

Pentecost Sunday 2014

June 7-8, 2014 Vigil Readings: Genesis 11:1-9; Romans 8:22-27; John 7:37-39

Readings: Acts 2:1-11; 1 Cor. 12:3-7, 12-13; John 20:19-23

I have never been very good at languages, and as a typical American, rely on English exclusively for all intents and purposes. It is frustrating when people come to the Cathedral from other countries, as for example a Ukrainian woman I met last week standing in front of the Shrine of Sts. Cyril and Methodius. I was not able to converse with her as I would have liked to do— but then again, a smile and a handshake is pretty universal. Even when I managed to learn passable Italian eight or nine years ago, too often the person to whom I was speaking answered back in English. “At least give me the satisfaction of trying to humor me.” My greatest linguistic accomplishment was when a majority stopped doing that!

Language both confounds me and fascinates me. Some languages seem pleasing to my ear, while others seem harsh—perhaps I simply have not heard them enough. Still others, though in English, manage to confound me, such as texting language— TTYL, TMI and LOL.<sup>1</sup> There are so many ways to communicate, and language can indeed be such a barrier, and so too one’s age.

It is extremely challenging to communicate in our world today, especially considering that we have been so taken over by technology that our personal interactions have become much more limited. When I hear stories of family gatherings on Sundays, where everyone went over to Grandma’s house for a big meal, and then later all went on a long walk, it is a scene out of a black and white movie on AMC, Channel 31.

In too many ways, we have retreated into our own worlds, perhaps comfortable to us, but a world in which real communication has

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<sup>1</sup> Talk to You Later, Too Much Information, Laugh out Loud.

been replaced with sound bites with no more than 140 characters. Meanwhile, we pay more per month so that we can upgrade to Digital preferred giving us over 220 channels of entertainment—including the Golf Channel, Food network, Jewelry Television, C-Span 3, I do not know how many MTV channels, and the list goes on. Where will it end, and how will we communicate in the future?

For the faith to survive and flourish today, there is no question whatsoever that we need to communicate in the real world and in a manner that is accessible to people today. The responsible use of media and especially social media is critical and the Church ought to embrace this reality. But we still have to make the fundamental decision to engage the world in order to transform it.

My concern is with the many ways in which this use of media has as its corrolary, the dimuniiton of personal interaction between and among people of all generations. We can so easily be turned in upon ourselves and comfortably retreat into these media driven worlds. And as a rsult, we suffer.

Perhaps an even greater fear is that we may choose to disengage, to retreat to a comfortable corner. In truth, this has become more and more of a temptation. But it is not the call of the Gospel— this is not the lesson of Pentecost. Rather, the message of the Gospel is able to bring together people of all naitons and languages. The Spirit heals divisions and scatters all that is confused, by bringing into clarity the voice of God.

This is why our faith needs enthusiasm, why grace builds upon our natures as social beings. Pentecost is a solemnity that celebrates building up the Church as a community of believers working together under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, bringing that saving message to the ends of the earth.

Our faith cannot remain a private affair; this is precisely what secularists would have us do. Keep it to yourself. This approach will surely fail, for it is so antithetical to the Christian faith from its very roots and from the message of Pentecost. All throughout Easter we have listened to how the early church struggled to figure everything out, especially the mission to the nations. But eventually they got it, didn't they? They got it.

Today's solemnity absolutely refuses to accept defeat; this is a feast of power and glory being made manifest in our midst. Can we not see it here in our midst at this parish? If not, why not? From where will it come if we are not ready, willing and able?

Our faith must always seek to invite others, not keep them at an arms length to our exclusive club. At the same time, our faith must not be compromised for the sake of popularity. Therein lies the balance, to be sure. But therein also lies the challenge and one that the Holy Spirit will empower us to accept.