

Whitsunday

Genesis 11:1-9; Acts 2:1-21; St. John 14:23-31

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

The world was a very evil place. God looked upon what He had created, and even in the foreknowledge of the fall of man into sin, grew weary with their wickedness. Moses wrote for us,

Then the LORD saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every intent of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the LORD was sorry that He had made man on the earth, and He was grieved in His heart. So the LORD said, "I will destroy man whom I have created from the face of the earth, both man and beast, creeping thing and birds of the air, for I am sorry that I have made them." But Noah found grace in the eyes of the LORD. (Genesis 6:5-8)

God instructs Noah to build an ark. He is to fill it with every kind of animal, and take his wife, his sons, and his sons' wives in with them. 40 days and 40 nights the rains fell, and the springs of the deep burst open, gushing forth their water so that the whole earth was flooded. A year, a month, and 20 days later, Noah and his family disembarked.

So, the whole earth was cleansed in the flood of its wickedness. Eight souls in all were saved in the ark. The church's first remnant came out of the Ark and subdued the earth. They were fruitful and multiplied, as God had commanded them (Genesis 9:1), just as God had commanded their ancestors. (Genesis 1:28)

In the years following the flood, the number of men increased. They moved east to a plain in the land of Shinar. There, they conspired against God to build a great city with a tower whose top is in the heavens. They sought to make a name for themselves, most translations tell us. It's the sin of Adam and Eve, who ate the fruit of the forbidden tree because they wanted to be like God. Here, the descendants of Noah—of Shem, Ham, and Japheth—believed they could be like God by sticking together and building something great. In the beginning, God had created the heavens and the earth (Genesis 1:1); now, man was going to do Him one better by building a great city and tower. "Let us make bricks in our own image, in our likeness, with our hands, and by doing so, we'll make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered abroad over the face of the whole earth."

But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built. And the LORD said, "Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to do; now nothing that they propose to do will be withheld from them. Come, let Us go down and there confuse their language, that they may not understand one another's speech." So the LORD scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they ceased building the city. Therefore its name is called Babel, because there the LORD confused the language of all the earth; and from there the LORD scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.

The people certainly had a name for themselves—they are not forgotten—but it was God who gave them that name; He it was who caused them to have that name: Babel. To this day, in many languages, that name is used to describe the gibberish one speaks or the use of an incomprehensible foreign language. We call it babble in English, brabbeln in German, and it is the ancient Greek root *barbar*, from which our word barbarian comes.

The people had one language. Consequently, they had one, clear purpose, and nothing would have been impossible for them. You see the Old Adam at work here as their one, clear purpose was evil. The world had become a very evil place again, and this only a few generations removed from the cleansing that was brought on by the flood.

YHWH confused their language, and they did not understand each other's speech. They could not

speak to each other. They could not work together. The city was not completed. The tower was never finished—perhaps never even started. The people were divided and scattered—Semites, Hamites, and Japhethites—by their clans, their languages, and their nations. (cf. Genesis 10:5, 20, 31)

Now, we fast forward a few millennia. The nations are divided and scattered all over the world. None speaks the language of another or many others. Some languages are similar, by way of the settling of the descendants of Noah's sons near each other and by the further development of clans, languages, and nations. To a nation from the Semites, YHWH deigns to dwell in the flesh. This is His chosen people, His chosen nation, His chosen language. An angel appears to a young Semite maiden and tells her that she will bear the Savior of the world. What God had separated on a plain of Shinar He will now reunite in the person of His Son. Mary would conceive a Son and give Him the name Jesus, for He will save His people from their sins.

So, the Word became flesh and dwelt among us. (John 1:14) Jesus was born to be the propitiation for your sins, and not for yours only, but for the sins of the whole world. (cf. 1 John 2:2) Jesus was nailed to a cross, whereupon He was lifted up, and by being lifted up, He drew all men to Himself. (cf. John 12:32) The Word became flesh and was given the name Jesus because God loved this sinful, fallen, evil world and would not see the sinner die and forever be separated from Him. (cf. Ezekiel 33:11; John 3:16) Jesus is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. (cf. John 1:29)

The Son has come and bore the sins of the world. On the cross, Jesus shed His blood for the remission of sins, gave His life under the full wrath of the Father against the sins of the world, and exchanged it for your life. Jesus gave Himself over to death in order that He may take you out of death and bring you into life. Jesus died and was buried; on the third day He rose again. 40 days later, He ascended into heaven, but as we heard Him promise time after time these past several weeks, and even today, He did not leave His Church alone or abandoned.

