

James J. Bacik

Introduction

1. The common problems in achieving good personal communication are intensified by electronic media especially cell phones.
2. Luke wrote Acts of the Apostles to encourage and strengthen Christians in their faith.
3. Pentecost brings the Easter Season to a close.
4. Reading: *Reclaiming Conversation: The Power of Talk in the Digital Age* by Sherry Turkle.

I. Challenges to effective personal communication

A. Common human problems

1. Failure to listen while preparing a response.
2. Dominating conversations – using language to control the other.
3. Too reticent to speak up.
4. Failure to perceive the intent and perception of the others.
5. Language conveys meaning and has a function.

B. Challenges in the digital age

1. Electronic media especially phones impede genuine conversation. Many people prefer texting to conversations because they can control content, length and timing.
2. With the “flight from conversation” we become less empathetic, less self-reflective, less able to manage the complexities of personal interactions, less likely to form genuine communities, less creative, less fulfilled.
3. Young people who grow up with phones do not know the joys and advantages of conversation and some older people might have forgotten them.
4. The mere presence of a phone as people eat together or work together detracts from conversation that is always fragmented.
5. People use any downtime or period of boredom to check their phones since we are accustomed to constant stimulation – no time for reflection.
6. With mobile devices always present, young people do not know the joys and challenges of face-to-face interactions. They tend to respond and apologize by texting where they can get the words right and not have to deal with unexpected responses.
7. Social media encourages us to make ourselves look good and hide our vulnerabilities.
8. The phone can function like “my tiny god,” an idol that claims our attention.
9. Presence of phone promises we will always be heard and never be alone or bored.
10. Turkel insists that if we recognize the problem we can learn to use social media to enhance our humanity and create community.

II. Acts of the Apostles

A. Background

1. Written around 85 by Luke as sequel to his Gospel

2. Luke the author was well educated, knew Judaism, skilled writer, investigated sources (Mark, Q) material on Paul's missionary journeys.
3. Purpose: to energize Christians.

B. Speeches

1. About one-third of Acts consists of speeches mostly by Peter but also Stephen, Paul and James. They tell us the significance of what is happening.
2. Luke was not present for their speeches. The five stereotypical kerygmatic speeches of Peter may be shaped by memories of early apostolic preaching. Some scholars think they are composed by Luke. In any case they help develop the theological message of Acts that God's plan was at work in the spread of Christianity.

III. Pentecost Acts Ch. 2

A. Historical background

1. Feast of Weeks: 50 days after Passover included Exodus themes brought pilgrims to Jerusalem.
2. The Galilean disciples of Jesus came and received the Holy Spirit (speaking in tongues) a sign that they should proclaim the good news publicly.
3. It is likely Luke gives dramatic form to a development over time and space of the Christian mission.

B. The pilgrims hear the disciples speaking in their own language about God's marvelous deeds.

1. The imagery of wind and fire is from Hebrew Scriptures and suggest God is renewing the covenant and forming a people of his own.
2. The people who hear the good news are from the far reaches of the Roman Empire so that Pentecost anticipates Gentiles joining the people of God.
3. Some commentaries see Pentecost reversing Babel when languages were confused because of human pride.

C. Peter's speech (2: 1-36)

1. We are not drunk but prophesy of Joel is being fulfilled that the Spirit would be active at the end time.
2. Although Jesus put the emphasis on the kingdom and not himself, the Apostles proclaim what God has done in Jesus: his mighty deeds, death on the cross, resurrection and scriptural evidence he was Lord and Messiah. This represents the core Gospel message proclaimed by the Church.

D. Reception (2: 37-45)

1. Peter made demands on his audience; repent (change your outlook); he baptized for forgiveness of sin (a public way of joining the community); he baptized in the name of Jesus Christ (confessing his identity); they will receive the Holy Spirit (as did Peter and the disciples – no second class Christians).
2. About 3,000 accepted the demands and were baptized.
3. The Jerusalem Christians lived in certain idealized ways: as community of fellowship (*koinonia*) sharing goods, eventually united with Gentiles who generously supported them; they prayed for one another using Jewish prayer forms and the Lord's Prayer and went regularly to the Temple to pray; they celebrated the Eucharist, the breaking of the bread in

- their homes which had an expectation of the return of Christ at the end time (until he comes); teaching of the Apostles - - the Law and Prophets with the revisions made by Jesus.
4. Their life in community showed both continuity with Judaism (going to the Temple, reading Hebrew Scriptures) and discontinuity by their acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah. The separation into separate religions would take time.

IV. Guidance from Acts

A. In general

1. Communication can flourish in communities of shared traditions, beliefs and practices.
2. We are social beings, interdependent creatures who need personal interactions to grow and develop.
3. We need some minimal shared values: for example, conversation as a vehicle for discovering truth.

