

## GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT: FOR UNITY

I Cor. 12:1-11; Eph. 4:11-16.

Int. Today is the beginning of the Week of Prayer for Christian unity. Many churches will be participating, such as the Roman Catholic, PIC, ECP, Lutheran, Baptist convention, UCCP and the UMC.

### I. Many Other Christian Churches are Not Participating.

Two reasons stand out as a hindrance for their participation. Some are saying that this gathering will only be an opportunity of proselytizing members. Of course this reason may not be imaginary at all. It maybe true. But this can only happen if there is no strong unity of the faith in that congregation. This is the reason why ecumenical participation can only be meaningful when the churches participating are grounded in their faith and united. With strength, unity and Christian maturity that they bring within the ecumenical fellowship they enrich the other churches for the common good of all, rather be absorbed by the participating churches. This is what is happening in the Koinonia Davao among the pastors, priest and lay workers.

The other reason for not participating is the feeling that they are better than the other churches. Sometimes they feel that they are the only right churches and others are wrong. This kind of Christians are called by St. Paul as "Superlative Christians."

This could be illustrated by a story shared by sister Letty Andres. A birthday party was going on among her co-teachers. When the food was ready, someone requested one of their co-teachers to lead in prayer. The person requested said, "Kamo lang and mag-pray wala koy labot kay ga-pray man mo sa mga santo." It hurt the celebrants and made a wall of barrier with the teacher requested to pray. When initiated to reconcile the two, the teacher who refused to pray insisted saying: "I was only being frank and honest that they are wrong in praying to the saints." In other words she was shouting in fact that she is more superior than the other Christian teachers.

Who are these superlative Christians in the time of Paul, that prompted him to write his first letter to the Corinthians. They are strong believers in Christ as their Savior and Lord. They are educated in the scriptures, in fact so knowledgeable that they think other anyone who differs from them are wrong. Many of them are multi-gifted. they spoke in tongues. they performed miracles. they had great faith. they were wise. the list was impressive. They are saying, spiritual people evidence spiritual gifts. That's just the way it was. Because of their feeling and thought that they are better than others, they are always criticizing the not so-super Christians. They even look down on those Christians with a not so important gift from the holy Spirit. So they created a super-group among the Corinthians church, and such spirit started the creation of other groups, making the Corinthian church a divided church.

## II. Gifts are given for the Common Good.

Paul spoke of gifts from the Holy Spirit. First are the gifts of Abilities: I cor. 12:8-10.

- ability to utter wisdom
- ability to utter knowledge
- ability to have faith
- ability to do miracles
- ability to prophesy
- ability to distinguish gifts of the spirit from those that are not
- ability to speak in tongues
- ability to interpret tongue speaking

All of these gifts are are supernatural gift from God. It is a gift, thus it cannot be learnt, cannot be earned, and cannot be forcibly given by God. So there is nothing for the person gifted to be boasting about. It is not a sign of superiority or holiness and spirituality. Those gifts given were bestowed in order that it will be used for the common good of all. You will also take notice that these Spiritual gifts can be categorize under: Gifts of Revelation, Gifts of Power and Gifts of utterance which are significantly be very useful in the building of the church and strengthening the church for mission.

The other gifts of the Holy spirit are the gifts of Church workers to administer the spiritual gift given to the church. They are the Apostle, Prophets, Pastors, Teachers, evangelist, Administrators, healers, helpers, miracle workers, faith-filled, exhorters, generous givers, merciful, speakers in tongues and interpreters.

According to Paul in Eph. 4:11-16, these gift of church workers were given to equip the saints for the work of the ministry, to build up the body of Christ, and for the unity of the faith. Again Paul is emphasizing here that these gifts of workers are rewards nor earned but given to bring unity of the faith in Christ our Lord.

So Paul knows that Christians possess different spiritual gifts as they live out their lives as members of the body of Christ. Some function like hands, like eyes, like feet and so on. Each has a place. We can certainly rejoice when one among us is multi-gifted in one way or another for the ministry in the church. We are called however to accord the highest honor to those who seem to be the weaker members of the body. Paul said: "the parts of the body which seem to be weaker are indispensable. God has so adjusted the body, giving the greater honor to the inferior part, that there may be no discord in the body" I cor. 12:22-25. Through this logic that we give greater honor to those who appear weak, we attain harmony in the body of Christ. If not, pride and the superlative Christian attitude will divide and destroy the unity body of Christ, the church.

Let me illustrate it with two stories:

A visitor to a mental hospital was astonished to note that there were only three guards watching over a thousand dangerous inmates. He asked the guards: "Don't you fear that these people will overpower the guards and escape?" NO was the reply. LUNATICS never unite. Would this speak of a church who are divided and could not unite! LUNATICS!

In any flesh and bones body, there are variety of cells..there are nerve cells, blood cells, muscles cells, and many others, each having a distinct function. the body operates smoothly, not because the cells get together and vote on what to do, buit because each one does what it was designed to do. It is the function of the head to bring all these different functions together, so that the body operates effectively as each cell gives itself to the task of functioning according to the its design. Certainly the body would not operate properlyu if its cells chose to go own their way. Do you know what we call a rebellion of the cells of your stomach? We call it indigestion! A revolt in your brain cells is called insanity. Anytime the cells in our body don't operate properly, it means that the body is sick, that something is wrong with it. Thus many of the problems in the church today are the result of gifted Christians not working as they were gifted to do, and forgetting that the church is a body with a head, Jesus Christ who direct all Christians to use their gift for the common good and the unity of the Faith in Christ.

#### Conclusion;

Of course the church are strange mixture of people. Just take two examples of the Apostles: Matthew and simon the Zealot. Matthew, being a tax-collector, was , in Jewish eyes a traitor and as renegade. Simon was the opposite. As a zealot, he was a fanatical nationalist, who was sworn to assassinate every traitor and every Roman he could. It was one of the miracles of christ that two people as different as these could live and work together. this is happening in many of our churches today. We have unity of the faith in Christ inspite of many diversity. In fact one pastor describe two of his gfaithful members: "they always argued; they never quarrelled."

Brothers and sisters, let us attained and achieve the unity that God has designed for our church, by cheerfully using in our church the gift that God has bestowed on us. Those gifts are not yours, it is given to you that you may contribute it to the glory of Christ in Davao Central church, in Davao city and in the worldwide United Methodist Church. Do not fail God! He is counting on you!