

Pentecost 2026 “Babel and Pentecost”
St. Vincent de Paul International Mass
Bishop Frank Schuster

I remember reading an article about scientists who claim they can trace the languages of Europe and Asia to a common language that was spoken 10,000 years ago. I found that very interesting. Genesis also speaks of an ancient kingdom of people who spoke the same language. However, this kingdom made a fateful mistake. The government of this kingdom built a tower high into the sky so that they could symbolically claim superiority over God. You remember the story. Or as one of my favorite poems that I shared recently in Northwest Catholic, “Their tower's impressive statistics pleased architects, boosters and mystics. But their excess of pride caused the Lord to decide it was time that they studied linguistics.” It is a story about original sin, about how egotism can get in the way of our relationship with God and with others.

My friends, when I talk to people who have suffered broken relationships, either with parents, children, or spouses, they all share a similar experience. When communication breaks down, when communication turns into babbling, relationships break down quickly. We can see this happen at home, between spouses or between a parent and a child, or between siblings. We can also see this happen at work, between coworkers or with an employer and employee. We can see this happen in school between kids on the playground, or in the classroom with a teacher and student. We never see communication breakdowns in our country’s politics, right? You see, when communication breaks down between people, even if all parties are speaking the same language and with perfect grammar; we are nevertheless reduced to babbling, everyone talking at each other with no body understanding a single word. How often have we experienced that phenomenon in our world around us: of everyone speaking at each other and no one understanding a thing?

What is the answer to the curse of Babel? The answer to Babel is the feast we celebrate today, Pentecost! On Pentecost, the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples like fire. On Pentecost, all the people who were present were able to speak in hundreds of different languages, mirroring Babel, but with one important difference, they could understand each other. You know, for me, a fitting way of appreciating the miracle of Pentecost is attending a mass in another country and in a different language. You don’t have to know the language to understand the meaning of all the prayers. It is truly remarkable. Here at Saint Vincent de Paul this weekend, the miracle of Pentecost is on full display. When we pray the Lord’s Prayer later at this Mass, I will turn off my microphone and hope everyone will pray the Lord’s Prayer in their own language. As you listen, as you pray, you might hear a dozen or more languages...but you will understand every word.

What this means for me personally is, if stories in the bible like the Tower of Babel give descriptions of humanity’s fall, then the celebration of Pentecost is a fitting way to celebrate the birthday of the Church. No matter which country we were born in, presently live in, or which language we happen to speak, we are blessed to be one Body of Christ. Bring this home, we can therefore ask ourselves this week, when was the last time we experienced a relationship reduced to babbling? Was at home, at work, was it with a friend, or perhaps in our politics, we have never

seen that right? When was the last time you experienced a relationship in your life reduced to babbling? Pentecost is the antidote to Babel. Can we name one thing we could be doing this week to open our ears and hearts more fully to the Holy Spirit? Can we name one thing we could be doing this week to open our ears and hearts to others so to mend a broken relationship? The more we realize life is less about “me” and more about Jesus, we can truly welcome the Holy Spirit more fully into our lives and then watch him renew the face of the earth...starting with us.