

Pentecost

(Act 2:1-11 / John 15:26-27; 16:12-15)

24.05.2015

Jesus says to us today what He first said to His disciples in the gospel passage we have just read: *You too will be my witnesses.*

We are called to bear witness to Christ in today's world in the same way as the first disciples bore testimony to Jesus in the world of their day.

To do this we must speak a language people can understand, daring to believe that the words we need to communicate the message of Jesus will be given to us by the Spirit.

If we are to speak to people in a way they can comprehend, we must first discern where they come from and where they are at in life.

To address our audience, we must find words they can fathom.

For this to happen, we must first listen to the people to whom we speak.

Only when we listen, so that we hear the questions they are asking, are we in a position to provide our addressees with the answers they long for.

We learn to speak intelligibly by listening to others speak.

Experience shows that the best way to learn another language is to listen to natives speaking it.

All that to say that communication is not only about talking, it is also about listening.

Given this, I hear the call addressed to us today as an invitation to be, not only what we could call a *confessing Church*, by which I mean *a gospel professing Church*, but also, and, before all else, *an attentively listening Church.*

We can only credibly proclaim the gospel if and when we have heard and welcomed its message for ourselves to begin with.

We can only find words to transmit the gospel's message of life if we have integrated that message of life for ourselves, for we can only share with others what is truly part of our self.

I have emphasised the importance of spoken communication, finding the right words, engaging with others by recourse to convincing communication.

But, please understand me.

While communication skills are vital and language is important, this is not enough.

Gospel proclamation is not all just a matter of words.

The apostle Paul, someone who wrote prolifically and spoke much, ended up drawing to the conclusion that life was not worth wasting words on.

Words of themselves can be, and often are, empty.

When words are empty, they are not the vehicles of communication they should be.

To touch people's lives, to convince them of the message of Good News we are called to herald, we must communicate heart to heart.

It is *ex corde* that Jesus spoke. The gospels tell us this explicitly.

It is *from the heart* that we are called to speak as we bear witness to Christ.

Our reading of the gospels shows us how Jesus' words were always congruent with His heart.

He never said one thing while thinking another.

Jesus appreciated clarity of speech. He spoke honestly Himself and He expected the same from others. He was averse to those who spoke in a dissimulating way. He did not like people saying one thing while thinking another. The gospels show us how Jesus unmasked those who came to Him with a hidden agenda, He uncovered their ploys of deceptive concealment. Jesus' confrontational encounters with some of those of the Pharisee Party who are depicted as *playing with words*, trying to set Him up or catch Him out, bear testimony to His dislike of word-play.

It is evident that for Jesus words should not be calculated to hide one's real intentions. (Our Northern Irish experience shows us the difficulties that arise when people give different meanings to words and draw forth irreconcilable interpretations from agreed statements.)

If Jesus was honest in His conversations with others, He was also blatantly honest in the dialogue of prayer with His Father.

Jesus dared to articulate what He really felt in prayer, running the risk of shocking those who listened in to His cries of distress upon the cross.

When Jesus calls us to be His witnesses in today's gospel, He is calling us to bear an honest testimony to Him.

Jesus is surely convinced that our words should not be empty. He wants that they neither be *unfounded* or *idle*.

Unfounded or idle words are words disconnected from the heart.

To quote one contemporary American author: *They have no potential for life. They serve no communicative function because they do not enable people to move toward one another. They hide rather than reveal. They darken rather than illumine.*

Called to be witnesses, we are called to move towards others and to share the truth with them.

We can only do that credibly if we are as open and true and as loving as Jesus was.

The truth we have been confided and are called to announce to others is not a stark, heartless truth, but the person who is Truth, Jesus-Christ, in whom all God's merciful and tender love for the world is made manifest.

The message of Pentecost is the message of God's love which is given for the forgiveness of our sins and for the healing of our wounded humanity.

We heard in the extract from Paul's Letter to the Galatians (chapter 5) read earlier in the week at the Divine Office that the first fruit of the Spirit is *love*.

We pray on this day that the Holy Spirit may come to fill the hearts of all people and *kindle in them the fire of God's love*.

The witness that we are called to bear is a testimony to God's love.

May our testimony to Jesus be more than just the words we speak! May it be our own warm embodiment of God's word of love which first took flesh in Christ-Jesus! This word is meant to take flesh in each one of us day after day.

Called to testify to Christ-Jesus, commissioned to be His witnesses, may we always remember the Lord's own word to those he first sent out in His name: *By this shall all men know that you are my disciples, by the love you have for one another.*

It is a loving Church, a People of God who are seen to live love, that will bear the most eloquent

testimony and give the most credible witness to Jesus Christ.

Archbishop Diarmuid Martin has rightly invited the Church in Ireland to ask itself some very fundamental questions today.

We must ask ourselves if we have well and truly preached and are well and truly preaching a Gospel of love, if we are well and truly making such a Gospel manifest by our whole way of being.

It is only to the extent that we are seen to do this that we will ever be given a hearing and anything we might have to say be given a considered hearing and paid heed to.