

Homily for Pentecost Sunday

June 8-9, 2019

Readings: Acts 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 12:3B-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

Preacher: Gloria Ulterino

They speak the same language! In this case, Spanish. A friend, fluent in Spanish, has served as a missionary in Peru. At the moment she's a volunteer on the Texas/ Mexican border, connecting immigrants to the families who are awaiting them. It's a 3-week assignment. Entirely staffed by volunteers. They all speak the same language: Spanish. And also: caring, compassion, understanding, wisdom, reverence—all the abundant gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Yes, it's Pentecost! That fiery, blazing, wind-swept, startling, astonishing, bolt-out-of-the-blue day, upending all expectations. For the Spirit is blowing where She will. Giving voice—a whole host of languages—to Israelites, who had only known Hebrew. Giving ears to people of many tongues, different from Hebrew, all gathered in Jerusalem. Surprise! They're all speaking the same language! The language of understanding, wonderment, acceptance, caring, and compassion. For whenever the Spirit of God is at work, there's always loving, healing, renewing, and birthing new life. There's always building up of community, confounding perverse division.

Those first disciples, 120 or so, huddled together in the Upper Room, waiting upon the Spirit of Jesus, were the first to know—to be touched by, moved by—this power of the Holy Spirit. They desperately needed it then, just as we desperately need it now. We know all too well when the Spirit is absent. When fear takes over—with its appeals to our lowest, most base instincts. When there is name-calling, belittling, bullying, and warring. When we can become stubbornly stuck in our meanest attitudes and factions. When it takes a power much larger than any one of us to get us un-stuck. When understanding, forgiving, healing, renewing, and the power of loving show up to change anything and everything. When we begin to speak the same language.

That day in Jerusalem was beyond imagining! And yet, don't we see this power of the Holy Spirit, this power to speak the same language, at work today? In big

ways ... and in small ways. I know a young, first year history teacher. She is bright, caring, in love with her students, but unsure of herself for several reasons. Then the Spirit showed up one day in the chair of her department. He told her that he had hired a sub for her that next morning, so he could take her to the Middle School to observe an older, experienced history teacher. On the return to school, he asked what she thought. When she expressed the view that this teacher was really good, he said, "I hope you see that you're every bit as good as she is!" The language of encouragement.

There's my cousin Eileen, a retired kindergarten teacher, who knows the language of delighting children. Making them giggle. Giving them a new thought or two. In her retirement, she writes books, complete with her own drawings. They *love* speaking the same language!

There's her father, now deceased, who served in the Pacific during World War II and returned home with PTSD, though they didn't have a name for it then. He worked to support his family but became addicted to alcohol—until the Holy Spirit took over, and he entered into recovery. For years he helped other recovering alcoholics, who told his family many years later that he had helped save their lives, using their common, life-giving language of recovery.

There's the soldier today, returning from service in Afghanistan. He's learned the language of making war, only to ask the question: "Why do we have war?" Now he knows he must learn the language of making peace, and to do that, he must first do penance.

There's Jean Vanier, founder of the L'Arche communities, who showed us that even if people could only make guttural sounds, they could teach us the language of love. Vanier learned and lived this language: the overwhelming power of gentle tenderness. For it transformed his companions with disabilities, as well as himself.

Let's face it: learning and living this Holy Spirit language of love is tough. It takes prayer, daily prayer, "Come, Holy Spirit come." Come, with your gifts of wisdom, knowledge, understanding, reverence for all, right judgment, courage, and wonder at God's goodness. It takes failure and the will to try again. It takes forgiveness and the will to forgive. In the end, it takes the will to join others in

speaking the same language. God language. Compassion, forgiving, and courage language. And then, watch out! And see what God alone can do!