
Pentecost and Our Journey

**An article from the *Cathedral Times*
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All of the believers were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages. At this sound, the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, "How is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? In our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power.

--Acts 2:4, 6-8, 11

In one of our most astonishing liturgies, the Cathedral of St. Philip observes the Day of Pentecost by hearing the gospel proclaimed "simultaneously" in as many languages as we can muster. Just after when we hear the familiar words, "The Holy Gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ, according to John," assigned parishioners and friends all over the nave will begin speaking the day's gospel lesson; and each of them will be speaking a language other than English.

As you can imagine, the effect has been startling in the past. "Who asked that person to speak in our usually very formal liturgy? And what is she saying, anyway? Is it gibberish? Why, it sounds like French! And that's Spanish over there!" When all are finished, the regular gospeller provides the translation alone, in English.

That Day of Pentecost symbolizes for us the proclamation of the gospel to other lands and cultures. In a reversal of the Tower of Babel story "when people were confused by the speaking of other languages" the Pentecost story actually unites various cultures and different languages with one interpretation. On that original Day of Pentecost, even though various languages were being spoken, the various people said, "In our own languages we hear them speaking about God's deeds of power."

That moment has continued to be the challenge of proclaiming the Christian gospel. Each of us, certainly, knows what the gospel means to us personally. We have our own, individual, ways of realizing God's grace and salvation in Jesus Christ. But as soon as we begin to tell that story to another person's condition, as soon as we try to apply those principles of grace and salvation in another context, our language changes a bit.

It is when we go out into the world that we rely upon the Holy Spirit to give us a new way of saying things "so that people other than us can understand. The Christian journey, for each of us, is a journey of translating the good news we have received into a language that others can understand. Those others might be far away, but they might also be members of our own households!

I thought of Pentecost the other day, during my own journey. As most of you know, I am one of five candidates standing for election as Bishop of Washington. Last week, the five of us, with our spouses, traveled to that diocese for a full week of "walkabouts." At least three times a day, we met with various regional groups, and constituencies, and even interest groups. In those settings, after we had each delivered a short, three-minute presentation, we were asked all sorts of questions "about ourselves, about God, about the needs of the Diocese of Washington, about most anything!

I heard every question as another context for the gospel and God's grace. Some of the questions were quite earnest. Some

were dear. Some were strident and challenging. Each question, from the easiest to the hardest, represented to me another language or culture, another person different from me, who wanted to hear my translation of the gospel for them. I could only rely on the Holy Spirit!

I do not know how God will lead the good people of the Diocese of Washington in their election of a new bishop on June 18. I may be elected, and I may not be elected. I do know that, however the election goes, God will be doing a new thing in my life. And God will be giving me a new language for it. If I am not elected, I will be doing a new thing here at the Cathedral of St. Philip; we will be engaging another stage of our Christian journey here. If I am elected, God will be leading me to do a new thing in the Diocese of Washington. Either way, God wins. God wins when we Christians accept that gift of the Holy Spirit and dare to speak the gospel in a new way!

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