

Trinity 10

I take as my text from today's Epistle of St. Paul to the Church at Corinth:

....the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be always acceptable unto thee, O Lord, my Strength and my Redeemer.”

Our parish is blessed to have among its members a great variety of gifts, as St. Paul might say, gifts that translate into talents.

Often we take these talents for granted, and, though may see them in a more down-to-earth light; nevertheless, their origin is not worldly but spiritual, as each are given to us according to our own ability. They are gifts to us through God's Grace.

We could very well compare these gifts to the talents in the Parable where three servants are given a certain amount by their master to take care of until his return — an investment. The gifts entrusted to us are, also, much like an investment. We are not to bury them like the one servant did; but grow them, so that at the master's return, when we are called to account, we may be likewise rewarded and received into the master's joy.

While some gifts, or talents, may seem more spectacular, or more important, than others, they are all supplied by the Holy Spirit through the Grace of God, and, while we might consider one gift of the Spirit, such as preaching, being more important than another, such as usher, they are all equally important in the sight of God, and in the healthy functioning of the Church as a living body.

In today's Epistle, St. Paul gives us a picture of the early Church as something that is vibrant and lively; there was nothing dull and ordinary about the early Church. Astonishing things happened within the Church then, through the working of the Holy Spirit, much that could and should happen within the Church today.

Now, in his letter to the Corinthians, St. Paul points out that each of us in this life has been endowed with certain gifts that, when properly used, are an integral part of the Church as the Living Body of Christ.

We cannot all be imbued with the same gift to the same degree. If we were, nothing would get done. But, we each have a certain gift of the Spirit to a degree that makes us an integral, inseparable part of the Living Body of Christ.

Toward the end of this 12th Chapter of First Corinthians, St. Paul says:

Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, Helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Are all Workers of miracles?

Have all the gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?

This was not meant to be just a list of offices, or functions within the Church, but individual gifts, with some of us possessing multiple gifts. Paul, for example, was an Apostle, prophet, teacher, miracle worker, and spoke with tongues. His example, though, is unusual in the normal life of the Church.

If we look at Paul's list of gifts in more of a 21st century perspective, we might say that:

Apostles could be defined as commissioned witnesses of Christ's Resurrection and founders or organizers of Churches.

Prophets are those who are inspired to reveal God's mind.

Teachers give instruction regarding the faith and the bearing of religion upon life and conduct.

Helpers would include such work as that of deacons, or even laity, who minister to the poor and sick and perform other functions as well.

Governments refer to the powers of organization and administration and could even include much of the work of the bishop or a priest.

Speaking in tongues and their interpretation: well, Paul seemingly lists them at the bottom because they had become so overvalued by the church at Corinth. Truly, some people could be filled with such ecstasy that their utterances would not be understood except by an interpreter; but grave danger lay in this practice for the authenticity of the utterance and its interpretation was difficult to discern.

Now, you may be wondering, what is the point of all this.

Simply to emphasize that each of us has been entrusted with gifts of the Spirit to use, grow, and develop. And in the life of the Church, of our parish, where we are a unit, one living body, the health and vibrancy of that body depends upon each of us. Not that any one of us is required to be perfect or possess many gifts. Not that any one gift is less important than another. Not that we are all limited to one gift.

But more importantly, the indwelling of the Holy Spirit raises us up to meet the challenges of maintaining a healthy, living body we call the Church.

For some of us, attending services regularly may be our gift; indeed, that's a gift we all can share!

For some, serving on the vestry may be a gift. A parish must have members willing to put their energy into providing administrative functions, visible leadership, and taking care of the physical as well as fiscal needs of the Parish.

For some, serving as an usher or acolyte, lay reader or choir member, may be a gift.

And, for some, participating in the Altar Guild may be a gift. Preparing the Altar for services, cleansing the vessels and laundering the linens are indeed a sacred duty.

The list continues, and not in order of importance: helping with coffee hour, calling on parishioners, making telephone checks of others when they are ill or unable to attend service; tithing; providing music for the services; or just reaching out to others in so many ways.

Just as difficult as it would be for us to function as human beings without a member or organ of our own body, so it is with the Church, with the parish.

Even when we walk out the front door of the church after services, after coffee hour, we continue to be part of the one Body of Christ and members of a family in Christ, in particular, the parish family.

If we read further on in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, St. Paul tells us that it may be well and good to possess these gifts of the Holy Spirit, but they do us no good unless we put them to use, in particular, put them to use in the spirit of love.

We have the perfect opportunity right here in our parish. We have such potential to make it grow and shine in the sight of God, in His Church, and in this community.

If we open our hearts and minds to God through prayer and meditation, then He will respond, providing the inspiration and power we need to activate the gift or gifts with which we have been imbued through His Grace.

And what could be a more inspirational moment than when we receive the Body and Blood of Christ in the consecrated bread and wine of the Holy Eucharist, a moment when we are brought into the most close and intimate communion with our Lord and Saviour.

If we listen; if we can put aside for just a few moments our worldly cares and concerns; if we can shut out the noise and distractions of the world for just a few moments; then, we can hear God's call. It's rarely an obvious call, as in the story of Samuel. It's most often a stirring within, a feeling, or an inspiration, which grows and grows — if we allow it to — until that special gift is revealed.

Whether corporately or privately, let us pray; let us meditate; let us listen with our hearts and minds so that God's gifts may be revealed to us; that we may accept those gifts of the spirit; and that we may put them to use in His service.

There is nothing more rewarding than to recognize God's call and respond, allowing ourselves to be changed into instruments of His Peace.