

Homily for January 14, 2001  
2nd Sunday in Ordinary Time Cycle C

By Father Charles Bowes

Isaiah 62:1-5  
1 Corinthians 12:4-11  
John 2:1-11

## *God gifts each of us uniquely.*

Each of us is unique. There is nobody else in the world like you or I, nor has there ever been, nor will there ever be again. It follows, therefore, that we will achieve our destiny by being just what we are, and functioning according to our uniqueness.

One of the most important steps we make in living effectively is to understand and respect our uniqueness. Each of us has our own life to unfold and our own destiny to accomplish. God has a plan, specific for each of us as individuals, to show forth God's glory and our own. But accepting our uniqueness with all that it implies is not easy. In fact, there's a lot of resistance to it. Many people don't like themselves. Millions are not happy with who they are or what they have. It is unfortunate that many of us spend our lives wallowing in envy of others. Rather than accomplishing our own purposes, we waste time and energy complaining about our supposed deficiencies, and wishing we had someone else's looks, personalities, talents, social advantages and financial means.

That's exactly the situation St. Paul faced in his first letter to the Corinthians – it was envy of one another's gifts that led to divisive conflicts within that

early Christian community. Apparently, some of the Christians in Corinth thought that they were particularly important because they could “prophecy” or “speak in tongues” – gifts they valued more highly than others. It was not a phenomenon unique to Christianity – these gifts of the Spirit – other religious traditions had them as well. But envy of particular gifts prompted those early folks to discriminate and cast aspersions: “Ha, you only have the gift of prophecy – I can speak in tongues.”

St. Paul is at pains to try to put things in perspective. Even if the gifts of the Holy Spirit are important for the Church, St. Paul certainly did not intend these verses as a comprehensive list of all the spiritual gifts. And since they are given for the sake of the community, some gifts will become more important and others less common in the changing circumstances of the Church in different cultures and different ages. The early Christians in Corinth were especially keen on speaking in tongues and uttering prophecies; in later eras, some Christians were more impressed by the gifts of healings and miracles. Given the information explosion and technological innovations of our modern world, we might do well to remember “expression of wisdom” and “utterance of knowledge” are also “spiritual” gifts that ultimately come from God and are

to benefit the entire community – not just individuals or elite groups.

All that we need to be happy and fulfilled in life, we already have. St. Paul makes it clear in his first letter to the Corinthians that each of us possesses unique talents and gifts. No one has exactly the same endowments, and we have no right to expect it to be otherwise. While we are all inspired by one same Spirit, that Spirit manifests itself through the distinctiveness of our individuality. The common good, and our own good, are served by being true to our individual natures, temperaments and gifts. We achieve our purpose in life by discovering, and living from, our own strengths.

Folks, we can stop looking outside ourselves for reasons to be happy and successful. All that we need is already within. Each of us discovers what we have to offer to leave our mark on this world. Perhaps it is to be a good friend, a remarkable parent, a fine musician, an exceptional handyman, a devoted teacher, a wise counselor, an honest politician, a model of long suffering. We can only work from what we have, not from what we feel we're missing. God doesn't make comparisons and neither need we. When God drives, no one is more appealing, more talented, more beautiful or more perfect. As the great St. Augustine wisely said, "God loves each of us as if there is only one of us." When we are unique, we are already perfect; because there really is no one else like us, there is no need for comparisons.

After all, at this table there is the same amount of food for each – without distinction. And somehow, it all works together for us to be the Body of Christ – to become what we receive here. Some years ago, I visited a woman who served me some tea in front of her fireplace before a roaring fire. "Do you notice those mud stains on the hearth?" she asked...and

continued saying that some time ago two children huddled in her doorway, wearing ragged old coats and thin, worn sandals. "Any old papers, lady?" they asked. "I was busy," she said, "but then I looked down at their cold feet, their sandals covered in sleet. I invited them in and made them some cocoa and toast and jam. There was no conversation. They just sat by the fire, eating, their big eyes taking everything in. 'Lady, are you rich?' the boy asked in a dull, kind of flat voice. 'Rich? Mercy no!' I looked at my shabby slipcovers. The girl put her cup back on her saucer carefully. 'Your cups match your saucers,' she said. Her voice was old, with a hunger that was not of the stomach. They gathered up their papers and left. They didn't say thank you. They didn't need to. I looked around – plain blue pottery cups and saucers. But they matched. Potatoes and brown gravy on the stove, a roof over our heads, a steady job: these things matched, too. Their muddy sandal prints are still on my hearth. I have left them there in case I ever forget how very rich I am."

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