

## "God Speaks Your Language"

### The Day of Pentecost

#### Acts 2:8

"How is it that each of us hears them in his own native language?"

Dear Friends in Christ:

If you think of the household of faith as a building, it is proper to think of God the Father as the chief Architect. He painstakingly designed and fashioned the Master Plan of our salvation and over the course of centuries prepared all things for the work of construction. He drew up the blueprints and fashioned every aspect. God the Son was the builder who took up his Father's plans and followed every detail flawlessly. He did not contract the job out, but invested Himself by becoming a human being, by taking on the form of a servant, by living the obedient life, by suffering and dying on the cross and by being raised to life again on the third day. The day of Ascension marked the completion of the work of our Savior on earth. Now all was ready. The redemption of the world and our reconciliation with the Father had been accomplished. The structure of the household of faith had been built.

Now, on the day of Pentecost, God the Holy Ghost, the third person of the Holy Trinity, begins to move people in -- into the household of faith. That's His chief work -- creating faith in the hearts of people, enabling them to believe, assisting them in living the Christ-centered life, and empowering them to proclaim God's Word of life to others. This is certainly not the first time we hear of this third person of the Holy Trinity in the Bible. He has always been alive and active -- moving men and women to faith -- people like Abraham and Isaac and Jacob and Moses and all the prophets. The Holy Spirit's work surely did not begin on the day of Pentecost. But, on that day there was an unprecedented outpouring of the Spirit's power upon the disciples and upon the people of Jerusalem.

It is good for us to recall what happened that day. The disciples of Jesus had been meeting together. They had been worshipping and praying together. They had been waiting, as Jesus had told them to wait "until the power from on high comes upon you." It was now the 10th day after His ascension -- the 50th day after his resurrection. In fact, this was the beginning of the Jewish festival of Pentecost -- celebrated 50 days after the Passover. That feast was usually held in the month of June and good weather conditions usually permitted more visitors in Jerusalem than at any other time during the year.

And they came from all the territories and provinces of the Roman Empire. God could not have chosen a better time or occasion for the coming of the Holy Spirit. If something extraordinary would happen in Jerusalem, all these strangers would be able to take the news back to their one homes and villages with them.

And something remarkable did happen! Suddenly a mighty rushing sound filled the room where the disciples were. Not only did it fill that room, but it also filled the streets and the whole city. And there appeared little tongues, like flames of fire that danced above the heads of the disciples. But these were just the preparatory signs, like an orchestra warming up before a performance. The Holy Spirit was just getting the people ready -- getting their attention.

Then suddenly one of the greatest miracles of all time took place. These uneducated Galilean fishermen began speaking in languages that they never before learned or even heard. And what's even more miraculous, they were understood by those whose native language they spoke. "How is it", the people wanted to know, "that we hear, each of us in his own native language? ... We hear them telling in our own tongues the mighty works of God!"

When God wants to communicate with mankind about the Good News, the Gospel of His Son, He is willing to overcome every communication barrier, including differences of language. There hadn't been such a commotion since centuries earlier, at the tower of Babel, when God had divided and confounded the language so that the people could not understand each other. The division of language has been a powerful symbol of the divisions and separation of people. But Pentecost reverses that. Now God has something to communicate with people of every language -- a message of Good News that transcends all our barriers and differences of language and race -- a plan of salvation that can unite all people in Christ.

You see how God the Holy Spirit works? First he gets their attention. Then He speaks their language. Luther says it like this: "I believe that I cannot, by my own understanding or effort, believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord or come to Him". I'm certainly not looking for God. By nature I'm looking the other way. By nature I'm running away from him like crazy. He has to come looking for me, to get my attention.

"But the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel", Luther continues. There it is! First, he gets my attention and then He speaks my language -- the wonderful language of the Gospel. In the Gospel God speaks a language that I can understand -- the language of forgiveness of my sins, of love for the sinner, the only language that can tear down every barrier in life that has separated me from my God. The Gospel is the one language that can bring me into the household of faith. This is the

language of God's love that reaches my inmost soul. The saving Gospel message that Jesus Christ, the Son of God from eternity, lived and died for me. That's the language the Spirit of God wants me to understand -- the language He wants me to believe -- the language of faith upon which He invites me to establish my whole life.

This is the language that Peter spoke in his sermon that day. The words Peter spoke went<sup>33</sup> to the very heart of the matter and to the very heart of the people. "God has made this Jesus, whom you crucified, both Lord and Christ", Peter told them. "You killed him, but God raised him from the dead." "You thought you were doing God a favour by getting rid of him, but this was all by God's own purpose and foreknowledge. God has done you the greatest favour of all time by raising Jesus to life and exalting him to his own right hand in heaven where he reigns above all authorities and powers."

Now, look at what happens when the Holy Ghost gets their attention and speaks their language. In Acts 2, verse 37 we read that "when they heard this they were cut to the heart, and said to Peter and the rest of the Apostles, 'Brethren, what shall we do?'" Now they're beginning to speak God's language! -- the language of repentance, of genuine sorrow over sin and disobedience. "What shall I do?" This is the question I, too, must ask when the Holy Spirit speaks God's clear language of Law and Gospel to me. What shall I do? What changes must I make? How will my life become different when I live in the household of faith?

Peter answers their questions. He tells them, "Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins; and you shall receive the gift of the Holy Spirit. For the promise is to you and to your children and to all that are far off (that's you and me), everyone whom the Lord our God calls to him." And the results that day were astounding, for "those who received his word were baptized, and there were added that day about three thousand souls."

Three thousand people in one day were moved into the household of faith! What a magnificent miracle! And it didn't stop there. Those mighty rushing winds of Pentecost continued to blow -- through Jerusalem and Judea and Sa<sup>33</sup>maria and to the uttermost parts of the world. The Holy Spirit has never stopped working. He has never stopped speaking our language, calling us to repentance and faith in the Gospel. He doesn't normally work in the same way as he did when the church was young and being established. His coming today may not be accompanied by visible signs and miraculous powers as we see happening with the Apostles. But we should never think for a moment that God the Holy Spirit has ceased working. He works silently. Through water and the word the seed of faith is planted. It grows and is nurtured by faithful and regular feeding in Sunday Schools and in Christian Day schools and in private family devotions and in public worship. By the time of

confirmation the Spirit enables our youth to publicly affirm their faith and claim God's promises for themselves. Then the 44Sacrament of the Altar becomes the Spirit's great tool to strengthen and nourish our faith.

And throughout our life the Holy Spirit continues to speak our language through God's Word and Sacraments -- keeping us in the household of faith and we begin to take on the family characteristics of love and kindness and patience and gentleness and self-control and a forgiving spirit. So even though we may not be dramatically and powerfully aware of the Holy Spirit, He nevertheless is certainly working -- calling and inviting people to believe the Gospel, enlightening us with His gifts and sanctifying us day by day to be more Christ-like in our attitudes and actions.

We must not resist the working of the Holy Spirit by deliberate acts of sin and disobedience. We must not stifle Him when he urges us to live the sanctified life<sup>44</sup> and when He prompts us to share our faith with others. For that's the way the Word of the Lord spreads. That's the way the Spirit works today -- from faith to faith -- from your faith in Christ to someone else's faith. That's what happened on the day of Pentecost. The disciples were empowered by the Spirit to tell others what they knew to be true. That's all they did. The Holy Spirit did the rest in the hearts of all who heard the message. That's all we need do, too. Speak God's language of repentance and forgiveness. That's the language people need to hear even today -- the Good News that in Christ God forgives their sin and loves them with an everlasting love. Every Christian must speak that language. The Holy Spirit will do the rest. In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.