

Do you remember ever seeing the commercials on TV or the ads on the internet: “Rosetta Stone is the world's #1 language-learning software.” “Rosetta Stone: Language Learning made easy.” If the advertisements are to be believed, you can follow the Rosetta Stone way and in a few short weeks you can be speaking another language; Spanish, French, German, Chinese, even Minnesotan- Ya, sure you betcha! Minnesotan *is* a language don'tyaknow? In fact, there was a book out a few years ago titled How to Talk Minnesotan. I remember my parents owning a copy of that back when I was a kid. Since then, the author, Howard Mohr, even came out with a new edition called How to Talk Minnesotan: Revised for the 21st Century! For Pete's Sake, isn't that fer cute? You betcha!

Okay, I admit, “Minnesotan” is *not* a language you can learn through Rosetta Stone. But, all the same, we Minnesotans do have some of our own vocabulary words like: Uff-da! Skol! Duck, Duck, Gray Duck! Oh, Fer-Cute! And “Ope!” “Ope!” is a word that you commonly hear said in tight places like grocery store aisles or potluck dinners. Used in a sentence it goes like this: “Ope! let me squeeze right passed ya.”

But seriously, getting back on track, have you ever wondered why there's so many different languages in the world? And why is it so hard for most of us to learn a new language? Since there are over **5,000** languages in the world it would be absolutely impossible to become fluent in every single one of them, even with the help of Rosetta Stone learning software on your computer or phone.

Someone once said that this diversity of speech is a monument to human cleverness. But the truth is: The fact that there *are* so many different languages is a testament to human *sinfulness*, not cleverness. We learn that from today's Old Testament lesson with the Tower of Babel. “Babel” literally means “confusion,” contrast that confusion with the wonderful clarity of understanding that the Holy Spirit brought at Pentecost. As we'll see, the ability to speak a foreign language on one hand was God's *judgment*, as sin *divided* the people who had been *united* at Babel. On the *other* hand, we'll see from our second reading

today that at Pentecost there's a tremendous testament of God's *grace*, as the Spirit *united* the people who had been divided. From this we'll also see how God brings us together with other people today and gives us clarity in the midst the confusing world we live in. (And I pray this will especially be helpful to our graduates, who are getting ready to head out in boldness, not only to make a living, but to make a difference, in this often-times confusing world.)

Let's start out at Babel. Babel was a city on the plain of Shinar, which is in modern day Iraq. The people who built this city probably settled in the Shinar plain about 100 years after Noah left the Ark. Although God had told Noah and his family to spread out and fill the world, when his descendants poured unto the plain of Shinar, they decided to settle down right there. They not only challenged God's command to spread out, but in an effort to show how great they were they decided to build a city with a soaring tower reaching the heavens. The people said, "Come, let us build ourselves a city, with a tower that reaches to the heavens, so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth" (v.4).

Without a doubt, there was nothing wrong with building a tower. But, it was their *motivation* for building that tower that was not God-pleasing. That tower was not for defense, forest fire detection, offices, or condominium space. The sole purpose was to show off how smart and strong they were and to make the statement that they really didn't need God. In effect, they were basically saying, "Glory to *man* in the highest!"

Do you see how Satan works? He doesn't have to get us to bow down to an idol in order to disobey God. He's perfectly happy if he can get us to hallow *our* names instead of God's. He wants us to think that everything we have acquired and accumulated in life is a tribute to our own hard work and ingenuity and, not because of God blessing us in so many ways. Instead of seeing them as gifts God has given to help us, the devil wants us to put our *trust* in things like science technology, and human reason with the belief that *these* things hold the answers to all the problems of the world. But the best science, the most advanced forms of modern technology, and the loftiest thoughts in human reason can't

defeat death, let alone many of the world's other problems. Any arrogant thoughts that we can make it on our own without God are just as conceited and just as false as the people were at Babel.

