

If you were to ask me what my favourite film of all time is, I'd have to say it's Top Hat with Fred Astaire and Ginger Rogers.

But, indeed, any of the nine films Fred and Ginger starred in I'd watch again and again.

And, you know, today's reading from the Acts of the Apostles actually remind me of Fred and Ginger in the film: 'Shall We Dance.'

They've fallen in love; but, although they're both Americans, they come from very different backgrounds, and this comes out in how they speak.

It's such a barrier between them that they begin to wonder if their romance will lead anywhere, so they sing: 'Let's Call The Whole Thing Off.'

"You say eether and I say either, you say neether and I say neither. You like potato and I like potahto, you like tomato and I like tomahto. Potato, potahto, tomato, tomahto, let's call the whole thing off" George & Ira Gershwin: Let's Call The Whole Thing Off.

And that reminds me of the very true saying - possibly coined by George Bernard Shaw - that although we British and Americans have a special relationship, we're two countries separated by the same common language.

This is also true of all those people listed in the reading from the Acts of the Apostles who represent for Luke, the author of both Acts and the Gospel bearing his name, the entirety of the then known world.

The Romans had conquered them, and unified them into a huge Empire with one system of government and law.

400 years earlier Alexander the Great had conquered them, and imposed Greek as the common language to bring about unification in his Empire.

But it hadn't really worked because people still spoke in their own languages, although they used Greek as their second language.

One Empire divided not by one common language, but many!

So, the Roman Empire was only a superficial unity because, like Fred and Ginger, they were still saying: 'eether, either, neether, neither.' to each other.

It was only after the Spirit had come and filled the infant Church, and the Apostles began to speak the Word, that all of these people became one.

And the words the Apostles spoke were not just some random words.

The Word the Apostles spoke was Jesus, the Word made flesh.

In the Letter to the Romans Paul says: "Anyone who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him." Rm. 8: 9

He is the One - the only One - who breaks down the barriers between us, and gives us true unity. Without the Spirit of Christ, the whole of humanity is fragmented, broken, and centred in on itself.

And the Lord's Church is the one place where people: "From every nation under heaven."

Acts 2: 5 are unified, and speak, and understand the same language.

The language of the Risen One: Jesus, who has gone through the agony of the Cross, and the ecstasy of the Resurrection to reconcile us to the Father.

And Paul, in the Letter to the Ephesians, in his usual succinct yet eloquent way explains why Jesus did this for us.

"For he [Jesus, Paul says] is himself our peace who has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility. He made peace between [us] by creating in himself one new people [the Church]. Together as one body, Christ reconciled [us] to God by means of his death on the cross, and our hostility toward each other was put to death." Eph. 2: 14, 15 - 16

Do you remember what Jesus said in John's Gospel? "The time for judging this world has come, when Satan, the ruler of this world, will be cast out. And when I am lifted up from the earth, I will draw everyone to myself." Jn. 12: 31 - 32

These, like the words the Apostles spoke at Pentecost, were not random words.

We need, firstly, to go back into the Old Testament to begin to understand the meaning of those words Jesus uttered: but their ultimate meaning would only become crystal clear after Jesus had died, and had risen from the dead.

His words take us back to that story in the Book of Genesis where the people said: "Come, let us build ourselves a city, and a tower with its top in the heavens, and let us make a name for ourselves." Gen. 11: 4

The Tower of Babel.... And the Tower of Babel is really a parable about humankind.

Babel stands for all societies throughout history where people live without any thought of God. It stands for any society that isn't God-centred.

Any society that's determined to dislodge God - even though they say He doesn't exist - and put themselves in His place.

Does that ring any bells for you when you look at our country today?

A society that, on the whole, wants to press forward in the name of progress without reference to, or respect for, God.

The parable of the Tower of Babel tells us that the road without God is doomed to disaster.

And the spiritual being behind all of our arrogance, and pride; all of our attempts to build modern Babel's, is: "Satan, the ruler of this world." Jn. 12: 31

In the truly amazing 4th. Century Basilica of San Clemente in Rome, where Clement, the third successor to St Peter as Bishop of Rome is buried, there's a wonderful mosaic on the ceiling of the apse behind the High Altar.

It shows Jesus reigning in glory on the Cross - the Tree of Life.

Its base is planted in this earth, which is green and lush as the Garden of Eden once was, and its apex is in heaven.

On the upright of the Cross, and on its arms, are twelve doves to show that from the Cross flows the fullness of the Holy Spirit - the Spirit of Christ - to give life to the Church, and the world.

To fulfil the words of Jesus: "I came that they may have life, and have it in abundance."

Jn. 10: 10

The San Clemente Cross is actually a retelling of the Tower of Babel in the light of the Death and Resurrection of Jesus.

Only when Jesus is at the centre of all that we are, and all that we do, will the world find, and fulfil its true destiny, it tells us.

Only in Christ will we find that we can, not only communicate with one another, but more profoundly than that; we are in communion with one another in the life of God.

That deep relationship of love, and trust that exists within the life of God; Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which opens up to us when we ask the Holy Spirit to inhabit our lives.

And Jesus brought to the earth the Holy Spirit, that is, the love of God who renews the face of the earth, and each one of us who yield our lives to Him.

This pure, essential, and personal 'fire of love,' which came down upon the Apostles gathered in prayer with Mary in the Upper Room in Jerusalem.

When we were Confirmed, and the Bishop - a successor of the Apostles - laid his hands upon our heads, we received the same Holy Spirit those Christians did on the first Pentecost; but more often than not we let it lie dormant and asleep in our lives.

"This is why [to paraphrase the words of Paul to his disciple, Timothy]

I remind you to fan into flames the spiritual gift God gave you when [the Bishop] laid [his] hands on you." 2 Tim. 1: 6 so that we can, without fear, proclaim the Good News of the Crucified, and Risen Christ to all.