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## Deeper Language

2010-05-23

A year ago, outside of Guatemala City, Lorenzo Rosebaugh, a Missionary Oblate of Mary Immaculate, was shot to death as he was driving with a number of his fellow missionaries to a community meeting. The real motive behind his killing may never be known. On the surface, it appeared to be nothing more than a violent robbery, but given the circumstances of Lorenzo's life and his life-long fight for justice for the poor, everyone, myself no exception, wants to believe that his being shot was more than a question of being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Too many things suggest that this was more than an accident. If nothing else, his death by gunshot is somehow symbolic: Lorenzo wasn't meant to die of old age in a comfortable bed.

I first met Lorenzo at our mother-house at Aix-en-Provence in France ten years ago. He had just returned from a long missionary stint in Latin America where, among other things, he had lived on the streets of Recife with its poor, without roof or fixed address, for several years. A serious illness drove him back to the USA and his Oblate community sent him on a sabbatical to France. He arrived there unable to speak any French whatsoever. Yet, when I met him there, less than a month after his arrival, he was sitting on the steps of the church which is attached to our community residence with a dozen street-people gathered round him. They were sharing food and cigarettes and some kind of conversation. It looked like a picnic in the park.

There is nothing exceptional about this except that Lorenzo couldn't speak a word of French and the people gathered round him couldn't speak English, Portuguese, or Spanish (his languages). Yet they clearly seemed to be communicating with each other, and deeply, in a way that would trigger envy to an outsider, and Lorenzo was their focal point.

How? How can we speak to each other beyond communicating in the ordinary languages that we know?

When the Evangelist, Luke, describes the first Pentecost, he tells us that, after receiving the Holy Spirit, the first followers of Jesus came out into public and began speaking and, everyone, absolutely everyone, no matter their ethnicity or language, heard the disciples' words as if they were in their own language. The old barriers of native language no longer blocked hearing or understanding. The language given by the spirit transcended ethnicity and native tongue.

It is too easy for us to simply write this off as a miracle, an exceptional foundational intervention by God which helped found the church. That may also be true, but there is another point to this: Language functions at different levels.

At its most obvious level, language depends upon the spoken word and that word is always in a particular language, e.g., French, English, Spanish, Chinese. At this level words have a relative power, but they can also deceive and lie. Words don't always accurately mirror the heart. Moreover, they invariably fail us just when we most need them, especially in depth situations where tragedy, death, and betrayal render us mute.

But we have other languages: Beyond the spoken word there is body language. Our bodies speak louder and more honestly than do our words. Through our bodies, through its gestures and the nuances of its countenance, we speak more deeply and more truly than we do with our words.

And we have still yet a deeper language: More deeply than through the body, we speak through the spirit, through the language of the Holy Spirit, a language that transcends the spoken word and the language of our bodies. What is the language of the spirit?

The Holy Spirit is not just a person inside the Trinity, hopelessly abstract and beyond our conception. Scripture tells us that the Holy Spirit is also very concrete, conceivable, and tangible inside of charity, joy, peace, patience,

goodness, longsuffering, fidelity, gentleness, and chastity. These speak through us more loudly and clearly, either in their presence or their absence, than do all our words and gestures.

In the end we are not fooled by each other. We hear beyond spoken words, bodily gestures, and beyond what we explicitly intend to say to each other. The heart reads the heart and the spirit recognizes itself wherever it sees itself as manifest. Thus many of us talk passionately about our love for the poor, but the poor do not hear us, understand us, or gather round us, even when our diction is perfect in their native tongue.

While working in Latin America, Lorenzo Rosebaugh spoke only broken Spanish and broken Portuguese. Yet the poor there heard him and perfectly understood what he was saying. He spoke no French at all and still he was able to sit on the steps of a church in France and gather round him the street-people there who spoke only French - and they understood him clearly, as in their mother-tongue.

Such is the language of Pentecost.

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