

A Short Story – You Hear Me
by Deacon Gerry Palermo

His name is Sal. We get along great. He is always happy to see me on rounds and every time we engage in small talk. Each time Sal asks me to sing a song for him. I have a few Hebrew songs that I can sing with a fair amount of linguistic fidelity. I cannot confer on him any sacramental graces properly speaking so our meeting place is music and chit-chat. Such a gentle man, we are both elevated by the encounters.

Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because each one heard them speaking in his own language. They were astounded, and in amazement they asked, "Are not all these people who are speaking Galileans? Then how does each of us hear them in his native language? We are Parthians, Medes, and Elamites, inhabitants of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the districts of Libya near Cyrene, as well as travelers from Rome, both Jews and converts to Judaism, Cretans and Arabs, yet we hear them speaking in our own tongues of the mighty acts of God."

The miracle of Pentecost and the outpouring of the Holy Spirit upon the Apostles allowed for this expression of grace and power. This is no mere transliteration of speech into a native language. Rather it is an amazing intimate expression in the natural and intuitive expression in each of the languages.

“Language is the unconscious revealer of thought” (Whiteley). The first Pentecost spoke about the mighty acts of God spoken in a way one would hear from his own Mother and Father. The listener exclaims “You hear me” even as the listener hears the Apostles.

I usually don't do rounds on the 14th floor but today I needed to attend to the names on the list on the 14th floor. From room to room, greeting, sharing and then offering the Holy Communion to the patients so disposed.

Unless I go to the wrong room. 14A and 14B look a lot alike sometimes. When I entered the room and realized the name, Marty, was not the name on the list, Joseph, I realized my mistake. I confessed to the patient that I didn't belong there but since I was there if he wanted to just visit and chat I am ok with that too. I am not authorized to visit with anyone other than my list unless invited to visit. He was happy for it. We enjoyed a conversation about this and that. I asked him his faith tradition. Jewish.

Oh, you know I memorized a Jewish healing prayer for another would you like to hear it? Yes!

Mustering up a singing voice, concentrating as best I could so as to do a good job:

Mi Shebeirach (version) By Debbie Friedman

Mi shebeirach avoteinu
M'kor hab'racha l'imoteinu
May the source of strength,
Who blessed the ones before us,
Help us find the courage to make our lives a blessing,
and let us say, Amen.
Mi shebeirach imoteinu
M'kor habrachah l'avoteinu
Bless those in need of healing with r'fuah sh'leimah,
The renewal of body, the renewal of spirit,
And let us say, Amen

When I finished there was complete silence. I looked up to Marty. Marty was looking at me with mouth wide open, his eyes wide as saucers, in utter amazement. He was in perfect peace. Then a cloud appeared in his contenance. He became very sad. What's wrong Marty? It has been so long since I spoke Hebrew, I do not know what the words mean. Would you tell me?

I told him about the prayer for healing. Added some definitions - Mi sheberach" meaning, "the One who blessed" and r'fuah sh'leimah means complete recovery. But mostly I said your response was spiritual to the intent of the spiritual prayer. I think G-d answered you.

On the evening of that first day of the week, when the doors were locked, where the disciples were, ... Jesus came and stood in their midst and said to them, "Peace be with you." When he had said this, he showed them his hands and his side. The disciples rejoiced when they saw the Lord. Jesus said to them again, "Peace be with you. As the Father has sent me, so I send you." And when he had said this, he breathed on them and said to them, "Receive the Holy Spirit. Whose sins you forgive are forgiven them, and whose sins you retain are retained."

Blessings of Shalom, Simcha, Chesed and Rakhamim.

Marty shared a few more life stories, so many to forgive and so many to be forgiven by, then I was on my way.

Eventually I arrive on Sal's floor. "Deacon Gerry!" That is his customary greeting. "Hi Sal. Guess what? I memorized another prayer to sing to you."

“Oh, not today, Deacon Gerry, I have a headache. Can we just talk?”

And so we did.

This is Pentecost. The Fire of G-ds love.

Peace be with you.

Deacon Gerry

Disclaimer – Names, times and places are fictional or obscured to protect the privacy of others without distorting the essential truth of the encounter.

References:

Mi Shebeirach – Debbie Friedman

The Theology of Saint Paul – D.E.H. Whiteley