

# *Daily Reflections*



## **WORD POWER**

By Sr. Katherine "Kit" Gray, CSJ

### **Context & Pre-Reading Reflection**

Over a 3-year period during Ordinary Time in the Roman Catholic Liturgical Calendar, sections of various books of the Bible are read sequentially. The Hebrew Scripture reading for today--Friday of the sixth week in Ordinary Time—is from the eleventh chapter of Genesis. This story of the people “who all spoke the same language” building a great tower, who were ultimately scattered “over all the earth” because of a “confusion” of language, is situated between the narrative about Noah and the great flood and the call of Abraham. According to Scripture scholars, it illustrates increasing human wickedness, shown in the sinful pride that human beings take in their own achievements apart from God; and it explains the diversity of languages among the peoples of the earth.

The division among people caused by the multiplicity of languages at the end of the story is reversed at Pentecost. As Luke describes it (in Chapter 2 of the Acts of the Apostles), after the apostles had received the Holy Spirit, they began to speak in different languages and all those gathered in Jerusalem for the feast

heard them preaching in their own languages.

Coincidentally, February 21 is International Language Day (also known as International Mother Language and Language Movement Day). This celebration was organized by UNESCO in 2000 as a celebration of linguistic and cultural diversity; it had its origins in a 1947 movement to preserve the Bangla language in Pakistan.

This Scripture passage and the celebration of International Language Day prompted a lot of reflection for me. According to Genesis, God created everything with a word; Jesus is the Word of God made flesh. Oh, the power of language!

- What does language mean to you?
- What is your “mother tongue?”
- What language do you prefer for personal prayer?
- When have you experienced language as a unifying element?
- When have you experienced language as a divisive element?

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### Today's First Reading

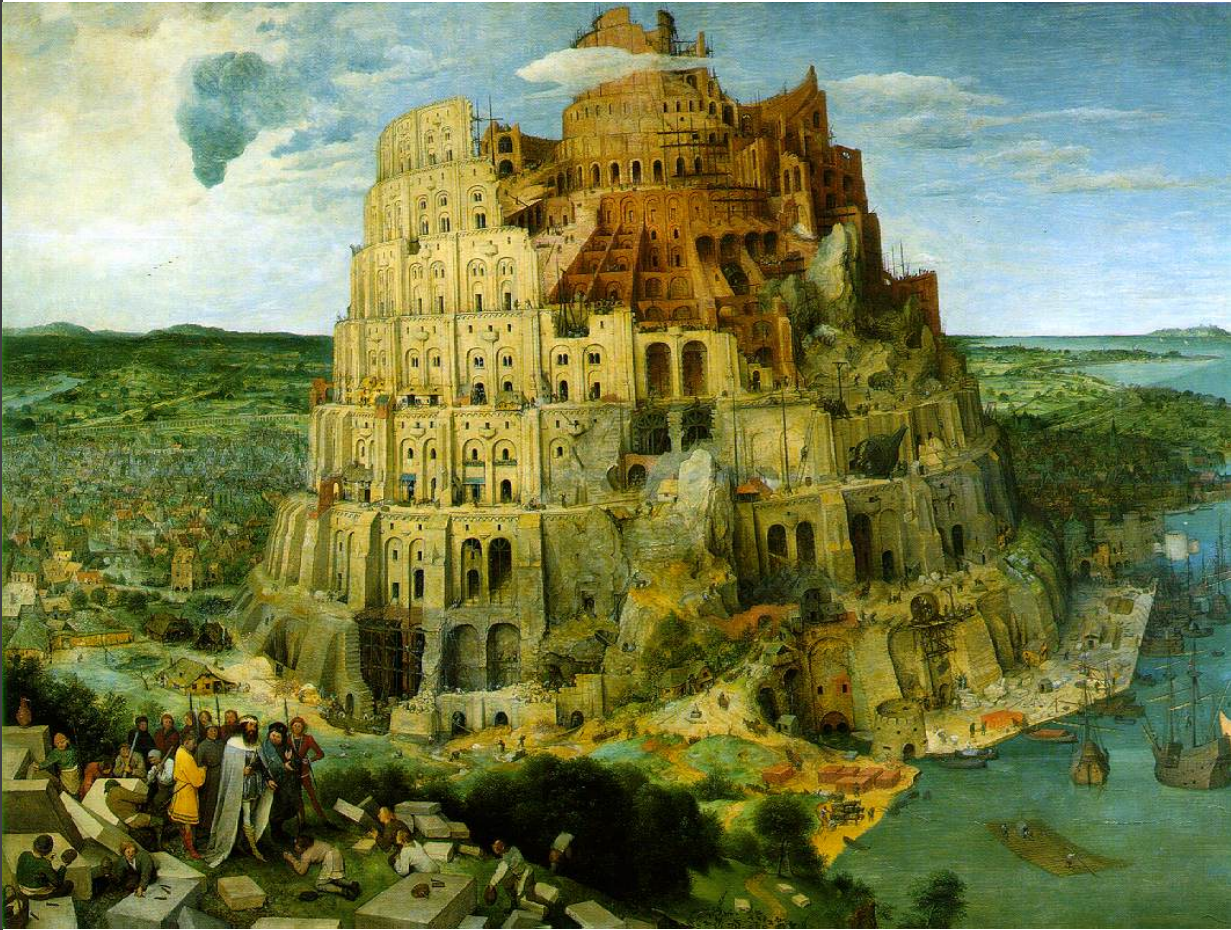
*The whole world spoke the same language, using the same words.  
While the people were migrating in the east,  
they came upon a valley in the land of Shinar and settled there.  
They said to one another,  
“Come, let us mold bricks and harden them with fire.”  
They used bricks for stone, and bitumen for mortar.  
Then they said, “Come, let us build ourselves a city  
and a tower with its top in the sky,  
and so make a name for ourselves;  
otherwise we shall be scattered all over the earth.”  
The LORD came down to see the city and the tower  
that they had built.  
Then the LORD said: “If now, while they are one people,  
all speaking the same language,  
they have started to do this,  
nothing will later stop them from doing whatever they presume to do.  
Let us then go down and there confuse their language,  
so that one will not understand what another says.”  
Thus the LORD scattered them from there all over the earth,  
and they stopped building the city.  
That is why it was called Babel,  
because there the LORD confused the speech of all the world.*



*It was from that place that he scattered them all over the earth.*

## GENESIS 11:1-9

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### For Pondering

- What words or phrases “speak” to you in this passage today?
  - What are your thoughts and/or feelings as you read the passage?
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### For Prayer

*God, give me the gift of speech  
that I may use words to build up, not tear down,  
to speak truth with love,  
and always to communicate with the intention  
of drawing others closer to you,  
just as you used your words to touch the hearts of all people.  
Amen.*



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