

In today's second reading, Saint Paul is introducing something which is extremely important. In fact, I think the point Paul is building up to is one of the most important lessons he has to teach us—which is why I am going to focus on that instead of the gospel. This is a teaching that ordinarily would be given to us over the course of three weeks but this year, the Feast of the Presentation of Jesus falls on that third Sunday. I don't want to miss this opportunity, though, so this weekend and next weekend I will try to combine three weeks into two and focus on Saint Paul.

Today, Paul introduced us to the gifts of the Holy Spirit. There are different kinds of gifts, different kinds of service, different kinds of ministry but they all have their source in the same Spirit, the same Lord.

In today's reading, Paul just lists the gifts and there is something interesting in the way he does it. Wisdom and knowledge are at the top of the list while varieties of tongues and interpretation of tongues are at the bottom. "Tongues" can refer to earthly languages (English, Spanish, German, etc) or the heavenly speech of angels. When we hear reference to people "speaking in tongues" they are probably referring to the heavenly speech of angels. We need an interpreter to understand this language which is why the gift of speaking in tongues should always be mentioned alongside the gift of interpreting tongues. Speaking in tongues is of no use to a community if we cannot understand what is being said.

Scripture scholars have said that Paul's arrangement of these gifts would have been the opposite of how the Corinthians would have arranged them; they would have put speaking and interpreting tongues at the top of the list but not for a good reason. Speaking in tongues is a very showy gift. When used improperly, it draws attention to the individual and the fame that goes with that attention can cause divisions within the community. This was a huge problem in Corinth and it is still a big problem today. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are not to be used as an ego builder for the individual. They are for the common good of the community. Any time those gifts are used for self promotion, they are being misused. The same can be said about any type of service or ministry within the Church.

The Holy Spirit produces a variety of gifts which he distributes to individuals as he wishes. All of these gifts are important and Paul makes this clear in what we will hear next weekend in his metaphor about the body and its members. We are going to jump ahead now. Paul writes that a body is made up of individual parts. Each part of the body was created by God for a specific purpose and these different parts rely upon each other. If one part of the body

suffers, all parts feel its pain. If one part is honored, all parts share in its joy. Paul's language is a little more convoluted than that but you get the basic idea.

If that sounds a little weird to speak of our bodies in this way, don't worry because it isn't our personal bodies to which Paul is referring. At the end of the reading next week we will hear Paul say: "Now you are Christ's body, and individually parts of it." Paul is referring to the body of Christ to which each and everyone of us belongs. Paul acknowledges that within this body there are apostles and prophets and teachers and doers of mighty deeds and people who possess a wide range of gifts given to them by the Holy Spirit. He is circling back around to today's reading and highlights that although the gifts of the Holy Spirit are different, each one is indispensable. As parts of the body of Christ, we are connected to each other. We share each other's pain and joy and no one is insignificant. If one person, one part of the body, withholds or misuses his or her talents, the entire body will suffer. Everybody matters.

Having taught us about the variety of gifts and how each and every one of us with our gifts is essential to the healthy functioning of the Body of Christ, Paul exhorts us to strive for the greatest spiritual gifts and promises to teach us a still more excellent way—which I will talk about next week.

For now, just remember this: every single one of us is important, no matter how big, small, rich, poor, young or old. To paraphrase Mother Teresa: We may feel like just a drop in the ocean, but without that drop, the ocean would be less. We need each other. Let's not let each other down. Everybody matters.