

The Feast of Pentecost  
31 May, Anno Domini 2020  
St. John 14:23-31  
Pr. Kurt Ulmer

In the Name of the Father, and of the +Son, and of the Holy Spirit.

In our second reading today from Acts chapter two, we have on display the very thing we considered in last week's sermon. When the Lord Jesus pours out the Holy Spirit upon the believers gathered in the Upper Room, there is really only one thing that causes the amazement of the gathering crowds - they were hearing the mighty works of God in their own language. It wasn't the tongues of fire that rested on the believers without hurting them, it wasn't the noise like that of a loud rushing wind which had drawn them in the first place. They were amazed at the preaching that they were each hearing in their mother tongue.

Consider for a moment that those who had gathered to Jerusalem for the Jewish festival of Pentecost came from all over the world ("every nation under heaven"). They likely all knew, in addition to their native language, at least one of the three primary languages needed for commerce and travel - Aramaic, Latin, and Greek. This is why the inscription Pilate placed on our Lord's cross was written in these three languages. But the Holy Spirit wasn't satisfied to pick a language that most people knew. He caused the disciples to speak in all of the languages represented there in Jerusalem at that time. The Holy Spirit thus sanctified ALL languages to be fit carriers for the preaching of God's Word. No longer would the worship of God be conducted only in Hebrew as it was at the temple. Now, the true worship of God would be heard in the language of the Parthians and the Medes and the Elamites and the Phrygians and the Spanish and the Germans and the Nigerians and the Japanese and the English and every other human language. Just as our Lord Jesus sanctified all waters to be a blessed flood and lavish washing away of sins, so on Pentecost the Lord elevated every human language by joining it to His Word.

This is the miracle of Pentecost. The Gospel of Jesus Christ is now spread across the globe and every human language, regardless of how complex or simple, can proclaim the forgiveness of sins in the Name of Jesus. Rather than making sinners learn a new language to be saved, the Lord puts the good news into your language, your mother tongue, the language that is most comfortable and natural to you. God wants all people to hear of Jesus' death and resurrection for their salvation. Contrary to the teaching of those who lust after the ability to speak in supposedly

heavenly languages that no one but the angels can supposedly understand, the disciples on Pentecost spoke known languages that sinners could understand. The point of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit wasn't the elevation of the disciples to super-Christian status. The point of Pentecost is that sinners of every tribe, every nation, every language hear of God's mighty works for them and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. Speaking in gibberish doesn't accomplish that. Those who claim to speak in ecstatic tongues may be filled by a spirit but it is NOT the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit proclaims the things of Christ for the creating and strengthening of faith.

That is why we read more than the traditionally appointed verses from Acts 2 (and perhaps in coming years we'll include all of Peter's sermon). St. Peter's teaching from the prophet Joel culminates in the declaration "Men of Israel, hear these words (in other words, here's the real point of what is happening): Jesus of Nazareth, a man attested to you by God with mighty works and wonders and signs that God did through him in your midst, as you yourselves know—this Jesus, delivered up according to the definite plan and foreknowledge of God, you crucified and killed by the hands of lawless men. God raised him up, loosing the pangs of death, because it was not possible for him to be held by it." It is Jesus of whom Joel spoke when he said "And it shall come to pass that everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." The entire work of the Holy Spirit is to bring us to Jesus, to create saving faith in us as we hear in our own tongue that which Jesus has done for us. Every time you hear true Christian preaching, every time you share the Gospel with your family, every time you tell your neighbors about Jesus, the blessings of Pentecost continue to pour forth into this world.

Your faith does not rest in ecstatic gifts of the Holy Spirit or in miracles. These things cease. Your faith must rest only in the Word of Christ which endures forever. This creative Word alone has the power to declare you forgiven of all your sins. This Word alone has the power to raise you up out of the dust of eternal death into the eternal life of God. This Word alone has the ability to bring peace to your weary conscience. This is the Word of Jesus, sent by the Father to atone for you. The truth and surety of this Word is guaranteed to you by the Blood poured out for the world on Calvary which is given to you as true drink. Without this Word we have nothing. Without this Word we wander around desperately searching for something to soothe our aching consciences and assure us of God's mercy - speaking in tongues, multiple baptisms, emotional experiences, works of penance, the prayers of the saints, our own good conduct. But these are powerless to help us. These are not from Jesus. The witness of the Holy Spirit through the prophets and apostles, Holy Baptism, the Sacrament of the Altar, Holy Absolution

- Jesus has given you these things and promised that if you guard this teaching He and the Father will make their home with you.

Jesus has also promised that the Father will send you the Holy Spirit, the Helper, to help you by causing you to hear and understand and believe Jesus' Word. And the Holy Spirit accomplishes this work through the Word. When the Bible is taught in its truth and purity, the Holy Spirit is at work in you confirming to you the salvation that is yours in Christ. As we said last week, the most comforting thing the Holy Spirit can do is proclaim to you the truth about God and Christ and draw you to cling to that truth in faith. Today in Plano and tomorrow here in our own midst we see the fruit of the Holy Spirit's teaching as Aaliyah, Jocelyn, and Chloe all confess faith in what the Holy Spirit has taught them through the Scriptures. These young ladies and their classmates aren't simply confirming historical facts. They are giving their "Amen's" to their faith in Christ and the teaching of the Holy Spirit concerning the mysteries of the faith.

So let us rejoice today and every day that the Holy Spirit has graciously caused the mighty works of God in Christ Jesus to be proclaimed to us today in our own language, a language that didn't even yet exist at the time of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost. Let us rejoice that God is pleased with our confession of the faith in our language and that He hears our prayers spoken in our language. The tongues of fire may not be visible but the Word of the Lord is still heard. May that saving Word be established in our own hearts and may we, by the Holy Spirit, be stirred up to join in the proclamation of salvation to every nation and language under heaven.

In the Name of +Jesus.