

House of Bishops

Phoenix, AZ, September 16-21, 2010

From Babylon to Pentecost

History of a Diocese

*“Now the whole earth had one language and the same words. And as they migrated from the east, they came upon a plain in the land of Shinar and settled there. And they said to one another, ‘Come, let us make bricks, and burn them thoroughly.’ And they had brick for stone, and bitumen for mortar. Then they 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; otherwise we shall be scattered abroad upon the face of the whole earth.’ The **Lord** came down to see the city and the tower, which mortals had built. And the **Lord** said, ‘Look, they are one people, and they have all one language; and this is only the beginning of what they will do; nothing that they propose to do will now be impossible for them. Come, let us go down, and confuse their language there, so that they will not understand one another’s speech.’ So the **Lord** scattered them abroad from there over the face of all the earth, and they left off building the city. Therefore it was called Babel, because there the **Lord** confused the language of all the earth; and from there the **Lord** scattered them abroad over the face of all the earth.” (Genesis 11: 1-9)*

*“So when they had come together, they asked **Jesus**, ‘**Lord**, is this the time when you will restore the kingdom to Israel?’ **Jesus** replied, ‘It is not for you to know the times or periods that the **Father (Mother)** has set by his (her) own authority. But you will receive power when the **Holy Spirit** has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.’” (Acts 1: 6-8)*

The coming of the Holy Spirit

*“When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly from heaven there came a sound like the rush of a violent wind, and it filled the entire house where they were sitting. Divided tongues, as of fire, appeared among them, and a tongue rested on each of them. All of them were filled with the **Holy Spirit** and began to speak in other languages, as the **Spirit** gave them ability. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven living in Jerusalem. And at this sound the crowd gathered and was bewildered, because each one heard them speaking in the native language of each. Amazed and astonished, they asked, ‘Are not all these who are speaking Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? Parthians, Medes, Elamites, and residents of Mesopotamia, Judea and Cappadocia, Pontus and Asia, Phrygia and Pamphylia, Egypt and the parts of Libya belonging to Cyrene, and*

visitors from Rome, both Jews and proselytes, Cretans and Arabs—in our own languages we hear them speaking about God’s deeds of power.’ All were amazed and perplexed, saying to one another, ‘What does this mean?’ But others sneered and said, ‘They are filled with new wine’.” (Acts 2: 1-13)

Peter’s speech

“But **Peter**, standing with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed them: ‘Men of Judea and all who live in Jerusalem, let this be known to you, and listen to what I say. Indeed, these are not drunk, as you suppose, for it is only nine o’clock in the morning. No, this is what was spoken through the prophet Joel: ‘In the last days it will be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams. Even upon my slaves, both men and women, in those days I will pour out my Spirit; and they shall prophesy’.” (Acts 2: 14-18)

“Tend the flock of **God** that is in your charge, exercising the oversight, not under compulsion but willingly, as **God** would have you do it—not for sordid gain but eagerly. Do not lord it over those in your charge, but be examples to the flock.” (1 Peter 5: 2-3)

Dear Brothers and Sisters,

I never imagined that, one year from my consecration as bishop, I would have the privilege and joy of sharing with you about the experience of my ministry, that which I have called: "**From Babylon to Pentecost**".

When through this **House of Bishops**, the **Lord** chose me to be the **Bishop of Central Ecuador**, everything seemed to be shadows, the future did not seem to be promising, the internal struggles, the conflicts, the long history of difficulties through which the **Diocese** had passed, seemed to have created barriers which were difficult to overcome. After the joy of the election came the sadness, the terrible and negative events brought about by some of the deputies of the **Diocese** to the **General Convention**, and finally the shameful intervention of some in the liturgy of my consecration. But now, here I stand before you, to tell you that the **Lord** had a purpose that is being fulfilled; **He** is with us and, gradually, we are reconstructing the **Diocese of Central Ecuador**.

