

THE COMMON GOOD

1 Corinthians 12:4-12

Celebrating Christmas is generally done by honoring others with gifts. But we need to remember, now and then, that God has honored us with His gifts. The greatest gift is Jesus Christ. God gave us His Son. Jesus is the incarnation of God. God gave Himself to the world to save us from sin. But then, in honor of Jesus, God gave us His Holy Spirit, the Spirit of Truth. (John 14:16-17)

“To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good! (2 Corinthians 12:7)

We need to realize that the Truth is the foundation of the common good. What is built on that foundation needs to affirm it. Each of us is meant to affirm the truth of the faith, and each of us is given a spiritual gift in order to help build the Church. The gifts we are given are not for our own benefit, necessarily, though we *can* benefit personally from them, they are given for the glory of God.

The gifts listed in 1 Corinthians 12:8-10, that were read a moment ago, include wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, the working of miracles, being able to prophesy, discernment, tongues, (or, languages), and interpreting tongues. There are nine. I don't think we should feel limited to thinking that these 9 gifts cover all the possible manifestations of the Holy Spirit, unless you claim that some of those listed cover a great number of what we might call abilities and talents; like engineering skills, mathematics and physics, science, and research... or, singing, musical abilities, and dancing. Skills *can* be developed that can very obviously bring glory to God. But, if they don't, are they merely human endeavors? Like acting or athletic agility? Aren't we all supposed to build a common good? Then why do so many very gifted people pursue their *own* benefit from what they can do, or, have done? Perhaps their abilities are not necessarily a manifestation of the Holy Spirit.

This is the paradox of giftedness. Does wisdom or knowledge cover financial or economic skills; do they cover engineering or tailoring? Could discernment cover some business or political skills? Since all honest work is blessed, could spiritual giftedness be applied to almost everything done under the sun? Or, are skills and special abilities just an example of human ingenuity or creativity? However we might discern these things we can always recognize that there is a common good to which each of us can contribute.

But... by faith, we are to see ourselves and each other as all a part of the Body of Christ! Paul said a few verses later in this chapter: *“Now you (plural) are the Body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the Church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers; then deeds of power, then gifts of healing, forms of assistance (or helps), forms of leadership, 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 interpret? Do all speak in tongues?”* (2 Corinthians 12:27-30) These are rhetorical questions. The answer is obvious. Of course a few people can possess more than one or two gifts. And then he says, *“But earnestly desire the greater gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way!”* And then comes his wonderful chapter about love!

John Wesley spoke about the relevance of the spiritual gifts, but he explained their decline following Constantine's establishing Christianity as the official religion of the Roman Empire, and the

evolution of the dry institutional Church, as the result of the way the love of many had "*waxed cold.*" You see, as Paul explained, without love, it's all *nothing!* (1 Corinthians 13:2-3)

Our first purpose, as followers of Christ, is love. Love is both a gift and a fruit of faith. And if our faith does not manifest itself in love, any other manifestation of the Holy Spirit will seem empty. Love validates our gifts.

God had loved us so much that He gave us His Son! That's the greatest gift we can receive! When we accept Jesus, we accept the most precious gift God has given. And when we accept Jesus, believe in Him, His Spirit begins to take its place in our lives. As that Baptism, the Baptism of the Holy Spirit, makes its effect known in our lives, which is often stifled by our resistance because we don't completely surrender to it, it will manifest its presence in our lives by cultivating the spiritual gifts He wants us to have.

So we need to accept God's love, *and*, surrender to the Holy Spirit in order for God's spiritual gifts to grow in our lives. Never forget that love needs to come first, though. The spiritual gifts will follow.

And more important, though, than the spiritual gifts is the common good – the Truth. The truth about Christ. The truth about love. The truth of salvation.

"To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good!"