

The most sacred Christian site on the earth is the Church of the Resurrection in Jerusalem, also known as the Holy Sepulchre. Built at the place where Our Lord was Crucified, buried and rose from the dead. It has been a place of Christian worship and pilgrimage certainly since the days of Constantine the Great, when the persecution of the Church ended and, no doubt, long before that. Perhaps, at times, a place of secret veneration. For in the mind of the Church it is the locus, the place, holding the memory of the paschal mystery.

The building has recently been restored and, as ever, the pilgrims flock there. It is the place where the ceremony and the wonder of the Holy Fire takes place, when the Orthodox Patriarch of Jerusalem brings out the fire of Christ's resurrection to the faithful and from there throughout the Orthodox world.

But what do we expect at a tomb? Dead men's bones, surely! Imagine, then, for a moment if the bones of Jesus of Nazareth were there; a strange idea indeed but just imagine it - just like the bones and relics of other prophets and teachers in any other religion all over the world. There they would be, the bones of Jesus: just another prophet in just another of the world's religions. And the people would still come; the pilgrims still massing together at Jerusalem to venerate His dust.

But Jesus' bones are not there; Christianity is like no other religion. Jesus is not another dead prophet, for the Church of the Resurrection is empty! He is not there for we have just spent a whole Pentecost, a package of fifty days, celebrating His glorious Resurrection and Ascension.

Instead, the Church of the Resurrection is full of the memory of a mystery that makes Christianity like no other religion, for it is more than a mere religion. The memory is held within the Holy Tradition of the Church and is alive and active through the power of the person

of the Holy Spirit who is God and the Giver of Life - not some vague spirit or ethos perceived around some dead man's bones.

Fr Dc Filip reminded us last Sunday that we do not believe in God on our own terms, through human reasoning or by shaping a god for ourselves, accommodating and promoting our own needs. How many gods, I wonder, have been created in the image of man, the icons of narcissism? Be that as it may, we do not mould and change God to fit our lives. Rather, it is we who are called by repentance to change, even if it be uncomfortable.

Therefore, it was fitting that last Sunday should commemorate the Holy Fathers of the First Ecumenical Council before this present feast of Pentecost, for inspired by the Holy Spirit, they set down for us the Apostolic Tradition to which we hold, into which we must fit. It is through that very vacancy, that emptiness at the heart of the Church of the Resurrection that the Holy Spirit invites us to recover the image of God and then to evolve, to change, to grow, into the true likeness of Christ our God. Truly, our religion is like no other!

Today being Pentecost, we begin three days dedicated to our understanding of the Divine mystery, the Holy Trinity. The Old Testament harvest-time festival of weeks, Shavuot, marks now the birth of Christ's Church and the harvest of souls. What may I say about God the Holy Spirit? Very little, indeed; only what the fathers recorded in the Creed: 'I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Lord, the giver of Life who proceedeth from the Father; who with the Father and the Son together is worshipped and glorified; who spake by the prophets

So few words? Of Course! For Christ taught us that when the mystery of His dispensation had been accomplished on earth, He would depart and the Spirit would come to fulfil in the Church the whole economy of salvation, to proclaim Christ in the world, who on the third day had finished his rest in the garden tomb outside the ancient walls of Jerusalem.

For the Holy Spirit is selfless, not promoting Himself or drawing attention to Himself but to Christ who in turn, opens the way to the Father. So may it be with us who have been chrismated, blessed in

our personal Pentecost and encounter with the Spirit. Through repentance we can abandon the old Adam, we can be open to change; we can be moulded and formed again by the Holy Tradition of the Church which is nothing less than embedded presence of the Spirit Himself, the mind of Christ filling and perfecting every church, for every local Orthodox church is no mere ossuary for a dead man's bones but a living icon and, in truth, is a church of the Resurrection of Christ.

Truly the Holy Spirit is self-effacing, as we must be self-effacing in all our service for Christ. The grace of the Spirit dwelling in us, the faithful, in proportion to our faith and ascetic struggle, in perfect synergy, working with God, the grace of the Spirit works to form Christ within us, both together in the Church and for each one who struggles to rise above the old Adam. He is the enabler, the fixer, the go-between, preparing the ground, not that we may know Him and about Him but pointing us back to Christ, for it is the image of Christ that He wants to form within us.

So it is with all Christian ministry as well! Be wary of those pastors and priests who promote themselves. We do not win souls for Christ by drawing attention to ourselves; all is focused on Christ. 'He must increase and I must decrease,' said the Forerunner. Likewise the Spirit does not come and is not sent by the Father to reveal Himself but to reveal Christ.

If we too are not full of dead men's bones, if we too are a church of the resurrection, we too shall be changed. No one can embrace the life in Christ and imagine all that he has and all that he is will be secure! Here is the paradox for us - for the Orthodox faith does not change, for God is not subject to change. But in that sure and steadfast immutability lies the secret of why we must change, if once more we are to recover our likeness to God and find salvation.