

The Second Sunday of Epiphany, 19 January 2025, Year C
Readings: 1 Corinthians 12.1-11; Psalm 36.5-10; John 2-1-11

1 Corinthians 12.1-11

Now concerning spiritual gifts, brothers and sisters, I do not want you to be uninformed. 2You know that when you were pagans, you were enticed and led astray to idols that could not speak. 3Therefore I want you to understand that no one speaking by the Spirit of God ever says 'Let Jesus be cursed!' and no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit. 4Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; 5and there are varieties of services, but the same Lord; 6and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who activates all of them in everyone. 7To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. 8To one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, 9to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, 10to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the discernment of spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. 11All these are activated by one and the same Spirit, who allots to each one individually just as the Spirit chooses.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of all our hearts be acceptable in your sight, O God, our strength and our redeemer. **Amen.** (Psalm 19.14)

Jesus is Lord! This is our confession, Jesus is Lord, as Christians, people of the Way who believe in the Gospel of Jesus Christ and seek to live what we confess. What is startling as we consider this passage by Paul from his first letter to the church in Corinth by which he is addressing the reality of the spiritual gifts is that it is only by the Holy Spirit that the confession 'Jesus is Lord' can be made! Now should we desire to take Paul at his word then we who make this confession with our hearts, our minds and our guts have already received the Holy Spirit. Let that sink in. It is first the confession and not the experience that is the sign of having received the Holy Spirit. To push the boat out a little further on the basis of what Paul writes I maintain that those who make the confession with their whole being, in them the Holy Spirit already abides. I realise I am not exaggerating as Paul already writes earlier in the letter, "...do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within you, which you have from God,..." (1 Corinthians 6:19)

Given what Paul writes here we should not belittle the spiritual gifts as outlandish or be afraid of them rather we are to welcome them even desire them. Hear what Paul has to say about the spiritual gifts as he concludes writing chapters 13 and 14, "Pursue love and strive

for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.” Now what is striking is that this sentence comes immediately after Paul writes the famous passage on love, a favourite at weddings finishing with “And now faith, hope, and love abide, these three; and the greatest of these is love.” He immediately continues, “Pursue love and strive for the spiritual gifts, and especially that you may prophesy.” This is wondrous indeed. Don’t just accept that there are spiritual gifts, but desire them for they are given for the common good, the building up of the body of Christ. Why Paul has to spell this out is because some have become spiritually proud. They have forgotten that the gifts, the spiritual gifts they have received are from God, if they are to boast, they are to boast of the Lord Jesus. (1 Corinthians 1:31)

This takes me to a second point and that is that the full realisation of what I just said hit me during our last year’s ecumenical study day. The ecumenical study day is an initiative of four English speaking churches in Vienna: Roman Catholic, Methodist, Community Church and Anglican. Please consider signing up for this year’s study day on Saturday 8 March. The topic is prayer. The title intriguing, **Wrestling with the Angel**, *The struggle and the joy of prayer*. Our speaker is Father Ed Hone, a Redemptorist priest and Dean of St Edmund’s College, Cambridge.

Finally, we have arrived where I wanted to land on this Second Sunday of Epiphany being the one Sunday to fall within the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity. At our 10.30 service today Janina Sórka, a pastor from the local Lutheran church (Pauluskirche) will preach. Yesterday at Cardinal Schönborn’s service of praise and thanksgiving for his ministry as Archbishop of Vienna of some thirty years as it draws to a slow end (he hoped his successor would have already been named by now), the Cardinal led the leaders of the churches in Austria in the affirmation of our common baptism in Christ. The churches were those of the Austrian Ecumenical Council of Churches of which Christ Church is a member. They are Armenian Apostolic, Coptic, Ethiopian, Old Catholic, Lutheran, Methodist, Reformed, as well as Bulgarian, Greek, Romanian, Russian, Serbian Orthodox and Anglican (Church of England). This was a significant gesture. It was a significant sign.

How ought we understand this sign? We should do so unashamedly theologically and therefore sacramentally. Christians have a unity. It is a unity that is given. It is given by Christ. It is not a unity that we can give ourselves, because we fail. Our vocation as Christians, as those who have baptised into Christ, into a death like his and a resurrection like his, is to live our unity in Christ in the wretchedness of the world. There is only one body into which we are baptised. It is the body of Christ.

What does Paul go on to write in the next sentence which we did not hear today? He writes, “For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For in the one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—Jews or Greeks, slaves or free—and we were all made to drink of one Spirit.”

And it is into this body you and I have been baptised and of which Paul reminds us. Salvation is not something we give ourselves. It is given. It is the free gift of which the Church speaks. Just as we cannot give ourselves the confession that Jesus is Lord. It is given by the Holy Spirit. “No one can say ‘Jesus is the Lord’, but by the Holy Spirit.”

The unity is given. It is a reality. We are to acknowledge it and acknowledging it learn to appreciate it and appreciating it learn to live this God given reality as best we can. How can we? With a generous spirit. With “wohlwollen” (meaning benevolence). By going towards one another. By praying together as we do on Good Friday at our Ecumenical service. For how many years? At least 25! By appreciating the strengths of other churches and traditions. The gifts they bring.

For Anglicans there is also work to be done within the Anglican Communion. Work that has been neglected by the politics of the various churches that make up the Anglican Communion. A Communion that too easily sets aside the prayer of our Lord as he addresses the Father, the *Ut Unum Sint* (That They May Be One). Let us listen in on Jesus as he prays as recorded in John’s gospel,

“I ask not only on behalf of these, but also on behalf of those who will believe in me through their word, that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us, so that the world may believe that you have sent me.” (John 17.20)

Against the above we have to be honest and acknowledge that the Anglican Communion is a much more fragmented body of churches than the one that I was confirmed in, when I said for myself and with hindsight unwittingly, Jesus is Lord! The Lord Bishop of London mused in the 1980s that denominational loyalty would be vain and that there would be a realignment. This as we can observe today is a reality in ways Graham Leonard could not have imagined with the rise of the charismatic churches.

Now before anyone from another church should feel smug about their own denomination the phenomenon that has led to the Anglican Communion's fragmentation affects other churches as well. Internal divisions are found there as well. Our Communion is more immediately affected by a less authoritarian structure, but possibly still more so by the politicking of synods encouraged by some bishops together with a degree of lawlessness that is becoming more and more evident and also by the flexing of financial muscle. Local western churches have failed to see and appreciate that the Anglican Communion is a global communion encompassing peoples as it should from every tribe, nation and language "under heaven". Remember the spiritual gifts are given for the common good. They are given for the building up of the whole church. "Think globally! Act locally!" was a slogan of the 90s or perhaps earlier... The slogan became popular as the recognition grew that we can't make big changes as individuals to the way the world is, but we can act where we are planted having regard for how our local actions and decisions will ultimately impact globally.

If anything this sermon is a plea that we stop neglecting the call to live the unity that Christ has given us through his saving work and for which he prays. The call to unity should be paramount. It is also a plea that we live this unity for the common good as the Holy Spirit dwells us, is working in us that the world might believe as we say by the power of the Spirit Jesus is Lord! Remember, "no one can say 'Jesus is Lord' except by the Holy Spirit."

Amen.