

IN NOMINE JESU

GOD'S MERCY IN DIVIDING THE LANGUAGES

Grace be unto you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ

Hear again the Word of God for this Feast of the Pentecost, fifty days after the Church celebrated the Resurrection of our Lord, and ten days after the Ascension of our Lord, as Christ, risen and ascended, through the work of the Holy Spirit promises through the words recorded by Moses:

Then YHWH caused to say, "Behold, one people and one language for all they have. And this is the beginning of all they will do, and now (it is) not possible for them all things which they purpose to be doing."¹

Our theme for today is that God shows His mercy in the division of human languages. We hear in the words of today's texts a foretaste of God's mercy poured out in uniting His people in the One language of the Faith. That language is: that Christ Jesus was crucified for the sins of the whole world; was raised for our justification; ascended to the right Hand of the Father to place our flesh in its appointed place; and, sent the Holy Spirit to declare these mysteries to we who will believe.

This day, in this place, at two Divine Services, the Church will hear the public confessions of those whom God has united with us in the one confession of the Faith. Their presence among us, in the Lord's services, people who can trace their family lineages to other continents, languages, and peoples, is a concrete display that God, in His out-pouring of the Holy Spirit has again united people of the Faith in one

¹ Genesis 11:6.

common language: the language of salvation, heard most clearly in the confession of Christ-crucified for the forgiveness of all our sins. In a way, today, we rejoice in the people of God's return to that which we had before and after the Flood, as our Old Testament narrative begins:

And all the earth had one language and few words.²

In time, those were the words of Peleg, descendant of the first father of the faithful during and after the Flood. Peleg was born about 100 years after the Flood in which only eight, out of all the population of the world, were found faithful to God through His Word. Peleg was in the sixth generation after the Flood. Conservative estimates teach that there were approximately 25,000 people on earth when the events of today's text from Genesis took place.

Six generations were all it took for mankind to try to, once again, make a Name for themselves and reject the Name of their God who had saved their ancestors who still lived among them.³ Father Noah was still alive at the building of the city and the tower! Only 150 or so years had passed: according to our dating. (He lived 350 years after the Flood).⁴

(Any of us who have children, grandchildren, or great-grandchildren who have departed from the right confession of the Faith, or have thrown away the gift given to them in the Water and the Word, can empathize a bit with Noah. After all, He

² *Genesis* 11:1.

³ *cf. Luke* 3:34.

⁴ *Genesis* 9:28.

had experienced God's grace, and taught it to his sons and daughters-in-law, and they, for the most part to their children. It is not difficult to put yourself in Noah's place. How sad).

And men's migration had come from the East and they found (a) plain in land of Shinar, and they settled there.⁵

Between the Tigris and the Euphrates. Modern day southern Iraq.

Then they said, (a) man to their friend, "Come, let us make bricks for brick, and burn them thoroughly," and for the brick for stone and asphalt was between them for mortar.⁶

These were new materials for building. This shows human wisdom, a gift of God even after the Fall of Adam and the Flood through which God saved Noah.

There are no records of people using these materials prior to the Flood.

And they said, "Come, let us build for us (a) city and (a) tower with its head in (the) heavens, and let us make for us (a) Name, lest we be scattered abroad upon (the) face of all the earth."⁷

Here is their sin: they who should have reveled in the Name of God Who saved them from the Flood – for they all came from the loins of Noah – chose to make a Name for themselves. Compare this to growing up in the American culture which teaches us to make our “mark in the world.”

City and tower – not just a tower, and certainly not one over which the floodwaters could flow – re. promise to Noah in the Rainbow – but rather a place

⁵ Genesis 11:2.

⁶ Genesis 11:3.

⁷ Genesis 11:4.

where they, and future generations, could revel in their glory. No other nations yet to come and see. Contrary to God's desire – to be fruitful and fill the earth.

And YHWH came down to see the city and the tower which the sons of men had built.⁸

Mankind's great work in making a Name for itself is so small that God had to come down to see it, much like you would have to do to view the "great towers" of the ants in this part of the State. For all the diligence of ants in building their hills, great though they may be from their perspective, all come to an end with the step of a child's foot.

Yet, God does not trod them down. In His grace, He does not execute His justice. Rather, He accomplishes His will among people, and uses the multiplication of languages to disburse them upon the face of the earth.

In time, God comes to another hill with structures made by man. There He mounts the cross, bearing their, your, my sins, and there on the relatively small hill outside the walls of ancient Jerusalem, He dies in our stead, paying the price for our sins, for your sins – for really wanting to make a Name for yourself in this world, you who have been already named with the Name of God....

Then YHWH caused to say, "Behold, one people and one language for all they have. And this is the beginning of all they will do, and now (it is) not possible for them all things which they purpose to be doing."⁹

⁸ Genesis 11:5.

⁹ Genesis 11:6.

God moves to restrain evil in fallen humans. Examples of God's restraining death and destruction in recent hurricanes, in the shootings at New Town and other places, in the pressure cooker bombers, etc. When we ask, "Where is God in all this, find Him restraining the evil men let loose."

*"Come, let us go down and confuse there their language so they may not understand (a) man (the) speech of another's."*¹⁰

Rites of Confirmation/Reception of New Members show, through public confession, the restoration of language, to the language of the Faith.

God, Trinitarian "Us," not the royal "we." He does not, as the Jews take from this text, consult with angels – for who are His creatures to advise Him. He takes counsel from Himself, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. In this decision, God determines to separate those who worship mankind and its wisdom, from those who worship God and His wisdom.

God comes down to man in his sinfulness. Here He shows His mercy to Mankind in merely confusing their languages. In time, God comes down to mankind in our flesh. He becomes one with us to bear our sins, into judgment, into death...

*Then YHWH scattered them abroad from there upon (the) face of all the earth, and they left off building the city.*¹¹

Again, as stated earlier, God accomplishes His will, to have those whom He has saved to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth.

¹⁰ Genesis 11:7.

¹¹ Genesis 11:8.

Therefore, (the) Name of the city is called Babel, for there YHWH confused (the) language of all the earth, and from there YHWH caused to scatter (them) upon (the) face of all the earth.¹²

Babel and Balal, an apparent word play in Hebrew. Words are exchanged, and the confession of the Faith begins to grow across the world, in many languages. This is declared fulfilled on the Day of Pentecost, in which Day we are still living.

The peace which passes all understanding guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus

Pentecost (*LSB* One-year series)

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

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¹² *Genesis* 11:9.