

CREATE: THE CLEARING

Lent, 2024 with Icons Through Western Eyes with Russell Hart

3/17/24 - The Descent of the Holy Spirit



After its veneration of the Trinity on the first day of the festival of Pentecost, the Eastern Church turns to the icon of the Descent of the Holy Spirit which represents the inner life of the faithful. By “inner life” it is meant that faith which has already begun its ascent through the work of the Holy Spirit. What is faith? The author of Hebrews describes it as that which gives substance to our hopes, that which convinces us of things we cannot see. [Hebrews 11:1]

This icon would seem to contradict the pandemonium described in Acts 2:13 where the uninitiated say of the Apostles, “They have been drinking too much wine.” But this icon is addressed to the faithful, who have already perceived the meaning of the event. In former days, pride brought confusion of tongues to the builders of the tower of Babel, but here, the diversity of tongues enlightens the mind and gives knowledge of the glory of God.

But who is this troubling figure in the center, bowed down in years? He is the Ancient of Days, described in Daniel 7 — who, after passing judgment on the four beasts, is approached by the Son of Man who is given an everlasting kingdom that will never pass away. He holds a white cloth containing twelve scrolls, symbolizing the Apostles, who will bring light to the world with their teaching. The scrolls also represent multiplicity within Christ’s Church, sustained by the inexhaustible power of the Holy Spirit who continually reveals new things to be discovered in this union of love.

Come Holy Spirit, heavenly Dove
With all thy quickening powers;
Come, shed abroad a Savior’s love
And that shall kindle ours.

~ Charles Wesley