

A friend of mine is in China this month teaching ceramics. She took up this hobby recently, but her work received much attention, and she now has some pieces in an art gallery near Kansas City. She is loving China. The area is beautiful, the trees are attractive, the water is cool and refreshing, and ducks keep her enchanted. She understands the ducks, but she does not understand Chinese. She studied it a short while before making the trip, and she can say a few expressions and read a bit of it. She says the people there appreciate her attempts to speak their language, so she has been struck by the sincere kindness of people from a land far away and totally strange from her experience. It has helped her sense the unity of all humanity. Everyone appreciates beauty. Everyone appreciates nature. Everyone appreciates conversation even in its most basic form. And everyone appreciates kindness. There are certain things that speak to every human being no matter where or when you live. There are certain elements that bind us together as one, all of us who share space and air on this same globe.

Pentecost Sunday shows that one of the things, perhaps the most important thing, that binds people together as one human family, is the message of Jesus Christ. On the first Pentecost Day, the disciples, filled with the Holy Spirit, rushed into the streets of Jerusalem to tell people about the mission, life and resurrection of Jesus. Jerusalem was filled with people who spoke different languages. People probably had to use simple expressions to communicate with one another, and I'm sure they appreciated whatever efforts folks made to speak a common language. But here was something new. Everyone plainly understood what the disciples were saying. The Acts of the Apostles describes this as a linguistic miracle, speaking in tongues. But it revealed another truth. The message of Christ applies to all people. It doesn't matter where you come from, what your experiences are, or how much faith you may or may not have. Christ died for you and offers salvation to you. His teachings will help you live a better life. Other Christians will support your faith and values. Jesus Christ is the one who ultimately binds us together, all of us who share this earth.

We are sometimes shy to speak out about our beliefs, acting the way that others expect, even if what they expect is contrary to the way we would prefer to act. When we stand up for our values, we do so on the strength of the Holy Spirit. That Spirit comes to us in the sacrament of confirmation, which is a personal Pentecost for each of us. The power of the Spirit lies within us and enables us to make good decisions and to say good things. When we let the Spirit speak through us, we may discover something about our words. We may have been afraid to speak up because our words would not be received by other people, or that we ourselves might experience some rejection. But we may discover something else. We may discover that the message God gives us to say is a universal message. It speaks to people everywhere. It is a word that will not alienate others, but a word that draws them close. When we speak the word of God's Holy Spirit, we witness Pentecost in our midst today.