

Homily – Pentecost – (Year C) – June 9, 2019

ACTS 2:1-11; PS 104:1, 24, 29-30, 31, 34; 1 COR 12:3B-7, 12-13; JN 20:19-23

With all the familiar **Pentecost imagery** of **driving wind** and **tongues of fire** in our **1st Reading**, it's easy to overlook another, **equally important image**—this one from our **Gospel** passage for today's Mass—namely, the **wounds** that the **Resurrected Jesus** showed his disciples to help them recognize him. Before getting to **that** image, however, let's first touch on some of the more familiar **Pentecost particulars**.

I have to admit that I've always taken these initial verses from **Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 2** to mean that the disciples were speaking a whole bunch of different **human** languages, and *that's* why the **people in Jerusalem from all over the known world** who spoke those **different human languages** could understand them. But a more **careful reading** suggests **otherwise**. Here's what this section of Acts says:

When the time for Pentecost was fulfilled, they were all in one place together. And suddenly there came from the sky a noise like a strong driving wind, and it filled the entire house in which they were. Then there appeared to them tongues as of fire, which parted and came to rest on each one of them. And they were all filled with the holy Spirit and began to speak in different tongues, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. (Acts 2:1-4)

So, the Holy Spirit endowed the disciples with the ability to spontaneously speak **tongues** they didn't previously know. A **hasty reading** of this passage might lead us to conclude that the disciples were speaking the **specific human languages** of the **specific foreigners** from more than a **dozen different parts of the world gathered in Jerusalem**. But a **careful reading** of the *context* suggests **otherwise**, as we can see in these next verses:

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who

are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his own native language?” (Acts 2:5-8)

Note that this passage **doesn't** say that the disciples were speaking the **specific human languages of the hearers**. It says that *“each one [of these devout Jews from all parts of the known world] heard [the disciples] speaking in [their] own language”*.

This **distinction** between **tongues** and **languages**, *here in the English translation*, is **theologically and spiritually significant** for our reflection today. In the first eight verses, then, we read that the disciples were speaking “**tongues**” and the individuals in the crowd heard their own “**languages**”.

What's remarkable, then, is **not** that an individual disciple was speaking “**Sumerian**” or “**Arabic**”. What's remarkable is that the disciples spoke supernatural “**tongues**” that could be understood *simultaneously* by people who spoke different human **languages**.

It was **God the Holy Spirit** who both **enabled the speaking** of supernatural **tongues** and the **translation** of those supernatural **tongues** into as many different **human languages** as there were listeners from different parts of the world, so that the hearers could understand **the Holy Spirit's** message.

In our own day, there are **manifestations** of “**translation**” and “**interpretation**” by the **Holy Spirit** that happen regularly—and more often than you might think. **One** is when a priest **preaches** a homily, and different individuals tell him how his words **spoke to them personally**. They will say things like, “**It was as though you were preaching directly to me.**” This would be rather un-remarkable if the listeners all reported **hearing**—and being **moved by**—the **same thing**.

When encouraged to be more **specific**, however, these different people often perceive different meaning *from the very same words*. In fact, **most every priest** has probably even heard from someone that **what he preached about “x”** really touched them—when he never actually spoke **directly** or **consciously** about “x”.

Is this phenomenon reducible to mere **selective-hearing** on the part of the listeners? A **non-believer**, on the one hand, might **prefer to attribute** such a phenomenon to **selective-hearing**, rather than to affirm the possibility of the **supernatural**.

But from the **priest's perspective**, it can be quite humbling to see—**time and time again**—how the Lord can **translate the priest's own human speech** to touch a **diverse population of people profoundly**...and in **profoundly different ways**...with the *same words*.

The **Holy Spirit's active *interpretation*** on our behalf is found in something **St. Paul** wrote to the **Romans**:

...the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words. And he who searches the hearts of men knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. (Rom 8:26-27)

In this case, the Spirit takes our **prayers** and **interprets** and **intercedes** for us in a way that **we may not even be aware of**. That's why the **prayer of quiet**—*wordless, peaceful, profound heart-to-heart communication with God*—is considered one of the **higher forms of prayer**—because this kind of prayer is actually **God the Holy Spirit** praying **in us**...and **for us**.

The **prayer of quiet** is *more* than just **being with God and deciding not to say anything**. This kind of prayer—where **God relieves us of the need** for words—is actually a gift that **God** gives...not something **we** initiate. We know we have received this gift when it's *not only difficult*...but even *dissatisfying*...to try to **use words** in prayer.

