

Understanding Each Other

Pentecost (Year A)

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The few times I've travelled outside of the country, I have always felt at a loss due to the language barrier. Fast talking, an inability to read the signs, and feeling like a tourist shut me off to appreciating the cultural experience offered to me. It was usually only after I returned home that I begin to reflect on the blessings of the trip. In the moment, however, I mostly felt frustration.

All this was brought back to me as I became part of this parish. Hearing other languages, experiencing different cultures, and worshipping with those of other races have led me to search for some kind of theological and spiritual grounding for all of this. What much of it comes back to is this: Pentecost. That is the feast we celebrate today.

In our First Reading, the Acts of the Apostles says that "all were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in different languages." The passage concludes by saying that they all heard them speaking in their own tongues of the mighty acts of God. There was a mutual understanding among all those gathered together in one place, even though they were from different regions: "Parthians, Medes, Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs."

Too often, we do not hear each other's voices. This problem isn't unique to us. It has been the problem facing humanity from the very beginning. Whenever we hear someone that sounds strange to us, we give in to frustration. This isn't just in regards to language. It is symbolic of

something much deeper- different ideas, perspectives, ways of doing things, and hopes for the future. Even worse than frustration, some of us go to the next step of rejection. Frustration and rejection are not healthy reactions to diversity.

The invitation of Pentecost, the celebration of the coming of the Holy Spirit 50 days after Easter, is to not let our first reaction to voices we don't understand be frustration and certainly not rejection. Pentecost is to welcome other voices and take the time to understand them. This is very hard to do and requires much patience with others and ourselves. Yet, that is exactly what God offers us at this parish.

Pentecost invites us to listen to each other and try to understand each other.

Are we taking the time to understand each other?

In the 1960s, Pope St. John XXIII prayed, 'renew your Church in this our day, O Lord, as if by a new Pentecost.' We make that our prayer today for St. Matthias Church and School because as it turns out, we do speak a common language: the language which tells of the mighty works of God.