

THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHARISMS

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COMPANIONS OF THE CROSS

THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT VERSUS **THE CHARISMS** OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

What is the difference between the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Charisms of the Holy Spirit?

The list of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit is taken from Isaiah 11:1-3:

*“But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of **wisdom** and of **understanding**, a spirit of **counsel** and of **strength**, a spirit of **knowledge** and of fear of the LORD [**piety**], and his delight shall be the **fear of the LORD**.”¹*

These seven gifts are the same gifts which were given to Jesus in his baptism.

Jesus is the fulfillment of the Old Testament promise of the Messiah.²

Jesus is the Messiah; the shoot that sprouted from the stump of Jesse.

Isaiah 11:1-3 was fulfilled when these gifts were given to Jesus.

What does this mean for you and for me?

These same seven gifts are given to us in baptism.

How?

When we are baptized, we participate in the life, death, and resurrection of Christ.

We are reminded of these gifts in our confirmation.

The rite of Confirmation includes the following prayer while the bishop lays his hands on the confirmandi:

*“All Powerful God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, by water and the Holy Spirit you freed your sons and daughters from sin and gave them new life. Send your Holy Spirit upon them to be their helper and guide. Give them the spirit of **wisdom** and **understanding**, the spirit of **right judgment [counsel]** and **courage [strength]**, the spirit of **knowledge** and **reverence [piety]**. Fill them with the spirit of **wonder and awe [fear of the Lord]** in your presence.”³*

The charisms of the Holy Spirit are taken from several places in the New Testament.

The primary explanation, however, comes from 1 Corinthians Chapter 12.

Paul proceeds to explain that although there is only one Spirit (the Holy Spirit), there are many gifts.

¹ Jean Marie Hiesberger, General Editor, *New American Bible, The Catholic Bible, Personal Study Edition*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995)

² Raniero Cantalamessa, translated by Denis and Marlene Barrett, *Come Creator Spirit, Meditations on the Veni Creator*, (Minnesota: The Liturgical Press, 2003) page 176

³ Canadian Council of Catholic Bishops, *Rite of Confirmation, Ritual and Pastoral Notes*, (Ottawa: Concacan Inc., 1987) page 20

These gifts to which Paul is referring are what we refer to as “charisms.”

Paul lists some of these charisms in 1 Corinthians Ch 12:

*“To one is given through the Spirit the expression of **wisdom**; to another the expression of **knowledge** according to the same Spirit; to another **faith** by the same Spirit; to another gifts of **healing** by the one Spirit; to another **mighty deeds**; to another **prophecy**; to another **discernment of spirits**; to another **varieties of tongues**; to another **interpretation of tongues**. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes.”⁴*

The primary distinction between the *charisms* and the *seven gifts of the Holy Spirit* is that the charisms are gifts given *for the common good*; or for the *service of others*.

They are given primarily for the *building up* of the Church.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church clearly emphasizes this point:

“Charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the ends of the world”⁵

The *seven gifts of the Holy Spirit*, on the other hand, are given primarily for the purpose of *personal sanctification*.

SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

According to Father Cantalamessa, the seven gifts “do not belong to the charismatic sphere but to the area of sanctification ..., they are not given only to certain people but they are offered exactly the same to everyone.”⁶

This is an important distinction.

On the one hand, the *charisms* may only be given to specific individuals *as the Holy Spirit freely chooses* who ought to receive such charisms.

On the other hand, *every* baptized Christian receives the *seven gifts of the Holy Spirit* at Baptism.

The seven gifts are a means towards personal sanctification.

It is these gifts that enable the baptized to imitate Christ and his way of life.

They are not natural gifts, but supernatural gifts freely given by God.

Although freely given, they must be developed by every Christian throughout his or her life.

⁴ *New American Bible*, 1 Corinthians 12:8-11

⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church, second edition*, (Washington, DC, United States Catholic Conference, 1994) paragraph 799

⁶ *Come Creator Spirit*, page 175

It is important to note that although the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are primarily for personal sanctification, they are not exclusively for this purpose.

Others can benefit from these gifts as well.

For example, the spirits of wisdom and understanding not only draw out the meaning of scripture for the reader of the text, but they enable the reader to explain the text to others.

