

The Holy Spirit At Work

This weekly bulletin insert complements the curriculum published by the Department of Christian Education of the Orthodox Church in America. This and many other Christian Education resources are available at <http://dce.oca.org>.



Pentecost falls on May 31 this year.

On that day the apostles were filled with the Holy Spirit. They were given the power to preach and teach without fear and with joy in the Lord.

June 1 is the feast day of another saint who was empowered by the Holy Spirit. Using his considerable intellectual skills, he sought the true God for many years. He finally found Jesus Christ, and became one of the most famous Christian teachers of the early Church. He is Saint Justin the Martyr.

Justin was born to pagan parents in about the year 100, in Judea. He had a good early education, but didn't find it sufficient to answer his questions about the meaning of life. He decided to pursue the study of philosophy, and in his writings he describes his experiences with various teachers.

First was a Stoic, who in Justin's words "knew nothing of God and did not even think knowledge of Him to be necessary." Next Justin studied with a traveling, or itinerant, philosopher. But this man, he thought, was more interested in collecting his fee than imparting knowledge. Then there was a teacher of Pythagorean philosophy. But he required that a student take his courses in music, astronomy and geometry before concentrating on philosophy. Justin had little interest in or time for such requirements.

Justin's study of Platonic philosophy brought him closer to answers. As he described it: "And the perception of immaterial things quite overpowered me, and the contemplation of ideas furnished my mind with wings, so that in a little while I supposed I had become wise; and such was my stupidity I expected forthwith to look upon God, for this is the end of Plato's philosophy."

Then Justin had a life-changing experience, which he later saw as a direct gift from the Holy Spirit. He met an old man who, unlike all the wise teachers he'd encountered, convinced him that there was true wisdom—not in the works of philosophers, but in the teaching of the Old Testament prophets about Jesus Christ. Justin responded with joy:

"A fire was suddenly kindled in my soul. I fell in love with the prophets and these men who had loved Christ; I reflected on all their words and found that this philosophy alone was true and profitable. That is how and why I became a philosopher. And I wish that everyone felt the same way that I do." Observing the unshakable faith of martyrs strengthened his conviction that Christianity was true.

Saint Justin would later write defenses of Christianity (called "Apologies") powerful enough to convince an emperor to halt the persecutions of believers. He also formed basic Christian thought, being among the first to say that the Old Testament foretells the coming of Jesus Christ as Messiah.

Saint Justin accepted martyrdom, inspired by the example of other martyred believers. The Holy Spirit was at work in all of them, just as on the day of Pentecost when wind and fire changed the apostles' lives forever.

Kontakion - Tone 2

The whole Church of God is adorned
with the wisdom of your divine words, O Justin;
the world is enlightened by the radiance of your life.
By the shedding of your blood, you have received a crown.
As you stand before Christ with the angels,
pray unceasingly for us all!