

“Simple Gifts”

I was talking with a young friend the other day and she was telling me about going to a birthday party. It reminded me of birthday parties from my childhood. The party I remember best had a small group neighborhood kids, Lucy, Jay, Garth, John, and Sam, all gathered around our kitchen table. My mom had made a chocolate cake which she decorated with little plastic soldiers.

There are so many aspects of a birthday party that are fun. What are some of the features of birthday parties that you were fond of as a child? [Listen for friends, cake, games, and gifts]. If you were going to a party the cake, ice cream, games, and seeing friends were probably the best parts. If you were the birthday boy or girl then receiving gifts might be the most enjoyable.

Gift giving can also be fun. It can be great coming up with just the right gift. Perhaps it is something long desired. It could also be that perfect thing they had no idea they would enjoy. The look of delight on the face of the recipient is what we are hoping for as givers.

In today’s epistle, St. Paul writes to the Corinthians about service, activities and gifts. He first reminds the Corinthians that despite there being a variety of each of these there is only one Spirit, one Lord and one God. He is careful that people do not begin to think that their gift, activity or service is better than another’s. None of these can be better because they all come from the one God who provides these gifts to all. Some people love to puff themselves up by valuing their gifts more highly than those of others.

The easiest way to do that is by creating a false measuring stick for human value—income, family, possessions, hierarchy, status, and celebrity among others. But in reality we know that a general is no good without foot soldiers, money cannot buy true friends or happiness, ten cars is no better than one car if there is no place where you are welcome. Likewise, some of the aspects of life that do not accrue status or money are some of the most important, for example, being a mother, father, teacher, caregiver, friend, or a tutor to name just a very few.

Returning to Paul’s list of spiritual gifts, he names nine in this passage—wisdom, knowledge, faith, prophecy, healing, working of miracles, discernment of spirits, tongues/languages, and interpretation of tongues/languages.¹ In Romans Paul has a slightly shorter list of spiritual gifts: prophecy, service, teaching, exhortation, giving, leadership, and mercy.² I doubt Paul went back to check his list from Corinthians when he wrote to the Romans. It is more likely that he was writing with the specific group in mind as part of his

¹ 1 Corinthians 12:8-10

² Romans 12:6-8

exhortation to them. That is, these lists of spiritual gifts are not definitive and the discrepancies should not worry us.

The more important point is that there are gifts that God give us; aptitudes and abilities that we are born with. We are not completely *tabula rasa* when we are born. Any parent can tell you that their child has a personality, however crudely formed when he or she is born. One child is quiet and still, another is fussy, another seems to be smiling from the moment of birth, another child is full of wonder, and another is mischievous. It is wonderful to see how the child's innate personality develops over time.

The spiritual gifts which may not be obvious at birth are important and so we bring children to church or in other ways help to build up what seems nascent in the child. I wonder what you think your spiritual gift is or gifts are. Were there indicators in childhood that your parents or relatives pointed out to you? If you cannot think of one, perhaps you might think what spiritual gift you wish you had. Let's sit in silence for a minute and think about them. If you are willing you can share. Don't feel you need to limit yourself to the lists that Paul gave us as there might be something else he did not name. [Sit in silence.]

I know that was not a long time to ponder spiritual gifts, especially if you have not thought about them before. Is there anyone willing to briefly share a thought about their spiritual gifts? [What do people say?]

This time of sharing has been very rich. By no means is this the only time you should think about your gifts. Please continue to ponder them. Also, ponder how you might use that gift.

This community and the world need people who are passionately motivated to do the work of God in the world. As in today's Gospel, we are called to a life overflowing in richness and in the very best that we can do and be. All for the glory of God who joys in our growth and in our becoming the person we were made to be.

Thinking about these gifts I was reminded of a favorite song from childhood, "This Little Light of Mine." Let's sing a verse

"This little light of mind, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mind, I'm gonna let it shine.
This little light of mind, I'm gonna let it shine.
Let it shine, let it shine, let it shine."³

Share your gifts. Let your light shine. This sad and weary world needs every one of the gifts you have.

³ "This Little Light of Mine" by Harry Dixon Loes