

When people have suffered a stroke they may have to learn to speak all over again and they do this best through the kindness of others – that other language which we are also being asked to get in contact with on this feast day of Pentecost. It's a whole new way of living in the world facilitated by God through one another, through that caring together of God's people in the one Spirit – it's a way of communicating across all those boundaries that otherwise separate us as unique individual human beings. This thought prompted by reading two separate sets of readings for today's feast, in particular two passages from John's gospel, today's emphasising the Spirit as "Helper" and advocate and a later passage from Pope John XXIII's Sunday missal when Jesus enters the upper room and breathes the Holy Spirit on his disciples saying to them "*Receive the Holy Spirit, for those whose sins you forgive they are forgiven, for those whose sins you retain they are retained.*" This is the other language we are being taught or gifted with when Jesus breathes on us or, better still, breathes in us. One body, one spirit, one breath. It's a language we all understand because it reaches the depths of our being.

Jan once said that an Alzheimer's patient can still detect kindness, and this was reiterated by the neuroscientist Jill Bolte Taylor in her account of her recovery from a massive stroke which effectively eliminated her left temporal lobe – with all sorts of interesting results including the insight

"that when it came to my rehabilitation, I was ultimately the one in control of the success or failure of those caring for me. It was my decision to show up or not. I chose to show up for those professionals who brought me energy by connecting with me, touching me gently and appropriately, making direct eye contact and speaking to me calmly. I responded positively to positive treatment. The professionals who did not connect with me sapped my energy, so I protected myself by ignoring their requests." (p81 My Stroke of Insight)

What we are talking about of course is the language of love and this is the language we lose through sin and regain in Christ – or should do. It's communicated best through the language of forgiveness – it is indeed for giving.

This prompted by both that other passage from John's gospel from Pope John XXIII's missal and a recent account in The Guardian of the work of a palliative care unit in Denmark. The reporter follows the work of Dr Johann Randers in particular as he cares for a whole variety of people coping with various terminal illnesses and he makes the point that where his treatment differs from that more generally received on other wards is in his willingness to talk directly to his patients of the prospect of death -

"There are three things that are important for someone dying to get the opportunity to say to the right people, "Forgive me, I forgive you. And I love you."

This is the language of the Spirit which enables us to speak and which crosses all boundaries.

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