

Readings

Acts 2:1-11

Ps 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34

1 Cor 12:3b-7, 12-13 *or* Gal 5:16-25

Jn 20:19-23

John T. Denny, O.S.A.
October 19, 1957 - June 20, 2016

Today's great feast, Pentecost – the birthday of the Church – recalls another great story in our salvation history. This feast of Pentecost makes me think of a story that God's people began to tell many, many centuries before today's powerful events occurred. I am referring to the eleventh chapter of the Book of Genesis, where we find the well-known tale of the Tower of Babel.

Humanity, in our arrogance, decides to build a tower that will reach heaven, thereby becoming God's equals – becoming God's peers. God "confuses" the speech of those building the Tower and they can no longer communicate with each other. Their effort to be God fails, of course.

In the passage proclaimed from the Acts of the Apostles today something very different happens to the people's speech. Regardless of their native language they all understand. There is no confusion. The day of Pentecost stands as the complete opposite of what happened when people attempted to build the Tower of Babel.

Today's feast reminds us that when we think that we are God we are confused, and we will make a mess of things. Today's feast invites us to be who we really are, not God, but rather, God's people redeemed by the blood of Christ. Today's feast celebrates the fulfillment of Jesus' promise to send us the Holy Spirit.

The gift of the Holy Spirit, St. Paul tells us in our second reading, graces us with clarity. In the Holy Spirit there is no confusion. We understand that “Jesus is Lord!” and we are his body. Every one of us, no matter if we are young or old, rich or poor, from a blue state or from a red state, male or female, is an essential part of that body. And that body, of which we are all members, is the Church.

Today we celebrate the birthday of the Church – our birth as Jesus’ body in the world. Pentecost ushers in the final phase of salvation history. Before Jesus ascends to the Father, he commands his disciples to continue his work. No longer is Jesus’ physical body the instrument through which God is present in the world. Now his mystical body is the instrument through which God is present to his world. That mystical body is the Church. We are that mystical body - you and me and all the baptized.

God’s world is made up of many people, many nations, many tribes, and many languages. Yet God’s Word to his world – the Gospel preached by Jesus Christ – is meant for everyone. The message is accessible to everyone. The Church has a place for everyone.

In order to make God present, in order to do that which we have been charged to do by Jesus, we must open ourselves to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We must embrace the clarity of faith that the Holy Spirit inspires in us. We must believe that we are God’s instruments. We must believe that we are gifted and our gifts matter. We all have gifts. Our gift may be the material resources that are available to us. Our gift may be the ability to explain things to others. Our gift may be patience and kindness. Our gift may be the ability to stop gossip before it gets going. Our gift may be fidelity to our marriage. Our gift may be a smile or a prayer. We must believe that without us and without our gifts the Church is incomplete and God’s presence in our world is weakened.

That is why we come to this table week after week. God feeds us the Eucharist – the Body of Christ – so that we have the grace and the courage to be the Body of Christ.

Happy Birthday to all of us: whether we worship God in English or in Arabic, in French or in Spanish, in Swahili or in Chinese, the message is the same for all of us. We are his Body – the Church.