

“He Will Teach You All Things”

“These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:25-26).

How did it feel to hear today’s reading from Acts in a different language? Aside from the obvious connection to the Pentecost story, I find it incredibly moving to hear God’s Word read out loud in a foreign tongue. Hearing Scripture in a language different from our own reminds us of the inclusive and global nature of the Gospel, and it broadens our understanding of the Church. But it’s also important for us to realize that this experience is only meaningful when we know it’s Scripture that we’re hearing. Today, we had the English in front of us as we listened to the reading, but without that key to guide us, most of us would have been completely lost, and we would have had no idea that we were hearing God’s Word. Language is key to communication, and even though you can send and receive messages through non-verbal cues, a difference in language creates an insurmountable barrier to understanding.

Last year, my oldest daughter studied for a semester in Puerto Rico and, about six weeks before she came home, we visited her. While we were there we experienced a rich culture and had a truly delightful time, but this pleasant experience was only possible because Maddie served as our translator. When we went to a restaurant, Maddie made sure we were ordering the right food. When we needed to ask for directions, Maddie was there to clarify our questions. The truth is, we would have been lost without her. In fact, one morning we went to a local bakery to buy breakfast. Maddie and I picked out what we wanted and approached the cashier, but before he had finished ringing up our purchase, Maddie turned and left me alone at the counter. I instantly realized that I was in big trouble as the man behind the cash register started speaking to me in Spanish. He needed payment, so I quickly handed him a \$20 bill which I knew would easily cover our purchase. Well, based on the change he gave me, I paid roughly \$16 for two donuts. I knew this wasn’t right, but with Maddie gone I had no chance at discussing this with the cashier who stood smiling at me from behind the counter. This humbling stop at the bakery reminded me that without Maddie and her knowledge of the Spanish language, our wonderful trip to Puerto Rico would have quickly turned into a nightmare.

Language is an essential part of the human experience, and when you can’t understand what’s being said, life quickly becomes frustrating. This is the truth we saw in today’s reading from Genesis 11 where God punished the sinful inclinations of His people by confusing their language. And today, in our reading from Acts, we see this linguistic division reversed as the Holy Spirit gave the extraordinary gift of languages so that the “mighty works of God” could be proclaimed to the Pentecost crowd. The lesson of these texts illustrates that the mission of God is one of unity and restoration; that the divisions caused by sin – in language and in life – are all reconciled and healed in the power of God. But this general observation isn’t enough, and the danger in settling on such a generic moral of the Pentecost story is to cut out the totally unique and absolutely essential role the Holy Spirit plays in building the Church.

Today, as we consider this story which details the birthday of the “one holy Christian and Apostolic Church,” we understand it as the fulfillment of God’s promises to us in Christ. You see, for the last six weeks, our readings have told the story of the Risen Christ. During the season of Easter which ended last weekend, we have been studying the days after the Resurrection and, in that time, we also have followed the growth of the early church. From the Risen Christ appearing to the Apostles and other witnesses, to the spread of the Gospel to the Gentiles, our readings have all illustrated the impact of Easter on the world. But today, as we celebrate Pentecost and the extraordinary work of the Holy Spirit, the words of our Gospel reading take us back to the night before Jesus died as He gathered with His disciples just hours before His arrest in the Garden of Gethsemane. Here, in John 14, Jesus addressed His disciples and this is what He said: “These things I have spoken to you while I am still with you. But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, he will teach you all things and bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you” (John 14:25-26).

Here, Jesus promised them the Helper – not *a* helper, not *some* helper...but *the* Helper – the One whom the Father will send in Christ’s name. And in this description of the Holy Spirit, Jesus points to the Helper “who” in the words of our Creed, “proceeds from the Father and the Son,” and, “who with the Father and the Son is worshipped and glorified.” And this Helper, *who is God*, has an utterly essential function in bringing us to faith.

You see, the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ stand at the heart of the Christian message. Here, the Bible tells us, “Jesus...was delivered up for our trespasses and raised for our justification” (Romans 4:24-25). Or, to put it another way, in the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, our sins – and the sins of world (I John 2:2) – have been completely punished, and we have been made right with God, our relationship to our creator has been restored and here, Paul writes, God has reconciled the world to Himself (II Corinthians 5:19). This is the foundational truth of Christianity and it is based on completely objective facts that took place *outside of us* 2,000 ago in the physical death and resurrection of Jesus Christ...but for this objective truth make an eternal difference in someone’s life, it must be *personally applied*.

Just this week, an amazing story broke about a treatment for a rare type of brain tumor called a glioblastoma. Apparently, scientists have developed a modified polio virus which causes no harm to the human body but completely ravages the glioblastoma, destroying it from the inside out. It has the potential to literally cure this specific type of cancer. Now, this cancer-killing, lifesaving treatment is an objective fact. It has been developed, it has been tested, and it works. But the fact that there *is* a treatment for glioblastoma doesn’t make a bit of difference to someone dying from this brain cancer...*unless it is personally applied to the dying patient!*

This medical analogy carries an important spiritual truth. You see, the battle is over; the war is won. On the cross, sin has been overcome! In the empty tomb, death has been destroyed! In Jesus Christ, the door to eternal life has been opened...but none of these things matter until they have been personally applied to the dying sinner. And that is the job of the Holy Spirit.

My friends, an undelivered Gospel is no Gospel! And, on our own, we don’t know the way to life! The natural world will never teach us about Christ, and we can’t discover the secret to salvation in depths of our own heart. We can’t find justification in the ways of world; we can’t alleviate the guilt of our sinful thoughts and actions with good works; and, as resilient as the human spirit can be, we cannot overcome the reality of death from within ourselves. To use Luther’s words: “We cannot by our own reason or strength, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to Him...*But the Holy Spirit!!!*” The Holy Spirit calls us by the Gospel, enlightens us with His gifts and sanctifies and keeps us in the one true faith. And, my friends...*He does this through language!*

Paul writes: “Faith comes through hearing the message and the message is heard through the Word of Christ” (Romans 10:17). On that first Pentecost, the Holy Spirit could have worked through the sound of roaring wind or the tongues of fire or some other miraculous sign to dazzle the crowd and bring them to faith...but He didn’t! The Holy Spirit worked through human language and He does the same thing today! “And” Luke writes, the crowd was “amazed and astonished, saying, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? How is it that we hear, each of us in his own native language? (We) hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God’” (Acts 2:7, 11). Today, in simple human language, God has revealed His plan to save you, and that plan for your salvation is all about Christ. That’s what Jesus meant when promised His disciples that the Helper would come and “teach (them) all things and bring to (their) remembrance all that (Jesus) had said to (them)” (John 14:26). And through the preaching of His Word, and through the Word of God combined with the waters of Baptism, and through the promise of God connected to the bread and wine of Holy Communion the Holy Spirit is personally applying the saving presence and promise of Jesus to your dying heart. And today, in your hearing, and today, in your eating and drinking, and today, in the remembrance of your Baptism in the name Father and Son and Holy Spirit...your life has been saved! And today, you can go in the peace that Jesus has left for you and proclaim the mighty works of God in your life. Amen.

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