

Saints Cyril & Methodius
Homily on 1 Cor 15:12-20 by The Rev Timothy A Leitzke

Well, it's fitting to spend this cold, snowy, icy morning talking about the patron saints of cold places in Eastern Europe. Yes, February 14 is St Valentine's Day; it is also the commemoration of St Cyril and St Methodius, who were missionaries to the Slavs. Czechs, Serbs, Croats, Slovaks, & Bulgarians all regard these two Greek brothers as founders of Slavic literature. They got this distinction by inventing an alphabet. Old Slavonic, the Slavic language, was not a written language, so Cyril & Methodius, Greek monks that they were, used their Greek alphabet as a starting point and added characters to represent the sounds not made in Greek. The result was the Cyrillic alphabet. (There's no word if Methodius ever complained about the snub!) Old Slavonic could be written. The Slavic world grew up. By the year 1000 Russia had embraced Orthodox Christianity and used the Cyrillic alphabet to communicate it.

Cyril and Methodius gave the Slavs a language—a written one. Imagine having faith without a language. Could you? It's a perennial philosophical question. Naming things is such a human thing to do that faith cannot really develop if a person does not have the language of faith. The Church equips people with a language of faith so that we can better

understand our faith, and deepen our relationships with God and with each other. Some things defy description; for everything else, there's language.

Language, especially written language, enables us to communicate faith across the centuries. It's how Paul can tell us, 2,000 years removed from his life, that Jesus lived, was crucified and died, and was raised from death, and that this gives us hope, because just as God raised Christ, God will raise each of us. That's the language of hope, and since we have a language of hope we can have hope itself. In that sense, our Church and our worship life as a Church are language lessons. We're here to learn how to name things. We learn the language of the Law, so that we can name Sin, so that we can identify where we are broken, and so that we can understand this as our human condition. We learn the language of the Gospel, so that we can name grace, so that we can identify where we are forgiven and healed, and so that we can begin to comprehend the love that God has for us.

So we thank Cyril and Methodius for their gift of written language to our Orthodox brothers and sisters in Christ, we thank all who labor to communicate the faith to us, and we thank God for the faith God gives us, and the love and grace poured out for us, which we can only begin to describe in human language. Amen