

“God’s Gift of Words”

Acts 2:1-21

The Day of Pentecost is a big deal. It is a major holiday on the church calendar. It is the birthday of the Christian Church. Originally, it was a major Jewish Festival, and Jews from all around the world would travel to Jerusalem to celebrate this holy day.

The Day of Pentecost got its name because it fell on the 50th day after the first sheaf to be reaped of the barley harvest – that is, the 50th day from the first Sunday after Passover. Pentecost is the Greek word for “50th”.

Among the Hebrew and Aramaic speaking Jews, it was known as “the feast of weeks”, because it was seven weeks after Passover. Also it was called “the day of the first fruits”, because on this day the first fruits of the harvest were presented to God.

When we see what the Feast of Pentecost becomes for the Christian Church, we again see the continuity of the Old and New Testaments. We are told later on that, after Peter finished addressing the crowd, they were “cut to the heart” at hearing how they crucified the Messiah – the Christ of God – and many repented, and 3000 were baptized that day.

On Pentecost, we see the first fruits of the Word and Sacrament ministry of the Apostolic Church. That first Pentecost was a great harvest and the events of that day paved the way for the Gospel to reach all corners of civilization in the lifetime of the apostles.

Those Parthians, Medes, Elamites, residents of Mesopotamia, Judea, Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, and all the other people who received faith in Christ and were baptized that day – they went home to share the Good News so that their friends and neighbors might also be saved.

The great miracle of Pentecost is not only that the Holy Spirit enters into the people and creates faith, but He does so through the use of language. The gift of language is truly amazing. We are able to communicate. We are able to speak and understand one another, organize complex thoughts, and express emotion. We are not simply another animal barking, mooing, grunting, or growling at each other (at least not most of the time).

One of God's most profound punishments on the ancient people was that He confused their language at the Tower of Babel. Since then, all languages have worked themselves into increasingly simplified forms.

For example, in English, we don't put "th" on the end of verbs anymore. We no longer say "Christ liveth and reigneth." Modern Greek has a fraction of the verb forms found in the ancient writings of Homer and Plato. They used over 600 forms of every verb.

The notion that language has evolved up from cavemen saying, "Ugh" is really a joke. The complexity of language comes from God. No culture in their right mind would build up a language where you had over 600 forms of every verb. We want simple "texting" language. By the time of Christ, the Greek speakers had eliminated over 200 forms of each verb by dropping one entire unnecessary segment of their language which only applied when you were speaking of two, and only two, of something.

Given the fact that languages tend to simplify over time and usage, it begs the question, “How did language get complex in the first place?” The answer is clear. The complexity of language comes from God.

When Adam was formed in the image of God, language issues were not a problem. The difficulty of man to communicate is a result of sin. When the Holy Spirit comes on Pentecost, we see a beginning of the resolution of the curse upon the people at the Tower of Babel.

It won't be until Christ returns that communication is perfect once again. We will continue to struggle. But God allowed His disciples and He allows His Church throughout the world to communicate the Gospel in a multitude of languages. It is the Gospel – the Good News of salvation in Christ – which is able to overcome the curse of sin.

As we ponder what a blessing it is to be able to communicate – especially communicate the message of our crucified and risen Lord – we are amazed at the art of language. Not only has God given us the gift of language, but He has given us the ability to teach, the ability to learn, and the ability to share the words which the Holy Spirit has given us in Baptism.

We recently celebrated Mother's Day, and on that day we took time to recognize and give thanks for the gift of life. Father's Day is approaching. Through your mother and father, you did receive life. Very often, your earthly father and mother are also the primary persons through whom you learned how to speak.

On this Day of Pentecost, we celebrate the official beginning of the Christian Church. Throughout history, the church has very often been compared to and referred to as our “mother.” And it is through her that we hear the Word of our Father in heaven. And we are fed, and we learn, and

we grow.

Among the Old Testament people, Pentecost was a day to celebrate the first fruits of the harvest and celebrate how God takes care of His children. With the coming of the Holy Spirit, for us as New Testament believers, having celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord for the past seven weeks, we recognize Christ as being the first fruits of the Resurrection, as He says He is. And we celebrate His continued work in His Church throughout the world as the final harvest awaits.

And we continue to be fed, and we continue to learn the Word of our Father from our mother – the church. And we continue to use our words to proclaim how Christ has overcome the curse of sin. Amen.