

Almighty God, who set in Your Church some with gifts to teach and help and administer, in diversity of operation but of the same Spirit: Grant to all such, we beseech You, grace to wait on the service which they have received in the body of Christ with simplicity, diligence, and cheerfulness; that none may seek another *person's* calling, but rather to be found faithful in his own work; to the glory of Your name in Christ Jesus our Lord. Amen. (Parish Prayers, ed. Frank Colquhoun, p. 45)

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers, I do not want you to be uninformed. You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, however you were led. Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit. Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. ... And God has appointed in the church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way.

In Christ Jesus, whose Church is gifted by the Spirit as He sees fit for His eternal purposes, dear fellow redeemed:

Consider how conniving the unjust steward was in our Gospel lesson for today. That is typical for the world, whether it is in business, politics, the workplace, classroom, right down to its most personal relationships. Jesus calls upon His followers to apply the shrewdness common to us all but without dishonesty and falsehood.

God the Holy Spirit Himself is as harmless as a dove but as wise as a serpent as He works through His Church in the world, which is filled with those who are lost. However He desires all to be found and saved forever. Among His tools are you and your brothers and sisters in the Church. Let us consider how it is that **God Calls His Gifted People for the Common Good of All.**

### I

First we need to recognize that all people, believers and unbelievers have been gifted by God with creaturely gifts. What our text is addressing are spiritual gifts. In part these are creaturely gifts that are sanctified by the Spirit for the people who comprise His Church here on earth. Certainly there are the supernatural gifts the

Spirit has bestowed upon the Church at times like doing miracles, healings and speaking in other languages never studied.

These latter may seem more impressive to us, but the Spirit does not make such distinctions. His gifting is done to benefit the Church at large not to bestow personal individual glory. We live in a culture that seeks and rewards individual accomplishments without recognizing the common good, which a wide variety of gifts provide.

Paul reminds the Corinthian Christians where they came from when he writes: "You know that when you were pagans you were led astray to mute idols, ... Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking in the Spirit of God ever says "Jesus is accursed!" and no one can say "Jesus is Lord" except in the Holy Spirit." When they were unbelievers, again they had creaturely gifts but they were employed in service to false gods who could not speak nor act for their benefit. Their gifts were not sanctified in service to the one true God who in love has saved them in Jesus.

Now these Corinthian Christians acknowledged Jesus as Lord, but it was not by their own reason or strength. They made such a confession because the Spirit gifted them with faith. This faith brought them forgiveness, life and salvation, the gifts secured by the blood and righteousness of Jesus in behalf of all sinners.

Creaturely gifts should not be demeaned or dismissed in any way. The world needs them. You and I who live in this world as citizens of this world, need such gifts in our rulers and leaders, our judges and magistrates, our law enforcement officers and emergency medical teams, our teachers and doctors, our scientists and engineers, our mechanics and farmers, among our white collar and blue collar workers. Whether they are believers or not, these gifts distributed among all men by our Creator should be recognized and the Creator should be thanked and praised as we do in the 4<sup>th</sup> petition of the LP.

## II

Among us as Christians we have been given spiritual gifts transforming our many and varied creaturely gifts empowering us to love sacrificially, give generously and forgive freely. Regardless of the different gifts in varying degrees and enhanced by various levels of education in which we have received them, the Spirit leads us to receive them all, great and small, spectacular and unspectacular, as pure gifts from our gracious God.

When we recognize that all these gifts come from the Spirit, we also realize that He is not concerned about the differences between the gifts but only about the way we use them. In our eyes human actions and works vary in glory and importance. In God's eyes the different works

themselves are not what is important. Rather, He looks chiefly for our response to Him in our works and vocations.

Our response to Him comes from hearts motivated by the great things He has done for us, especially in regard to salvation. Without Christ our gifts and their accomplishments are chiefly done to serve self. But with faith in Christ who sacrificed all for us, so that we might live with Him forever in the glories of heaven, we see the gifts He gives us to serve Him by serving neighbor.

Paul states it this way: “Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” This is quite a contrast with the unjust steward in the Gospel lesson, who used his gifts to serve self, certainly not his master, but also not serving even those to whom he gave the dishonest discounts, so they might feel obligated to provide him lodging in the future.

In his letter to the Roman Christians Paul described it according to how the body has many members, but not all members have the same work- eyes, hands, feet, mouth etc. So we are many members of one Christian congregation, but not all of us have the same work. Everyone ought to look after his own work, and not that of another. So we should live together in simple obedience, in a harmonious purpose for the common good.

It is by paying attention to our vocations that we become useful members of the whole body of Christ. As Paul asks: “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret?” The answer to each and all the rest that could be asked – *absolutely not!* - but we need one another as God has seen fit to provide.

“But earnestly desire the higher gifts.” What are they? Chapter 13 speaks of them – faith, hope and love. As believers we share all three, again not by our doing, but by the gracious working of the Spirit among us. If you were to strip away all the other gifts we have individually as members of the body of Christ these are the three that remain and are for our eternal welfare. But again, as pointed out, Paul says: “I will show you a still more excellent way.” The way is love. Hope and faith fade away once we are safely in heaven with body and soul, but love will continue to be shown to God and to neighbor in everlasting righteousness in the courts of heaven.

In reviewing all this, we can become struck with an overwhelming feeling of failure. We can confess to envying others' gifts. We can confess to violating by intruding upon others' vocations. We can confess not using our gifts for the common good, failing to love, serving ourselves first, being stingy, and unforgiving. But this is why we cherish faith now – faith in the One who was perfect in all these ways and more. Jesus was perfect for us and for all our unrighteousness He was charged and punished.

Through this faith and hope you are able to say with all sincerity: "*Jesus is Lord*". Now you get to be informed about all your gifts given to you by the Spirit, not to squander on self, but to use for the common good of all. Jesus is Lord and you are His redeemed servant now and forevermore. Amen.