

The Body of Christ functions best when each member exercises the unique gifts entrusted to them. Today we celebrate the memorial of Saint Charles Borromeo who lived in the era of the Counter Reformation. He rose to the occasion and through the exercise of his many gifts, he helped to rebuild the church through his work at the Council of Trent and his diligence in implementing it.

If one is an exhorter, one exercises their gifts through exhortation, the urging of others to do what is best. The church attempted to address its many problems at the Council of Trent which began in 1545, but the council sputtered before addressing all of the pressing needs of reform. “Borromeo encouraged the pope to renew the Council in 1562, after it had been suspended for 10 years.”ⁱ As an organizer and a reformer, he worked behind the scenes to keep the Council of Trent on task rather than allowing it to stall once again.

If one is given responsibility, then one exercises their gift by the diligent exercise of power. Ordained as a priest in his mid-twenties, he played a leading role in summarizing the work of the Council of Trent in a very systematic way that helped to implement it throughout the depth and breadth of the worldwide church. The reward for a job well done was increased responsibility caring for the souls of the Archdiocese of Milan as it’s bishop.ⁱⁱ

If one is a teacher, one exercises their gifts through teaching. Many of the Catholic Churches problems in the 16th century that lead to the Protestant Reformation stemmed from poorly trained clergy. To help right the ship, the Council of Trent called for the creation of a seminary system in order to help fully train the clergy. As Archbishop of Milan, he took the lead in creating a diocesan seminary that helped to serve as a model for other dioceses.ⁱⁱⁱ To help the laity grow in their understanding of the faith, he initiated the work of the Confraternity for Christian Doctrine and the first “Sunday School” classes to teach religious education.^{iv} He is the patron saint of both catechists and those learning about the faith.

If one is able to give, one exercises their gifts through generosity. Born into a noble family and by earthly standards entitled to a life of leisure, he gave away the majority of this wealth to the poor thus storing up treasure in heaven. Once he had achieved stature by hard work within the church, he could have amassed a new wealth. He chose to serve the poor instead. He was a model benefactor. Most of the money he earned went to charity. “During the plague and famine of 1576, Borromeo tried to feed 60,000 to 70,000 people daily. To do this he borrowed large sums of money that required years to repay.”^v

In extraordinary times, God endows ordinary men like Charles Borromeo with extraordinary gifts to help rebuild the church and society. With our ordinary gifts, God calls upon us to exercise them to strengthen the Body of Christ. So, use your God given gifts faithfully for the good of others and let the Lord multiply the good that is possible.

If one is a follower of Christ, then one exercises his gifts by picking up his cross and following Christ. If we are open to the healing that Christ offers us, a setback in life can often be transformed. Then, that which was once a burden becomes a new gift, the ability to reach out and help others with the same cross. “Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer” (Romans 12:12).

ⁱ franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-charles-borromeo

ⁱⁱ catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-charles-borromeo-645

ⁱⁱⁱ traditioninaction.org/SOD/j100sdCharlesBorromeo_11-4.htm

^{iv} catholicnewsagency.com/saint/st-charles-borromeo-645

^v franciscanmedia.org/saint-of-the-day/saint-charles-borromeo