One Scripture commentator put it this way:

At Pentecost, the Spirit communicates the words of the Apostles in the languages of the people. When we pray, the Spirit interprets our wordless longings into the language of God. <http://www.thesacredpage.com/2019/06/gathering-human-family-pentecost-vigil.html>

Now, returning to the **1st Reading**...

How the listeners heard the disciple’s words was certainly remarkable. But equally significant was *what* they heard, because it’s precisely the **content** of what they heard that will bring us back to consideration of **Jesus’ wounds**. Here’s what the people said:

...we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God. (Acts 2:11)

This statement now becomes the “**bridge**” to the Gospel passage today—specifically a bridge to the *implications of Jesus keeping his wounds* even after his Resurrection. Recall these verses from **today’s Gospel**:

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, for fear of the Jews, Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, “Peace be with you.” When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. (Jn 20:19-20)

The first thing Jesus said was, “**Peace be with you**”, after appearing out of nowhere in the locked room, because he no doubt had to calm the disciples after **startling** them with such an **extraordinary entrance**. He then showed them his **wounds**...and the Gospel then tells us that *“[t]he disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord”* (cf. Jn 20:20).

The Gospel doesn’t say that they rejoiced when they **heard** the Lord. Rather, they **rejoiced** when they **saw** the Lord and, specifically, his **wounds**.

Why is this important?

Because, as with Jesus, **our** wounds—whether *physical, emotional, psychological* or *spiritual*—**shape** us and **form** us—for **better** or for **worse**—depending upon *what we do* with those wounds.

Put another way, *our wounds play an important part in making us who we are.*

When the disciples saw Jesus’ wounds, they would have recalled the love that moved him to accept these wounds from the **nails** that pierced his **hands** and **feet**

and from the **spear** that pierced his **heart**. And now, seeing Jesus alive—**eternally alive** because **“death no longer has power over him”** (cf. Rom 6:9)—they rejoiced because they could see that **not even the mortal wounds** inflicted on Jesus **could stop God’s plan of love and salvation** from achieving its purpose through him.

Now, because we have been **“baptized into Christ”** (cf. Gal 3:27)—**to the extent that we let Jesus heal our wounds**, rather than **allowing our wounds to defeat us**—we too can step victoriously into the **eternal life** that was **lost to us** by our **First Parents**—Adam and Eve—but **won back** for us by **Jesus Christ**.

There’s an important lesson for us here, particularly as it pertains to the wounds we’ve suffered. **God the Father wants to bring about for us, what he brought about for Jesus**—specifically, that a **greater good** come from our wounds, **willingly submitted to God for healing**—than if we had **never** been wounded in the first place.

Let’s consider this **another** way by reflecting on something we can all relate to:

SIN.

The **very act of committing** a deliberate, grave sin demonstrates how easily we **take God’s love for granted**—how easily we **turn our back** on his **limitless love** and **choose** something **offensive to him**...and **damaging to ourselves**. He loves us...yet we reject his love by our **decision** to sin.

Nevertheless...when we repent and return to him with **sincere sorrow**, he welcomes us back **as if we had never damaged ourselves and our relationship with him in the first place**. To discover that **“nothing—[not even our worst sins]—can separate us from the love of God”** (cf. Rom 8:39)—**provided we repent and return to him**—is to discover that God doesn’t love us **only** when we’re **perfect**. God loves us **when** we are broken and lost. Not **in spite of** our brokenness—but precisely **because of** it!

For someone who has **not** experienced this **outrageous mercy**, it’s easy to **take God’s love for granted**.

For someone who *has* been welcomed back from the **self-imposed *Hell of alienation from God's love*** because of **their** own—because of *our* own—**sin**, there **grows** in the soul a **desire *never to offend that kind of love again***. Our **appreciation** for his love is **greater**, the **more** we have been **forgiven** for our offenses—especially the **grave** offenses—against his love.

We sin because we're born wounded...and then suffer additional wounds in life because of our own sins...and the sins of others. But the Lord Jesus not only **forgives** our sins. If we will let him, he will **heal the underlying wounds**, and **bring about something better** for us than if we had **never been wounded in the first place**.

If our wounds play an important part in making us who we *are*...then our wounds—*healed by Christ*—play an important part in making us who we are *meant to be*.

That is a perfect example of the kinds of ***“mighty acts of God”***. (cf Acts 2:11) spoken of by the people who heard the Holy Spirit speak through the disciples in our **1st Reading**.

God's **mightiest** act is saving us **undeserving** sinners because of his **outrageous** mercy.

Our **wisest** act is going to Jesus to **allow him to bring something even greater from our brokenness** than would have been possible had we never been wounded in the first place.

If we don't know how to ask the Lord for healing, we need simply **show our wounds to the Lord** in prayer...

...and let the Holy Spirit do the talking *for us!*