In the Acts of the Apostles, the Ethiopian eunuch was reading the scroll of Isaiah and did not understand what it meant. Phillip was prompted to go to the eunuch and explain what it meant. Because Phillip was explaining the scroll *in the light of the spiritual gifts* of *wisdom* and *understanding*, the eunuch understood, became excited, and asked to be baptized.⁷

These gifts, along with the cooperation of the recipient, are what make it possible to grow in Christian virtue.

CHARISMS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

What distinguishes charisms from the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit?

First, they are always given for the common good of the community.

Second, they are always given particularly to an individual or a specific group of individuals as opposed to the universal nature of the seven gifts.⁸

In other words, charisms are not given to all baptized for personal sanctification, like the seven gifts,

Charisms are given to those whom God chooses and for the purpose of building up the Church.

Unlike the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, charisms cannot be exclusively for personal sanctification.

Their primary purpose is for the service of others.

DIFFERENCE BETWEEN CHARISMS AND TALENTS

Paul gives another list of charisms in 1 Corinthians 12:28:

*“Some people God has designated in the church to be, first, **apostles**; second, **prophets**; third, **teachers**; then, **mighty deeds**; then, **gifts of healing, assistance, administration, and varieties of tongues.**”*

Two important distinctions must be made.

First, not every baptized person will be given the supernatural grace to exercise every charism.

⁷ Acts of the Apostles, Chapter 8

⁸ Ibid, page 173

Paul intentionally chooses the words “some people.”

Charisms are given to particular individuals or groups of individuals for particular reasons.

All the charisms work together within a Christian community to build up the body of Christ.

For example, in a parish, there ought to be a pastor who acts as the shepherd carrying out the role of the apostles. There ought to be some people with the gift of prophecy seeking the Lord’s word and consulting with the pastor and key leaders to develop a vision for the parish community. There ought to be a team of leaders willing to motivate and lead the community to carry out that common vision. There ought to be one or more people with the gift of administration overseeing the administrative details of the parish. There ought to be gifted teachers to pass on the knowledge and wisdom of the Church. There ought to be people with the charism of assistance who are willing to serve in ministries such as hospitality. All of these people are necessary to live out a common vision in a parish community.

It is essential, however, that the people who have been given particular charisms recognize these charisms and seek areas in which they can use them.

It can be tempting for us to want to volunteer in areas in which we are neither naturally gifted nor gifted with a related charism.

For example, it may be tempting for someone with the gift of prophecy or assistance to want to volunteer for an administrative position simply because the position needs to be filled.

It is better to keep the position vacant until someone is identified as having the charism of administration.

It is the Holy Spirit who chooses which people ought to receive certain charisms.

As a community of faith, it is necessary to trust that the Holy Spirit will provide the right people for each area of need.

Second, it is important to recognize that there is a difference between a person with natural talent and a person who has been given a particular charism.

Natural talents are the result of natural birth.

Charisms, on the other hand, are free and sovereign acts of God linked to baptism.⁹

Although an individual with the natural gift of administration could effectively do the job of a parish administrator, it is not the same as an individual with the charism of administration doing the same job.

There is a supernatural grace that is attached to a charism.

It is the Holy Spirit working in and through the administrator.

⁹ Ibid, page 174

With this supernatural grace comes the power of the Holy Spirit.

When all the people within a parish community come together as a team with each of their respective charisms, the Holy Spirit guides them toward the common vision that the Holy Spirit himself gave the team.

A CLOSER LOOK AT SOME OF THE CHARISMS

Charisms are not limited to those listed in 1 Corinthians Chapter 12.

The Holy Spirit pours out his grace upon people in many different ways.

Any supernatural gift that is given by God and is used to build up the Church can be considered a charism.

However, this section will focus on some of the charisms listed in 1 Corinthians.

For example, the two charisms “speaking in a varieties of tongues” and “interpretation of tongues.”

One may ask, “What does Paul mean when he refers to speaking in a variety of tongues and interpretation of tongues?”

A simple look at the Acts of the Apostles will show how these gifts can be given to anyone at anytime to build up the community.

According to scripture, at Pentecost each of the twelve apostles was

*“filled with the Holy Spirit and began to **speak in different tongues**, as the Spirit enabled them to proclaim. Now there were devout Jews from every nation under heaven staying in Jerusalem. At this sound, they gathered in a large crowd, but they were confused because **each one heard them speaking in his own language.**”¹⁰*

This account makes it very clear that the Holy Spirit spoke words through each of the twelve apostles in languages none of them knew or had ever spoken before.

