



DAILY FAITH PRACTICES

The Day of Pentecost (A) – 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Focus: *The Gift of the Spirit*

word of life

“Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone.” (1 Corinthians 12:4-6 NRSV)

Read 1 Corinthians 12:3b-13

Today is the festival Sunday of Pentecost—a day in the church year celebrating the gift of the Holy Spirit and the gifts the Spirit gives which form and shape the community of believers. It is a major festival of the church and is often seen as the birthday of the church.

1. *Are there special things (special music, decorations, etc.) done in your congregation to celebrate Pentecost Sunday? What are some of them?*

Today’s reading from Paul’s letter to the Corinthians addresses the gift of the Spirit and the gifts given through the Spirit to the whole church. It seems that some in the church believed that certain spiritual gifts were of more importance than others. Elitism was expressed as those who were gifted with these gifts were lifted up as being a “better” or more spiritual believer.

2. *Why is elitism sometimes experienced when gifts are recognized and affirmed?*
3. *How can we keep this from happening in the church?*

Paul begins with the foundational gift of God to the Church—the gift of faith. “And no one can say ‘Jesus is Lord’ except by the Holy Spirit.” (1 Corinthians 13:3b NRSV) The very confession of belief in Christ is a gift from the Spirit. Martin Luther, in his explanation of the Apostles’ Creed in the Small Catechism, wrote. “I believe that I cannot, by my own understanding or effort, believe in Jesus Christ my Lord or come to him. But the Holy Spirit called me through the Gospel, enlightened me with his gifts, and sanctified and kept me in the one true faith.”

4. *Do you agree with Luther’s statement: “I believe that I cannot, by my own understanding or effort, believe in Jesus Christ....”? Why, or why not?*

The gift of faith is manifested in the variety of gifts given by the Holy Spirit. As Paul affirms diversity—there are varieties of gifts, there are varieties of services, there are varieties of activities—he emphasizes unity. The same Spirit and Lord activates these gifts for the sake of the body of Christ. The gifts of the Spirit are given not for the sake of building up the individual. The litmus test by which Paul defines spiritual gifts is whether or not the gifts are expressed and shared for the building up of the community of faith. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7 NRSV)

5. *Think of your congregation. How are the gifts of the Spirit expressed in your community of faith?*
6. *Think of some examples of individuals who willingly share their gifts for the common good.*

“All these are activated by one and the same Spirit who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.” (1 Corinthians 12:11 NRSV) In the body of Christ, no gift is greater than another. In the body of Christ, all are included and valued—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free (vs. 13). In the body of Christ, the gifts shared build up the whole community. “For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body” (1 Corinthians 12:13 NRSV)

Word among us

Shirley was a special member of the congregation. Some might describe her as “differently-abled.” Some might use the word “handicapped” or “disabled” or “mentally challenged” or “slow.” The congregation had learned long ago and had grown accustomed to Shirley’s verbal outbursts and comments made when she agreed with something said in the sermon. They accepted her boisterous singing with the choir, even though she was always out of tune. That was just Shirley.

One Sunday, a family new to the community came to worship at Shirley’s church. They were looking for a church home. The mother couldn’t believe how distracting Shirley was. As the family sat at the table after church for Sunday dinner, they all agreed that the church probably wasn’t for them. Shirley was just too disruptive and took away from worship. But they agreed to try it one more Sunday.

Tragically, the family suffered a great loss that week as the husband experienced a heart attack and died. As the family, grieving and in shock, walked through the church door the Sunday after the funeral, who was there to greet them but Shirley. She wrapped her arms around the grieving widow, and with tears in her eyes, she said, “I feel so bad for you. But I know he’s in heaven with Jesus.” The widow wept in Shirley’s arms, and they became inseparable friends.

1. *Describe a time when you experienced the gift of the Spirit through someone unexpected.*

Shirley wasn’t a talented singer. She didn’t have human wisdom. She wasn’t always appropriate in her comments. But Shirley was gifted, and she shared her gifts to build up the community of faith.

Shirley’s story is a poignant reminder that spiritual gifts are more than just talents and abilities. To view them as talents or abilities alone is to risk elitism and boastful pride. No, spiritual gifts (Greek *charismata*) are expressions of God’s grace (Greek *charis*), given and shared for the building up of the body of Christ. “To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.” (1 Corinthians 12:7 NRSV)

faith practice in daily life

Live among God’s faithful people

In baptism we are each bestowed with gifts of the Spirit. Some of the gifts are readily evident and easily claimed. But for many, the gifts bestowed upon us in baptism are not so clear. We need the gifts of discernment and the gift of a community of faith wherein our gifts are identified and shared for building up of the body of Christ.

2. *What are your gifts of the Spirit? (If you find this question difficult to answer, ask others group to name gifts they see in you.)*
3. *In what ways can you share your gifts for the building up of the body of Christ?*

Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, come! Empower us with your grace, so that we might realize, claim, and share your gifts in the service of others. Amen

last word

Identify the gifts of the Spirit within you, and think of ways to share those gifts for the building up of the body of Christ.