During this time, the refrain of a beautiful Cuban song has resonated in my ears: "**We care for the garden, the garden of hope, pulling out the thistles, the thorns, but losing neither the way nor the destination.**" That was my ministry this year, caring for the garden which is the **Diocese of Central Ecuador**, pulling out thistles and thorns, but keeping to the path and looking to the horizon, as the chorus of a hymn, composed in long hours of prayer and ministry by the Lutheran Bishop (Uruguay) **Federico Pagura**, says: "**That is why today we have hope,**

that is why today we stubbornly struggle, that is why today we confidently look toward the future."

The seemingly impossible difficulties of reorganizing the **Diocese** are being overcome. We have been blessed with the prayer and support of **TEC**, with the heroic fidelity of some priests and many laity, with the endurance of Episcopalians who were convinced that the **Diocese** would not succumb to the acts of interference, to the power struggles, to the lack of respect for the institution, to the corruption, to the violence and terrorism. They all, with their healthy attitudes, are allowing us to move forward and, as the song says, "***confidently look toward the future.***"

Because of this, when Bishop **Clay** invited me to participate with a reflection, I was afraid, very afraid to speak to you. I was going to say no, but I was encouraged by the biblical words which I learned in my childhood, when I participated in **Sunday School**, "***And I came to you in weakness and in fear and in much trembling***" (see 1 Corinthians 2: 3).

After the fear and while preparing this reflection, I thought of the two biblical figures of "***Babylon and Pentecost***". They bear testimony to our relentless march, to our unity of purpose, despite our cultural differences and the diverse languages which distinguish us - Spanish, Quichua, English, French and other indigenous languages that I know exist in Ecuador and other parts of the world, and to the mission to which we are called in this hour of history.

During this year, it has been necessary to be firm, to compassionately use authority, to discipline in many cases, and as **Don Quixote** said (in **Cervantes's** classic work): "***to right wrongs***"; as **John the Baptist**, **to make the way smooth**. I must confess that for my ministry this process has not been easy. Sometimes I have been strongly criticized, but I also have received a lot of support and accompaniment in order to continue to stand firm in the struggle.

One of my priests, who in my childhood and youth was my pastor in the **Diocese of Colombia**, when he received me as his **Bishop** in the **Diocese of Central Ecuador**, said to me: "***Bishop, it's time for the belt,***" referring to the discipline that must be administered and because of which some have left, preferring other denominations. But along with the pain which always accompanies the departures, I must honestly say that they have left at a good moment. It is rather difficult to understand this episcopal responsibility, but, repeating my priest, it is clear that we needed to take off the belt, we needed authority.

In order to grow it has been necessary to empower the laity and give them many responsibilities. In the same way, the priests that have withstood the difficulty with courage have taken on countless responsibilities. But the blessing is not wanting, and we have grown in numbers, in identity and in a sense of belonging. The **Parishes - Missions** have been strengthened, we have more leadership. In my opinion, for the **Diocese of Central Ecuador**, the confusion of **Babel** is being

reversed and a new unity for the diocesan family is beginning to be possible, all working for one and one for all, for the sole purpose of building the **Kingdom of God**, putting aside the petty personal interests; as **Bishop Stephen Neill** said: "***Babel is communication broken; Pentecost, communication restored.***" Or put another way: "***Disobedience, infidelity, excessive craving of power separate, scatter as at Babel; obedience, fidelity, unity of purpose unite, communicate as at Pentecost.***"

Let me conclude with two joyful announcements:

In one year we have three new congregations in the Diocese, as I will proudly announce in the next **Diocesan Convention**.

On October 2nd of this year, despite the difficulties, I will ordain three new priests, my first priests. You all are invited, and if the distances do not permit us to be together, please always hold the **Diocese of Central Ecuador** in your prayers.

I left the land of my father and my mother, with **Tania**, my good wife, and my adopted children, as **Abraham and Sara** left, trusting in the promise: "***Go from your country and your kindred and your father's house to the land that I will show you. I will make of you a great nation, and I will bless you, and make your name great, so that you will be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, and the one who curses you I will curse; and in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed***" (Genesis 12: 1-3).

We have placed our hope and our trust in the **God** who promised blessings for us; that is why we are convinced **that the promised blessing will overflow in the Diocese of Central Ecuador**.

In the love of the Lamb.

LUIS FERNANDO RUIZ

Bishop (Diocese of Central Ecuador)