

Let the Spirit do the talking

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Back in the dark ages of the 20th century, I remember an ad for the Yellow Pages that urged, "Let your fingers do the walking." Now that texting has become the preferred means of communication, it seems our fingers actually do the talking.

I've been thinking about the complexity of communication with God, especially the challenge of praying at times when words are hard to come by. In response to such a dilemma, Paul essentially tells the Romans to let the Spirit do the talking.

The Bible includes a variety of episodes in which mortals engage in dialogue with God. Whether these encounters are prototypical or literal is a topic for another discussion. My point is that in these conversations, God speaks and understands the language of the people.

The Pentecost story emphasizes that language barriers were at least momentarily suspended. In a miracle attributed to the Spirit, Luke records that "each one heard their own language being spoken" (Acts 2:6).

Writing to the Romans, Paul addresses a unique communication dilemma, a topic I do not see specifically considered by other biblical writers. What happens when you are at a loss for words to formulate your prayer to God? Paul asserts, "Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but that very Spirit intercedes with sighs too deep for words" (Romans 8:26 RSV).

What if my grief is so profound, my anxiety is so high, or my depression is so deep that I lose the capacity to articulate my prayer to God? Paul proposes that the Spirit can bypass the vocal chords and interpret directly from our internal communication

center.

When my wife and I visited China, our traveling companions brought a digital language translator. We would speak a word in English, and the digital device would translate it into Chinese. It also gave us specific dialects, such as Mandarin or Cantonese, which enabled us to order meals, ask for directions, and communicate with cab drivers.

As Pentecost approaches, I am encouraged to know that the Spirit is fluent in my inner dialect and can translate my unspoken prayers with pinpoint precision.