He did this to proclaim the good news of Christ risen from the dead in each of the languages of the people gathered in Jerusalem.

This clearly falls under the category of supernatural graces that are given both to the apostles (speaking in a variety of tongues) and to the Jews (those who were able to interpret the tongues) for the specific purpose of building up the Church (the Jews were converted and baptized the same day).

Some of you may be thinking, father, “this happened two thousand years ago, and besides, there is no evidence that it actually occurred as it is written in scriptures.”

This is where my personal testimony comes in to answer the above objection.

¹⁰ *New American Bible, Acts 2:4-6*

In 2001, I attended a Franciscan University of Steubenville youth conference with a group of youth from Royal Oak, Michigan.

Throughout the weekend, I personally witnessed thousands of youth outwardly manifesting many different charisms of the Holy Spirit.

The two particular charisms I wish to mention, however, are speaking in “varieties of tongues” and “interpretation of tongues.”

I was sitting next to two youth from our group.

One young lady who had never spoken Arabic in her life began to speak in Arabic.

The young man sitting next to her grew up in a family that speaks Arabic.

He understood every word she spoke.

The Holy Spirit had a specific message intended for that particular young man and used the young woman to proclaim that message.

In this case, she was an instrument through which the Holy Spirit built up another member of the Body of Christ.

This is a contemporary example of these two charisms being used by two unsuspecting youth who simply happened to be open to allowing the Holy Spirit to work in and through them.

THE HOLY SPIRIT AND THE CHARISMS IN THE CHURCH TODAY

This example is only one of many examples that indicate that the Holy Spirit is just as capable of pouring out the charisms today as he was at Pentecost when the Apostles converted thousands to be baptized.

According to the Vatican II Dogmatic Constitution on the Church, *Lumen Gentium*, the Holy Spirit:

“distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church, as it is written, ‘the manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit’ (1 Cor 12:7). Whether these charisms be very remarkable or more simple and widely diffused, they are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation since they are fitting and useful for the needs of the Church.”¹¹

It is quite clear, then, that the Church today encourages all baptized Christians to have an openness to receive whatever charisms the Spirit chooses to bestow upon each of them “for the renewal and building up of the Church.”

This includes all types of charisms, no matter how simple or exceptional.

¹¹ Austin Flannery, O.P., *Vatican Council II, Volume 1, The Conciliar and Post Conciliar Documents, Lumen Gentium* (New York: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), page 363

With Vatican II, the charisms have become more visibly present in the Church.

According to Cantalamessa, “The two lungs of the Church body are once again working together in full accord.

The Holy Spirit breathes into the Church from two directions.”

He does this *from above* through the sacraments “that Christ instituted and entrusted to the apostolic ministry”¹² and *from below* through each member of the Body of Christ exercising the charisms freely given by the Holy Spirit.

PRIDE CAN INTERFERE WITH THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THE CHARISMS

Once again, charisms are not given for the benefit of the individual, they are given to be shared with others.

Father Cantalamessa asks a very important and thought provoking question that addresses the concern that charisms may be improperly used by those to whom they have been given.

“How are we to make sure that our charism does not become a threat to the unity of the body of Christ and a danger to our own soul?”¹³

The simplest answer to this question is to remain focused on growing in personal holiness.

This is why it is so important for individuals to have a healthy understanding of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and to continuously ask the Lord for assistance in developing these gifts.

As mentioned above, virtue grows out of the seven gifts.

If we are not grounded in humility and we are not living lives of virtue, the charisms will not be exercised in a healthy way.

Father Cantalamessa indicates that there are three key virtues that must be fostered and developed in order to continue effective implementation of the charisms.

These virtues are

obedience,

humility,

and love.¹⁴

He points out that charisms and obedience to the Church are inseparable.

“Charisms without the institution result in chaos; the institution without the charisms becomes stagnant”¹⁵

¹² *Come Creator Spirit*, page 184

¹³ *Come Creator Spirit*, page 186

¹⁴ *Ibid*, pages 188-189

Some Christians are blessed with exceptional charisms such as healing of the sick or prophecy.

If these Christians begin to ignore the teachings of the Church and begin to contradict biblical principles, they run the risk of both dividing the Church community and potentially losing the charisms given to them.

Father Cantalamessa then points out that the second virtue of humility is a clear sign that the Holy Spirit is present in the charisms.

Two common obstacles preventing the effective implementation of charisms are pride and envy.

