

The Mystery of Language

By Fr. Jhon Edison Márquez Torres

Speaking or not speaking various languages has been an ancient concern since the Book of Genesis. To speak languages is not just about communication, but about intercultural issues, business, survival, and in a Christian context it is about evangelization.

The very first time that we find the problem of the language in the Bible, is in the narration about the Tower of Babylon, in which the human ambition wanted to build a selfish civilization with a unique language. Speaking only one language is here the manifestation of the human being agenda, “to reach the heavens and to make a name for ourselves.”

The divine intervention in that biblical event seems a punishment, but nothing could be further from the reality of that interpretation. God came to confuse the language as a *Kairos*, because speaking just one language means being closed in our human ambition and contradictorily in our mediocrity, selfish mediocrity.

In this same way, the Gospel according to Mark tells us about the signs that follow those who believe in Jesus, “In my name shall they cast out devils; they shall speak with new tongues; They shall take up serpents,” etc. I have to highlight the fact that those signs are able to struggle against something bad, but what is the

meaning of speaking new tongues? Following this teaching of Jesus, not speaking new languages is something bad on a similar level to demonic possession, drinking poisons, or being bitten by a serpent. Then, reading this verse together with Genesis, we can discover easily the ancient temptation “to reach the heavens and to make a name for ourselves” whose root is the original temptation the Devil proposed in the garden, “You will be like gods”.

This topic is one of the most important topics of the Holy Spirit’s program because it is the base of evangelization. The very first charism that the Holy Spirit gave to Jesus’ disciples was the ability to speak new tongues in order to preach the Gospel in the whole world. This is a charism for the whole holy Church, this is a charism in order to help the catholicity of the Church. But speaking new languages is not just a gift for the Church, but it is a personal gift too, because it helps us to open our minds to new realities, as Edmund de Waal said, “With languages, you can move from one social situation to another. With languages, you are at home anywhere.”

If we go through the neurolinguistic studies, we can realize that to learn a new language physically creates new neuropathways in our brain, and they develop our creativity, our capacity to resolve problems, and at the same time it helps us to understand more and more other cultures and other people.

So, the gift of a new tongue is not just the ability to speak, but it is the ability to communicate with others, leaving our selfishness and going in communion. To speak another language means getting out of the mediocrity and the temptation to make a name for ourselves and bringing in the other person like an equal, like a human being, like a brother or sister. When I want everyone to speak my own language and I don't want to speak or at least understand the other, I build a tower, drink my own poison and close my heart to the action of the Holy Spirit. I close my heart to the communion, to the dialogue with the brother who is different from me.

We are sons of the light, we have our hearts opened to the Holy Spirit, we believe in Jesus Christ, and together we share the bread of life in this intercultural and multilingual Mass, because all of us believe in the communion of the saints, and we believe that the Church is One and Catholic. That means the Church is One but it speaks the tongues of humanity and it reflects the true Christian language, which is the language of love.

To Speak a new language, requires humbleness, discipline, constancy, and a lot patience from us, the students, and from the people who embraced us in this house of formation, especially teachers who step by step explain us English language in different ways, and SCJ community who decided to open the doors of their community and made us feel like part of them. Thank you all of you guys,

fathers, deacons, seminarians, employees. It was a challenge for all of us, but at the same time it's a victory too, because it helps us to learn English as a service to the Universal Church, and it is a great apostleship. Thank you because all of you help us to speak the language of love.