

It takes time to learn a new language, and practise, whether by choice or force of circumstances. Force of circumstances has driven some of the newly evangelized Jewish Christians out of Jerusalem into the surrounding countryside – so the Greek-speaking Philip finds himself in Samaria among a people previously shunned by all respectable Jews – except Jesus of course. So Philip is not entirely in foreign country after all in several respects – he's among people of Jewish origin, he's among people Jesus has already visited and, most important of all, he's among people made in the image and likeness of God- receptive that is to the possibility of God, to a spiritual life, or better to life as essentially spiritual – the essential human quest. This 'alreadyness' of people to be fertile ground for conversion perhaps explains something of the confusion we still have as to when the Spirit is at work in people's lives- is it at baptism in the name of Jesus or does it come after, or does indeed it come before - our default position as human beings, the Spirit already at work in us before we ever become aware of it as a specific thing, or separate entity – like grace then, or God's love forever at work. Being made in God's image then could be equated with the idea that we are made for language, simply waiting to receive those first sounds, those first words communicated by others, ripe for the Word from the word go .This is as much a surprise to the apostles as it is to the people they go to, or find themselves among. At first it all seems foreign and they are afraid and then they venture to go out of themselves in order to reach these strange others and, not always but often, they find receptive ground, especially when they relax and have their answers ready speaking 'with courtesy and respect and with a clear conscience '. We may find the same dynamic at work today in trying to speak across the religious / secular divide and across the generations. We may be met by a mutual incomprehension, seemingly speaking entirely different languages, and having to trust in that fundamental grace which we all have of being human first and different and difficult afterwards. We may find we have to use other languages first, other ways of representing our joy in meeting fellow images of God- and indeed we can be certain that if we are not in touch with that more fundamental language in ourselves then what we say of God in terms of Jesus and God will ultimately fail. Indeed it's this first language of the body that the disciples are putting at risk here – a body in which Father and Son are doing the work and all we are doing is taking that work to others. The place to practise this of course, and discover its truth is firstly among ourselves.

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