B. More specifically

1. Political realm: we hold these truths to be self-evident; all created equal with inalienable rights; must cherish and defend the pursuit of truth – our great challenge in a post-truth society; must talk and collaborate across party lines.
2. Religious realm: need interfaith and ecumenical dialogue based on shared beliefs (for example one God for Abrahamic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam): working together for peace, justice, sustainable environment (Chinese wisdom traditions and Indian mystical traditions); faith communities pray together, share goods, celebrate common beliefs; for Catholics, Eucharist is focal point of unity, a shared meal that overcomes divisions, a sacred time not bound by watches and phones.
3. Family: domestic church, building block of society; place where we learn to deal with imperfection and to communicate despite differences and celebrate for the good of all; importance of family traditions, working, playing and worshipping together; learning to forgive and not identify the others with their transgressions; value of silence; manage technology by turning off TV in order to talk, no phones at meals or family discussions.
4. Personal: respect uniqueness of the other; pass over to their viewpoint and return to self-enriched; learn what pleases and what disrupts; do not expect total understanding; be able to set aside personal needs to attend to the other; manage technology, set aside phones when talking; apologize in person and not by text.

C. Advice adapted from Sherry Turkle (pp.319-330)

1. Attitudes: Remember the power of our phones which influence not just what we do but who we are. Their presence divides our attention and limits conversation. We must make prudent decisions to manage our use of electronic media (phones, computers, television, Facebook, Instagram) remembering that we can reclaim conversation. Phones offer illusion of control and intimacy. They do provide access to information and connections but not the deeper knowledge of conversation.
2. Meditate regularly. Slow down, put aside the phone and computers. Enjoy solitude. Nourish creativity. Think things through. Imagine possibilities. Do creative daydreaming. Experiment with two types of meditation (Ignatian imaginative meditation and mind clearing centering prayer or transcendental meditation). Cultivate play and leisure without mobile devices. Develop capacity for solitude.

3. Create sacred spaces for conversation: family meals with no phones present; cafeteria at work; standup meetings; classrooms with no phones allowed; rooms at worksites with no digital connections; church services with phones off. Remember the mere presence of phones impedes conversation.
4. Concentrate on “unitasking,” doing one thing at a time with full attention. Contrary to popular opinion, multitasking (for example, answering email during a meeting) is less productive and more inefficient. Attentive conversation is a good way to practice “unitasking.”
5. Talk to people who are different with various ways of viewing life, religion, politics, economics, and public policies. Conversation is inhibited not only by distractions but also by prejudices. Staying in our own echo-chamber is cozy but keeps us from learning new things.
6. Learn to tolerate silence, boredom and enjoy surprises that occur in conversations. This helps us live real life which is not controllable like digital connections and specific apps. Mobile devices help create the illusion that life is predictable and controllable.
7. Recognize that electronic media (smart phones, texting, video conferencing) are good for some things like sharing information and staying connected but are not a universal tool good for everything (not good for apologizing or judging an employee’s potential) and are not substitutes for face to face encounters with eye contact and genuine conversations which bring emotional stability and social fluency.
8. Remember the contrast between genuine conversations when we were present, engaged, absorbed, and attentive to the needs of the other and distracted connections when our attention was divided and we felt vaguely unsatisfied and unfulfilled. Constant use of phones can make us forget the value of real conversation. A father who has his phone when playing catch with his son knows it is different than when he played with his father.
9. Join the public conversation on digital privacy, foreign influences on elections, and advertiser’s use of our personal data and also on transparency (what rights do we have to know how we are being manipulated by those with access to data (political parties, extremists, corporations, government, advertisers). This conversation is about public policies (for example Congressional hearings on use of Facebook data).
10. Avoid the binary thinking fostered by the digital world. We are tempted to all or nothing thinking about many issues for against, distance learning, cell phones in meetings and classrooms, use of Facebook, government access to information on citizens. We need to find practical solutions, middle ground compromises, and prudent use of tablets, phones, and reasonable restrictions on use of phones by youth.

Accessing other Father James Bacik lectures and reflections is easy:

You can access previous lectures at: www.frjimbacik.org and you can access WGTE's video library of Father Bacik lectures at the Franciscan Center at: www.knowledgestream.org

If you would like to receive Father James Bacik's Weekly Meditations and Monthly Reflection, send your request to jamesbacik@gmail.com

Father Bacik's 2018 Lecture Dates at the Franciscan Center:

Thursday, May 31: Sixth Annual Karl Rahner Lecture

"Ordinary Grace: Human Life as Sacramental"

Guest Speaker: Mary Catherine Hilker, O.P.

Thursday, July 12: Pope Francis and His Critics on Clergy Sex Abuse

Thursday, August 9 (Topic TBA)

Thursday, September 13, 2018 (Topic TBA)

Thursday, October 11 (Topic TBA)

Thursday, November 8 (Topic TBA)

Thursday, December 13, Advent Reflection

Thursdays, 5:30 p.m. – 7:00 p.m. in the Franciscan Center

\$10 Pre-registered; \$15 at the door

Register online at www.sylvaniafranciscanvillage.org, or pre-register by calling Laurie Bertke at 419-824-3515 or emailing lbartke@sistersosf.org