

FEBRUARY 21, 2025 FATHER MICHAEL COUTTS

On television, there is a commercial which shows an Anglo-Saxon nurse in a hospital, and a family comes to see their relatives, and they speak in rapid Japanese, and she is not phased. She understands clearly what they are saying, and she replies in fluent Japanese. Around her head is a gadget called "Auto-translator." It sells for \$299.99, plus tax. It's just the opposite of the story that we hear in our first reading. People speak in different languages, and yet all understand. Here, in our Gospel, in our first reading, people all speak the same language, but nobody seems to understand one another. Now that is strange.

When God created Adam and Eve, and their children, and their grandchildren, they all spoke one language. Sure enough, they didn't have the vocabulary we have today, with the antonyms and synonyms, and different ways of expressing things, but they could communicate with one another. They could agree, they could disagree. They could tell jokes, and most important, they could tell their story, their tradition, their saga... So suddenly, we find one group of families not understanding another group of families. How does this happen? The author of the Genesis uses a genre called aetiology, which is he creates a myth. He creates a story in order to explain a reality that does not seem to make sense. And it does not seem to make sense, because everybody should be speaking the same language. Why on earth can we not understand one another?

And so, we have the story of the tower of Babel. And Babel simply means gibberish, nonsense, incomprehension. That's exactly what it means, so where did it come about? Before the story of the tower of Babel, we had the story of Noah and the flood. There the people were arrogant, they were selfish, they disrespected one another. They created

strife, they were separated, they were not united... And God is described in an anthropomorphic way. God says I am fed up of these people, why did I create them? And so there's a flood that destroys them. And then, they start again. With Noah, and his three sons, and their families. And one would expect that they would listen and understand the nonsense that took place before. They would be considerate for one another, they would respect one another...

Just the contrary, they repeat the same thing all over again. And so we have the tower of Babel. They decide that they are going to build a tower, reach up to the heavens, and take God and take God's possession, and put themselves in place of God. Now you see, whenever we do something together, like Habitat for Humanity, or we build a school, or we build a theatre, build a hockey rink, for our children and grandchildren, somehow the other people who live together but barely know one another, suddenly begin to understand one another. They call one another by name, they understand their skills, they make allowances for differences of opinion, they bind together whenever there's a project that they are all involved in. As I said, building a school, building a hockey rink, building a church. One would expect that if they decide to build this huge big tower, they would understand one another, understand their skills. But the purpose was wrong.

They decided that they were going to put themselves in the place of God. God was going to be on the side, they were going to be in the centre, and everything was going to be copacetic. And that was not going to be the truth. The moment you take God out of the centre, you have chaos, confusion, and that is the basis of the story of the tower of Babel. You know the irony of the whole stuff was that God wanted, right from the beginning, from the fall of Adam and Eve, God wanted to share God's divine life with the people. To give all the power, to give all the

glory, to give all the wisdom, knowledge, and understanding, to the people that God had created. They didn't need to build the tower in order to snatch it from God. God was going to give it to them.

And so there are two lessons that we get from here. One is God is always at the centre. And the second is God creates us in God's image and likeness, we don't need to recreate God in our image and likeness. And we see that in our Gospel today. Jesus says if you want to be a follower of mine, you have to be picking up your cross, and following me every day. The people wanted to follow Jesus because they expected that Jesus was their Messiah. And so he was. But they wanted to create a Messiah in their own likeness. They wanted a Messiah that would liberate them from the Romans. They wanted a Messiah who would do great things for them. They were quite happy when Jesus healed them, when Jesus exorcized the demons... They were quite happy when Jesus made the lame walk, the deaf hear, and the blind to see. They were willing to take that. But they also wanted to get rid of their Roman overrulers. And that is the way they created their Messiah. And Jesus would have none of that.

Jesus said I am a Messiah who carries his cross. Don't create a Messiah in your own likeness. A Messiah that was suffering, a Messiah that was willing to empty himself, and take the form of a slave, and become one like us, so that Jesus could know and understand our sufferings, our joys, our happiness, our desires, our direction. But they didn't want to do any of that stuff, and therefore, Jesus would say, If you want to save your life, you're going to lose it. If you want to lose your life, for the sake of the kingdom, you are going to find it. It is a logic that is totally foreign to the logic of the world around us. But if we decide that we are going to be created ourselves, in God's image and likeness, as God has wanted us, then we can enjoy the beauty, and the glory of God. corruption and death.