And before we go pointing any fingers, we Christians today aren't immune to such prideful thoughts either; we're just better at concealing them. When God crowns our hard work and our schooling with success it's easy to look down on those who haven't been so successful and think that we deserve our achievements because we've worked harder. By doing this, haven't we failed to give credit to God, from whom all blessings flow? The Bible says, "What do you have that you were not given?" It was the Lord Who gave us faithful parents, teachers, coaches, and other mentors who instilled in us this work ethic? It is God who gave us the good health to succeed as we did? We dare not treat God as just a footnote in our life. He made us and He saved us. He deserves our very best - not just in our offerings but in the songs that we sing and the attention we give throughout the service.

How does God react to rebellious people? Well, God did put down that rebellion at Babel, but not as you and I might have. Our text says, "(T)he LORD came down to see the city and the tower that the men were building. The LORD said, 'If as one people speaking the same language, they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other'" (Gen. 11:5-7).

It's interesting that our reading describes how the LORD "came **down**" to deal with the people of Babel. God came **down** while in vain they were trying to build a tower "**up**" to heaven! But, instead of destroying everyone as He had mostly done with the flood, God chose simply to confuse their speech. This **did** cause chaos and it drove people apart but it also gave them time to **think** about what they had done. These verses also remind us how God does not act in a quick-tempered way. He first collects all the data before He decides what course of action to take.

Thankfully, God still works that way in our lives today. He deals with us on the basis of His **patience** and love, and before He acts, He gathers all the data. So, whenever we may feel that we're getting a raw deal from

God we need to think again. It is true that God will allow us to go through difficulties in this sin-spoiled world, but His purpose is always to grab our attention and to bring us back to Him. If God hadn't intervened in the lives of the citizens of Babel, they would have ended up facing His justice and wrath forever. So, as hard as it may be during those times, we actually need to thank God when He allows confusion to come into our lives. He does that so you and I will see straight by turning to Him and focusing on His promises, not on our own rebellious interests.

Although God did force the people to move apart it was their own sin that caused the united to become divided at Babel. Sin continues to drive us apart today, doesn't it? Sin sets up barriers between people on every level; political, racial, economic, and more. On an individual level, sin causes us to say hurtful things to others, to refuse to admit when we're wrong, and sin also leads people to take advantage of others. When you think about it this world is really a horrible place in which to live!

Or at least it **would** be for us if it were not for **Christ**. Thanks be to God that through Him, God has provided a remedy to sin, the thing that separates us from one another on so many levels, and even worse, the thing that separates us from God. While the people of Babel tried to unite heaven and earth with brick-and-mortar God has united the two through His Son, Jesus. More than that, God has sent the Holy Spirit to bring us to faith in Jesus' work of salvation.

Only the Holy Spirit can repair the sad confusion that sin has caused. He does that through the common language of the Gospel. He demonstrated that on the day of Pentecost in the city of Jerusalem. Fifty days after Jesus' resurrection, the Holy Spirit descended visibly on the disciples in the form of tongues of fire and gave them the ability to speak in foreign languages they had never studied before. The disciples used their newfound ability to share God's Word with the many pilgrims that were in Jerusalem for the festival of Pentecost. People from all over the world heard in their own language the wonderful works of God. Peter himself preached to the Jews convicting them of their sin of crucifying Jesus. He also went on to assure them that God had raised Jesus from the

dead and that their sins had been forgiven. In a single day 3000 people came to faith including people who had once been enemies of the Church.

Today, people from many different languages, cultures, and all walks of life are still being drawn together by the Gospel. Only the Holy Spirit can bring something like that about. He does it through His Word as it's delivered here in our country and all over the world through professional church workers *and* through lay people.

Our God brings us *together* to worship every Sunday. It's not our common likes and dislikes, or our political views that does it. No, the thing that brings us together is the common **knowledge** of our sin, the common **faith** in our Savior, and the common **goal** we have of sharing the Good News. The Holy Spirit still unites God's people just as He did at Pentecost. He does it by reminding us of, and filling us with, Christ's love. Yes, the Holy Spirit still brings us out of the confusion caused by sin and into the clarity of God's love for us in Christ. And this is the love we have to share with the world which so desperately needs it. Amen!