

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCHATE  
HOLY METROPOLITANATE OF HONG KONG AND SOUTHEAST ASIA

**Encyclical**  
**of His Eminence Metropolitan NEKTARIOS for the great feast of Pentecost 2008**

*To the Reverend Priests and Deacons, the Monks and Nuns, the Members of the Parishes  
of the Orthodox Metropolitanate of Hong Kong and South East Asia  
and the entire Orthodox Family in South East Asia.*

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Ten days after Jesus ascended into heaven, the twelve apostles, Jesus' mother and many other of His disciples gathered together in Jerusalem for the Jewish harvest festival that was celebrated on the fiftieth day of Passover. While they were indoors praying, a sound like that of a rushing wind filled the house and tongues of fire descended and rested over each of their heads. This was the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on human flesh promised by God through the prophet Joel ([Joel 2:28-29](#)). The disciples were suddenly empowered to proclaim the gospel of the risen Christ. They went out into the streets of Jerusalem and began preaching to the crowds gathered for the festival. Not only did the disciples preach with boldness and vigor, but by a miracle of the Holy Spirit they spoke in the native languages of the people present, many who had come from all corners of the Roman Empire. This created a sensation. The apostle Peter seized the moment and addressed the crowd, preaching to them about Jesus' death and resurrection for the forgiveness of sins. The result was that about three thousand converts were baptized that day.

On Pentecost day the presence of the Church in the world is activated, for which reason it is considered as her birthday, the moment of the appearance in history. With the Holy Spirit that was outpoured on the world on the day of Pentecost, the presence of Christ in the world is continued through the Church as His body. "If the Spirit did not come, the Church would not come into being", St. John Chrysostom clearly states. The Church is a continuous Pentecost because it is "welded together" as an earthly bond through the uninterrupted breath of the Holy Spirit, for which reason it is God-made and not a human organism. It is on the earth but it is not "of this world".

Christ is the only leader of the Church because He is Her head and the Church is His body. The Church, therefore, is the community of all the Christians, clergy and lay, the Lord's Body, the people of God in all the world and in all times.

The purpose of the Church is the one which is defined by Her Head, Christ. Christ, with His world-saving work objectively saved humanity "I came to save the world". This work of salvation in Christ is continued in the world by the Church. Her purpose is to make the world Christ-like and Church-like, to change it into a "new creation". With the incarnation of the World all are called by God to become Church, i.e. body of Christ. "The will and wish of Christ is the salvation of man, and this is called Church", observes St. Clement of Alexandria. The Church not only grants salvation with all the means that her divine Builder gave Her, but is Herself the salvation of the world. For this reason St. Cyprian, along with other Fathers, will say that "outside the Church there is no salvation". The Church is the ark of which no life exists at all.

As we confess in our Symbol of Faith, the Church is "One, Holy, Catholic and Apostolic". Let us see what these characteristics of our Church mean.

ONE. The Church is One because she has only one head, one Spirit, one faith, one baptism, one beginning and one purpose. One is the true Christ, and one is His true body, consequently, one is

the true Church. The Church is One also because as body of the one Christ She is the unique source of man's total salvation, since "there is no salvation in any other". (Acts 4,12).

HOLY. The Church is Holy because her founder is Holy. Christ "gave Himself for her that He might sanctify her" (Eph.5,25). The work that She accomplished is sanctifying. It sanctifies man and the world. Through the sanctifying means, which are the holy Sacraments of the Church, and the sacred teaching, humans and everything else become "partakers of divine nature".

CATHOLIC. The Church is Catholic because She addresses all men in accordance with the commandments of the Lord "go therefore and make disciples of all the nations" (Mat.28,19), and also because She is completed wherever the Divine Liturgy is offered with the canonical Bishop, Priest and the People of the Parish. The Church is also called Catholic because She believes all that Christ has taught, the Apostles handed down and the Ecumenical Synods defined.

APOSTOLIC. The Church is Apostolic because She has Her beginning in Jesus Christ Who is not only Her founder but the first and the greatest "apostle" (Hebrews 3,1). Then, she is related to the Holy Apostles because, according to Paul, she was built "on the foundation of the Apostles and Prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone" (Ephesians 2, 20). For the preservation of the Apostolicity of the Church is demanded continued Episcopal succession through ordination, on the one hand, and on the other, unadulterated preservation of the Apostolic teaching and Tradition.

The Church as a visible and God-human society was organized in accordance with the commandments and particularly the nature of Her founder, so that She could measure up to Her greatest mission which is the salvation of the world.

The people of God are distinguished in two orders: the Clergy and the Lay, who, however, as members of the Church, are equal before God. The clergy are the shepherds and the lay the shepherded. Christ is the "chief shepherd", the Apostles and their clergy successors are the shepherds who receive their authority from Christ to shepherd the Church: "the Holy Spirit has made you oversees, to shepherd the Church of God" (Acts 20, 28), with the parallel right to perform the most sacred sacraments, and to teach and govern the Church. The Apostles transmitted the authority they received from Christ to their successors, that is, the Bishops, through ordination and the invocation of the Holy Spirit. According to St. Ignatius the God-bearer, the Bishop is "in the form and place of Christ", the Presbyters in the form of the holy Apostles and the Deacons in the form of the angels who, together with the faithful people of God, march together following the footsteps of Christ the Savior.

Beloved Brothers and Sisters in Christ,

Let's choose the way of fidelity to the true Faith. Let's choose faithfulness to the true Church with all Her canons and dogmas which have been received and confirmed by the local and universal Councils. Let's choose the holy customs and traditions, the spiritual riches of that faith transmitted complete and entire to us from the Holy Apostles and the Holy Fathers of the Church.

May Christ our true God, Who sent the Holy Spirit, upon His holy disciples and Apostles, thus illuminating them, and through them the whole universe, have mercy on us and save us in His goodness.

With paternal blessings and love in Christ,

**+NEKTARIOS**  
**Metropolitan of Hong Kong and Southeast Asia**