

Pentecost Sunday Year “C”

June 4-5, 2022

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

While I have never been particularly adept with foreign languages, I am fascinated by them. Even when I was struggling with my first few words of Italian for example, invariably the person to whom I was speaking answered back in English. “At least try to humor me.”

There are approximately 3000 spoken languages in the world, not counting the many dialects. At last evening’s extended Pentecost Vigil Mass held here as part of the Synod, we heard readings in five languages. It was a powerful witness to the universality of the Church. I closed my eyes, listening to see if I could discern the content of the readings. Let’s simply say that I had mixed results.

Language equally confounds and fascinates me. Some languages are pleasing to my ear—French and Italian come to mind— while others seem harsh. Perhaps my unfamiliarity contributes. There are many ways to communicate, and language clearly can be a barrier. But there are others.

Ear pods are one. Perhaps you have had the experience of calling out to someone or saying hello only to have the person act as if they completely were ignoring you. In reality, they never even heard you— they are perpetually plugged in and too often tuned out. People text each other across the room! We are forgetting the power of the spoken word!

By contrast, the saving message of Jesus Christ cut across all boundaries and barriers. We all share it in common as His sons and daughters. The gift of the Holy Spirit enabled the apostles to carry the message far and wide, into foreign lands, but it also required a life changing decision.

Acts of the Apostles (1:15) relates that 120 people were gathered together in one place when the Holy Spirit came down upon them. St. Augustine notes that the sacred number of apostles (twelve) was multiplied by ten, yet each spoke the tongue of every nation. This signified the unity of the Church amid the tongues of all the nations. Augustine says this:

He therefore who possesses the Holy Spirit is in the Church, which speaks in the tongues of *all* nations. Whosoever is without this Church, has not the Holy Spirit. For this reason, the Holy Spirit deigned to reveal Himself in the tongues of *all nations*, that each may understand, that he possesses the Holy Spirit who is nourished within the unity of the Church, which speaks in *every* tongue.<sup>1</sup>

Unity is certainly not easy these days, be it among our nation's elected officials, our local communities or even our Church. Increasingly, people share their strong convictions. It takes courage to lead amid divergent viewpoints. Our local shepherd Archbishop Hebda is leading by means of a process in which all Catholics were encouraged to participate.

A total of thirty listening sessions were held, followed by the parish small group process. I was pleased that over 100 parishioners participated for the six-week session here in this parish. In this day, that takes commitment. That input formed the basis, with all the other parishes, for refining the priorities of the Synod, concluding this afternoon.

We are invited to engage the world in order to transform it with the Gospel. A greater fear might be that we may choose to disengage, to retreat to a comfortable corner. Being forced to learn a new language forced me to embrace this discomfort. The solemnity of Pentecost provides the impetus for spreading the Word no matter the obstacle.

Faith needs enthusiasm; grace builds upon our natures as social beings. All throughout Easter we have listened to how the early Church struggled to figure everything out, especially the mission to the nations. But eventually they understood, didn't they? They got it.

The Holy Spirit is very much active in our Archdiocesan Church today, and the Holy Spirit preserves the unity in the Church to which we have been called. Unity takes hard work and docility, including trusting our

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<sup>1</sup> Saint Augustine, sermon for the Feast of Pentecost, *Sermo #268.1-2*

shepherd in this local Archdiocese. Now, he is leading a long process that sought input at every level of this local Church.

After receiving recommendations this weekend, he will pray, listen and ultimately issue a pastoral letter on the Solemnity of Christ the King in the fall, outlining a path forward. May he be assured of our prayers for his leadership.

To each of us the manifestation of the Spirit has been given for some benefit. “To each of us,” we have been told. It is up to us though to live up to this calling we have received, that truly the Holy Spirit may renew our Archdiocese and in turn, renew the face of the earth.