christ revealed to us God the Father. He taught us how to pray saying "Our Father" God desires for us to be His children and treat Him as our Father. "But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you, that you may be sons of your Father in heaven" (Mt 5:44,45).

We do not keep the unity of the Spirit by how we behave towards each other only but also by how we believe the doctrines of God. If we divert from these doctrines, automatically we infringe upon the unity that the Spirit has given us. Let us be lowly, meek and gentle. Let us be longsuffering and forgiving while keeping the true doctrines of the Church that the unity become real in our church, and we will not bring any disrespect upon God who called us into His kingdom and glory.