

Pentecost
May 15, 2005
1 Corinthians 12.3b-13
Holy Trinity, Manasquan

What's the big tip-off that somebody is really "spiritual"?? What's the perfect clue that someone's a Christian?? How do **you** tell who's close to God??

Two thousand years ago, in the Greek city of Corinth, the litmus test for holiness wasn't the amount of time a person clocked in worship, the passion with which people served the poor, their familiarity with the Bible, or their morals. It was whether or not they spoke in tongues.

So, you're wondering, "Just what **is** speaking in tongues??" It's also called inspired speech. It's not a language the person speaking it consciously knows. Most of those hearing someone speak in tongues don't know **what** he or she is saying, unless they have the gift of "interpreting tongues," which means deciphering (with the help of divine help) what the message is.

This isn't like *The National Enquirer* reporting a recent sighting of the Loch Ness monster. People really **do** speak in tongues. I've **heard** them do it, and maybe some of you have, too, if you've ever attended a charismatic prayer meeting. A whole group of people speaking in tongues sounds like an orchestra warming up, then making beautiful music, blending into a lovely symphony.

From the time of the early church, as evidenced in St. Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Christians have believed that the Holy Spirit **inspires**, enables people to speak in tongues in order to give them yet **another** voice with which to praise God, and sometimes to use them as a channel of God's prophetic Word to the community. Paul

basically said to them, “That’s fine, but **don’t miss everything else** the Holy Spirit is doing within and among you!” In today’s second lesson, he severs the tie between gifts and **status**, and instead yokes gifts and **service**.

The heart of this epistle is St. Paul’s claim:

*To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.
(I Cor.12.7)*

Another translation of that same verse (from *The Message*) is:

Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits.

So, St. Paul is saying that the litmus test of **a true spiritual gift** is that it **serves the community rather than being self-serving**. It gives glory to God rather than to an individual. It builds up the Body of Christ rather than bulking up a personal portfolio.

The Greek word for gifts from on high, presents from the Holy Spirit, is *charismata*, the root of the English word “charismatic.” The root of that Greek word is **another** Greek word, *charis*, meaning **grace**, the love of God that comes to us as **pure gift, not reward**.... God gives gifts to individuals so they can become human channels of heavenly grace, a source of divine blessing to the Christian community and the world.

On this weekend of Pentecost, this weekend when we receive new members into our family of faith, we thank God for the charisms, the gifts from on high, the presents from the Holy Spirit, lavished upon us as individuals and as community. We thank God for those with the gift of teaching who bless our Sunday School children and youth, and also our adults. We give thanks for those with gifts of organization and creativity who planned this weekend’s ministry fair, for those with the gift of hospitality who are shepherding our incoming members, for those with the gift of voice and instrument who

bless our worship with song and music, for those with the gift of public speaking who serve as lectors, for those with the gift of humility who serve behind the scenes in a thousand ways, for those with the gift of compassion who serve as Stephen Ministers and friendly visitors to our sick and homebound brothers and sisters.

Today we affirm that:

To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.

Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits.

Our incoming members each received a spiritual gift inventory to fill out and learn for the first time or perhaps to be reminded of gifts that God has given them to serve the community of faith. Our Council members and various committee members are also being asked to invest time in taking the inventory, to expand their awareness of what ability they've been given for the common good, what they can do to show who God is in and beyond this faith family.

A wise person once said that God **enables** what God **intends**. In other words, if God wants us to do something, God will provide the means for us to do it. And there definitely **is** something God wants us to do!

It's no mystery. Scripture tells us quite clearly what God wants us to do. God wants us to **proclaim** and to **be** Good News, helping the "Kingdom come, God's will be done," more and more fully, **telling** in word and **showing** in deed what God has done for us in Jesus Christ. We need never fear we'll come up short in terms of people power, money, time, talent or opportunity, if **we** are desiring what **God** is desiring.

If you are already serving and experiencing the joy of being a human channel of heavenly grace, praise God! If you are serving but feeling strapped or overworked, ask the Holy Spirit's help in calling forth the gifts of others and enlisting them in the ministry. **Or** if you are realizing you haven't yet **found** a niche of service in this place, ask the Holy Spirit to guide you to it! I have a spiritual inventory set aside **just** for you, as soon as you're ready to ask for it! I'd love to help you process the results and discover and share the unopened gift or gifts God has given you.

*Each person is given something to do that shows who God is:
everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits.*

The perfect clue that someone is a Christian is that he or she is a human channel of heavenly grace within the faith community. Amen

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