A person may be blessed with one or more exceptional charisms and he may be building up the Church community by implementing such charisms.

However, sometimes the person becomes prideful and begins to take ownership of the charisms.

He may tell others “look at the exceptional things ‘I’ am doing.”

The person forgets that it is not him doing the exceptional works, but the Spirit working in and through him.

This can lead to abuses of the charisms that may do more harm than good, and as a result the Spirit may choose to stop giving the charisms.

Two ways to test the authenticity of a charism is to look for whether or not it produces the positive result of building up the Church community and to look at whether or not the person is acting in humility.

Pride can also lead a person to become envious of the charisms of other people.

He may say to himself, “why isn’t the Lord giving me prophetic words?”

or “why doesn’t anyone I pray with get healed?”

Again, this can be an obstacle to effective use of the charisms given by God to the individual.

As mentioned previously, a person must remain grateful for the charisms given to him and focus on fostering and developing such charisms with humility.

St. Augustine reflects on this in his *Commentary of the Gospel of John*.

“Cast out envy, and all that is mine is yours, and if I cast out envy, all that is yours is mine. Envy causes division, but love unites”¹⁶

This leads to the third virtue which is love.

The charisms must be exercised out of love.

¹⁵ Ibid, page 188

¹⁶ Ibid, page 189

If love for God, the community, and the other is lacking, the charism lacks its effectiveness and meaning.

Paul clearly indicates this point in 1 Corinthians Chapter 13.

“If I speak in human and angelic tongues but do not have love, I am a resounding gong or a clashing cymbal. And if I have the gift of prophecy and comprehend all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have all faith so as to move mountains but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away everything I own, and if I hand my body over so that I may boast but do not have love, I gain nothing.”¹⁷

It is quite clear, then, that the charisms must be accompanied by obedience, humility, and love.

Without these three virtues, the person to whom the charisms have been given not only runs the risk of losing the charisms, but also of slowly beginning to isolate himself from God.

It may be appropriate to end this section with another personal testimony to illustrate the above points.

When I was ministering to the youth in Houston, Texas, I began to experience specific charisms; some of which were simple and others of which were rather exceptional. At first, I felt quite blessed and excited about these charisms. However, after a period of time had passed, I began to tell others about “my” gifts. I even began to boast about the things “I” was doing. Not only that, but I also began to look at some of the exceptional charisms others were given and wanted them for myself. I became envious of their charisms. As a result, the Lord stopped giving me the charisms. Thankfully, I had a spiritual director at the time. I said to her, “I lost my gifts.” She replied, “Whose gifts?” I replied rather insistently, “My gifts!” She asked once again in a little more of a nuanced tone, “Whose gifts?” I picked up on her nuance and realized that I had taken ownership of the charisms and as a result had lost the privilege of being an instrument through which the Spirit chooses to work. I asked the Lord for forgiveness and came out of the experience with a greater appreciation of the importance of humility and gratitude. Occasionally I will still experience a temporary absence of particular charisms. The first thing I ask the Lord is whether or not I have become prideful. I have also learned, however, that sometimes the absence of particular charisms is simply a result of the Lord freely choosing to withhold such charisms. After all, they are given for the purpose of being shared with others, not for our own personal satisfaction. Perhaps he may wish to only give charisms that are pertinent to each particular situation at hand. What is most important is that I always remain open to whatever charisms God wants to give, not the ones I want him to give.

CONCLUSION

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit act as a strong foundation upon which a person ought to grow in virtue and sanctity.

Each person, however, has to continuously develop these gifts throughout life.

It is precisely these seven gifts given at baptism that keep a person spiritually grounded when exercising the many different charisms of the Holy Spirit.

The charisms must always be exercised with obedience, humility, and love.

¹⁷ *New American Bible*, 1 Corinthians 13:1-3

The charisms must also always be directed towards others and nurture the growth of the community.

When every person within a community is attentive to his or her particular charisms and puts them to proper use within the community, each charism ought to work together for the common purpose of building up the community.

Vatican II encourages such openness to the charisms of the Spirit.

This is precisely why learning about the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit and the charisms of the Holy Spirit is so important in every Christian community.

The more Christians know about the gifts and charisms, the more the Spirit can work in and through such communities.

It is my hope that this talk will give each one of you a desire to learn more about the many ways in which the Holy Spirit wants pour out his gifts in order to work in so many ways in and through every person.