These things I have spoken to you while being present with you. **But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all things that I said to you.** Peace I leave with you, My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid. You have heard Me say to you, "I am going away and coming back to you." If you loved Me, you would rejoice because I said, "I am going to the Father," for My Father is greater than I. And now I have told you before it comes, that when it does come to pass, you may believe. (emphasis mine)

Here we are now, 50 days after the Resurrection. The disciples are in the room with the little Church, about 120 members-strong, of one accord under the grace and mercy of God. The Spirit of God descended upon the disciples, dividing over them as tongues of fire. These twelve began to speak, preaching the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins for Jesus' sake. And there were in Jerusalem at the time, devout Jews from many nations, and they each heard these twelve speaking in their own languages.

Look, are not all these who speak Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each in our own language in which we were born? Parthians and Medes and Elamites, those dwelling in Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya adjoining Cyrene, visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—we hear them speaking in our own tongues the wonderful works of God.

Now, there were certainly more than 12 nations under the heavens and more than 12 languages spoken in Jerusalem that day. If you counted, there were at least 16, though highly likely many more since many of the places mentioned were regions and not nations and languages. On a plain in Shinar, God divided the languages; on a Pentecost day in Jerusalem, God proclaimed the forgiveness of sins in Jesus' name in many languages through the 12 disciples.

The Eastern Orthodox have a hymn, a line of which states, "When the Most High came down and confused the tongues He divided the nations; but, when He distributed the tongues of fire, He called all to

unity! Therefore, with one voice, we glorify the All-Holy Spirit!" What was once separated on account of sin was now joined together by the blood of Jesus, proclaimed as a propitiation for sins on that first Pentecost day to be heard in the languages of the many nations and people in Jerusalem that day.

That day, "those who gladly received [their] word were baptized; and...about three thousand souls were added to them. And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, in the breaking of bread, and in prayers." (Acts 2:41-42) The people from many nations speaking many languages were united by God in the one church, by one Baptism, under one doctrine and fellowship, celebrated by the breaking of bread...one bread. (cf. 1 Corinthians 10:17) Jesus is drawing all men to Himself on the cross, where He died for the forgiveness of the sins of all men.

These days, confused and divided language is hardly the barrier it once was. The world has overcome that with interpreters and technology. A computer in the pocket is enough to unite two formerly divided people such that they can have one, common purpose. Look around, and you see nations and people united with each other so that the hubristic and foolish statement is made, "There is no God." By our works and our craftsmanship, we are making a name for ourselves, aren't we? "Let us make a computer in our own image, in our likeness, let us form this technology, by the works of our hands, let us fashion a vessel to reach the stars. We were scattered once; it shall not happen again because we've become greater than the people at Babel."

You see, the world is still a very evil place. And you, dear hearers, are a part of it. Oh, by the grace of God, you are in the world and not of it, but you would hardly know it by what you do, by what you are, even by who you make yourself out to be. You are making a name for yourself, and rarely is it ever that of Jesus Christ. You draw attention to yourself by your works: "See, what a good man am I!" "See how well I mother." "Follow my example; go to church and be a good person." You puff yourself up.

Dear hearers, these statements and ones like them set yourself up to be like God. And let me be perfectly clear, you may not say these things, but you certainly do not keep all points of God's Law, and if you fall in one point, you fall in them all, and if you fall in them all, you have fallen in the first. That means that you are making yourself out to be a god—for yourself and others. You are making a name for yourself by your habits, your works, your perceived goodness which is no better than filthy rags. (cf. Isaiah 64:6) Your sin is the sin of your first parents. Your sin is the sin of the people on the plain of Shinar. You, by your sins, are in darkness.

But, as a people lost in darkness, you have been brought into the Light. For the sake of Jesus Christ, you are brought out of sin and into God's mercy, grace, and forgiveness. By way of water and the Word, just like those eight souls on the Ark, you are shielded by the wrath of God which Jesus Christ bore in your stead, just like those 3000 in the second chapter of Acts. You here, primarily descendants of Japheth—Germans and English, Danes and Norwegians and Swedes, Poles and descendants of Spanish conquest—divided by way of ancestral language and heritage are united by way of your Baptism into Jesus' death and resurrection. Here you gather as one—one church, by one Baptism, under one doctrine and fellowship, celebrated by the breaking of bread.

By the work of God alone, you are pulled out of this divided and evil world into the unity of the Godhead—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. You are washed clean in the water of Holy Baptism. You are joined to Christ who gave His life for you that you would have life with Him. And though you may slip and fall back into the ways of this evil world and rely on your own reason and works, you are still marked by the sign of the cross of Jesus Christ upon forehead and heart—you are marked as one redeemed, bought back, brought out of darkness into Light by the blood of the Lamb. In Holy Baptism, you have been given the Holy Spirit who is always at work as your Helper, sanctifying you by keeping you with Christ in the Holy Christian Church. You see, it is by the work of God, and by His work **alone**, you are brought to repentance and the forgiveness of all of your sins.

In the name of the Father and of the + Son and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.