

# Tradition!

OK, Tevye, you sing of tradition. Big deal! It's much easier to sing about tradition than it is to live it. Trust me!

What is meant by tradition, anyway? We each have our own definition of tradition, don't we? Very often we find tradition expressed as disapproval of what somebody else is doing: "What are you doing? That is not what we do: this is what we do! We've always done it this way, and this is what we're always going to do – whether you like it or not!" We have this idealized and probably false picture of how things used to be done, a picture which we have fallen in love with, a picture which we are obsessed with, a picture which we are bound and determined to reproduce in minute detail. The reality to be reproduced varies from person to person: my village in Ukraine, the pre-Vatican II Church, Mount Athos, the way things were under the former pastor, whatever. (Fill in your own blank.)

Tradition really means nothing more than "handing on" or "transmission". What we hand on can be alive or dead, helpful or dangerous. I am reminded of what Jesus said: "*What father among you would give his son a snake when he asks for a fish? Or hand him a scorpion if he asks for an egg?*" (Lk. 11:11-12) Obviously, the inappropriateness of a snake and the scorpion can be judged by the harmful effects which they bring about; it seems to me that the value of what we hand on can be assessed in the same way: is our Church a genuine help to salvation, or is it merely a burden? We cannot just ask those in the pews, but we must also ask those who have left.

This is a question which I must ask myself. You see, some people have hurled the word "traditionalist" at me as an epithet. In trying to hand on the tradition faithfully, I need to make sure that what I am handing on is a living, life-giving tradition rather than a museum piece in which nobody except historians shows any interest. Perhaps an example would help to explain my quandary.

After coming to a new parish, I was asked, "Will we be decorating the church in green for Pentecost?" I made my interlocutor happy by answering in the affirmative. Wherever I have been assigned, wherever I shall be assigned in the future, I shall make sure that the church is festooned in green on Pentecost – as indeed was the case this year in Mishawaka. Why? It's important not only because that has been the custom in our Church for centuries, but also because of what it symbolizes. You see, we wear green – the color of life – to symbolize the life-creating Spirit: by adorning our churches in green, we are proclaiming our openness to the life which the Spirit intends for us as individuals and as Church.

And what a life that is! In the account of the descent of the Holy Spirit on the first Pentecost, we get an idea of the wild ride which the Spirit destines for those brave enough to embrace the Christian life:

...And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong, driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. (Acts 2: 2-4)

Two thousand years ago, the Holy Spirit came in like a tornado and shook things up; the same Spirit seeks to do the same to us. There is nothing stodgy or conservative about the tradition

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which we hand on; rather, it's a ball of fire intended to set the world ablaze with God's love. For that to happen, we ourselves need to be brave enough to "catch the fire" of the Spirit so that we can pass it on.

This year we begin our celebration of the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the St. Nicholas Eparchy. What is proposed is a new Pentecost for our Eparchy, an opportunity for rejuvenation. May the Holy Spirit bestow upon us the gift of courage so that we may take advantage of this opportunity! If the 1<sup>st</sup> Pentecost could change the fearful apostles into bold preachers, maybe this new Pentecost will provide hope for us as well.

-Fr. Jim Karepin, op