

Shown by the Spirit

1 Corinthians 12:1-11

Introduction

Our Epistle readings for the next 6 Sundays after the Epiphany are from **1 Corinthians**. Epiphany is all about Jesus being shown to the world as the Son of God. In these readings, we are going to see how He is shown to be the Son of God through the Church. Jesus said in **John 15**, *“But when the Helper comes, whom I will send to you from the Father, the Spirit of truth, who proceeds from the Father, he will bear witness about me. And you also will bear witness, because you have been with me from the beginning”* (**John 15:26-27**). This is the job of the Holy Spirit and the job of the church, to bear witness to Christ.

The Greatest Gift—Faith (v. 1-3)

Paul tells us in **verse 3** of our text that *no one can say “Jesus is Lord” except in the Holy Spirit*. Luther says in the Small Catechism, *I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Spirit has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith*. It is only by the Holy Spirit that I can believe in my heart that Jesus died for me; it is only by the Spirit that I can confess my faith, as we do in the Creeds; it is only by the Spirit that I can boldly proclaim my faith in Jesus to others. The Holy Spirit makes all this, the church, possible.

Many Gifts—One Spirit (v. 4)

The gifts the Spirit gives are many and diverse. They are diverse because we are all different, with different personalities and interests. God doesn't want us to try to be something or someone we aren't, so the Spirit gifts us according to who we are. The gifts are also different because of need. Think what the church would be like if everyone were skilled in the same thing. How would anything get done? But they are all given by the same Spirit, and there is *only one Spirit, one God, one Lord*. Paul uses this opportunity to reinforce the doctrine of the Trinity—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. They are three distinct persons, yet one God. The diverse gifts are given by the one Spirit to build unity in the Church.

Given for the Common Good (v. 7)

Paul says in **verse 7** that the gifts of the Spirit are given for the *common good*. The folks at Corinth were focused on the “flashy” gifts, like tongues and healing. They wanted gifts that drew attention to themselves. But we're not gifted for our own benefit. We're not gifted so we can show off. The gifts are given so we can share them with others in the body. They are given for the common good.

Given for Service (v. 8-10)

Since the gifts are given for the common good, they are given for service. Having a gift, even if it is one of the “flashy” ones, is given so we can serve one another. *Whoever would be first among you must be your slave* (**Matthew 20:27**). Each gift is as important and vital to the church as the others because they are all given by the same Spirit. It's the Giver of the gift that gives the honor, not the gift.

Given As He Sees Fit (v. 11)

The gifts are the domain of the Holy Spirit, the Giver of the gifts. God knows best. He knows who should have which gift. He knows how we should work together. So, he gives the gifts *as He wills* (v. 11). We don't request the gift we want, what we think would be best. We humbly accept the gift He gives and cheerfully use it in the service of the body of Christ, for the common good.

Pointing to Christ

When we use our gifts this way, we are pointing others to Christ. Attention is directed away from us and to Him. Jesus is exalted as Lord. The same can be said about Communion. We receive His Spirit and grace through Word and Sacrament. At Communion, He forgives our sin and strengthens our faith. At the same time, we *proclaim His death until He comes*. The church shows the world that Jesus is the Son of God through the gifts of the Spirit.

*And the peace of God,
Which surpasses all understanding,
Will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.*
