

## "Christocentric Charisma" 1 Corinthians 1:4-9 Trinity 18 2022

The grace, mercy, and peace of Christ Jesus rest upon each and every one of you this day.

I guess it's just part of human nature that we try and make everything about ourselves. We children of Adam are a very self-absorbed people. We always find a way to make the conversation about ourselves. That's why loving God and loving our neighbor is so impossibly difficult. We're too busy loving and worshiping and glorifying ourselves! Our Church forefathers referred to this self-centeredness as "curvatus en se," which is a fancy Latin way of saying we're curved in on ourselves. Like a satellite dish or a magnifying glass in the sun, everything ultimately gets focused in on and made to be about us.

Now, the reason I lead with this ugly little ego-centric reality is because, in our Epistle lesson for today, we hear St. Paul offering up his praise and thanksgiving because the Corinthian Christians "are not lacking in any spiritual gift." That's impressive. Apparently these folks were God's gift to the Church, certainly worthy of praise and adoration.

Now, you know as well as I do that some people honestly believe this to be true about themselves. Some folks honestly believe that if it wasn't for them, the church walls would fall in. In their minds, they are God's gift to the Church, lacking in nothing...except for the praise and

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adoration they think they deserve. But most of us, though...? We know the truth. I don't know about you, but I hear this language of "not lacking in any gift" and I immediately begin to think, "Man, I wish I was that good. I wish I wasn't lacking in any gift." I confess: I hear these Old Testament and Gospel lessons for today, and I can't even do something as simple as love God and love my neighbor; that's how lacking and deficient I am. I can't even do the easy things! Man...I wish I was like those Corinthian Christians.

No...you don't. You shouldn't. Those Corinthian Christians were an absolute mess! They were some of the most self-centered, self-serving hypocrites the Church has ever known. These folks kept St. Paul awake at night, and for good reason. There's a reason why Paul wrote not one, but two letters to the Corinthian Christians—they were a self-centered, self-indulging, self-aggrandizing mess! For example, they were so messed up that some of their own parishioners weren't even getting communion because the more self-centered, well-to-do folks had turned the Lord's Supper into their own little Martha Stewart feast. They were getting drunk at communion, and leaving nothing for the others! And Paul says that he gives thanks for this?! These are people who aren't lacking in any gifts?! Sounds to me like they're severely lacking; lacking and deficient in some pretty basic Christian catechesis and love! They really don't get it, do they?

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Well...here's the thing: When Paul says that they're not lacking in any gift, he isn't referring to the Corinthians and what they bring to the table; what they have to offer the Church. Again, that's how we often hear this and understand this. Clearly, it has to be about us, right? No! The word that Paul uses here is *charismata*, which is translated as "gift/spiritual gift." I know some of you perked up when heard this word because you hear the word "charismatic," don't you? Based on what we know in today's culture, this isn't necessarily a good thing, is it? The charismatic preacher isn't just an outgoing kind of extrovert. He (or she) is the one handling snakes and acting like the ringmaster or the used car salesman. The charismatic congregations are the ones who are flopping around and hopping around and dancing and speaking crazy gibberish, claiming that the Holy Spirit has given them the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues or the spiritual gift of interpreting such gibberish. Charismatic congregations are all about putting on the biggest, brightest, best show in town. That's how we often understand charismatic in today's culture and Church.

That word (*charismata*), when you break it down and parse it out, simply means "a gift of grace; a free gift." Hmm...who is the Giver of the gift of grace? Who is this "grace gift"? Answer: Jesus! Not only is God the Giver of this free and unmerited gift of grace, but He IS the gift of grace. Jesus Christ is God's *charismata* in the flesh; the Gift of God's

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grace and peace; the undeserved and unmerited gift of God's compassion and love and mercy. And God gives this gift to the entire world. "God so loved the world that He gave...." God takes this gift of His grace and mercy and love, and He nails it to a cross for all to behold and receive and hold fast to.

And I want you to think about what this means for you in terms of your daily life. I know...a bit contradictory of me to now encourage you to consider yourself after going on and on about all the problems with being curved in on yourself. What does this [the crucifix] mean for you? After all, Jesus didn't die for generic, hypothetical people and generic, hypothetical sins, did He? He died for YOU! He died for YOUR sins. He died to save YOU. So...what does all this mean for YOU?

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: You have every reason in the world to give thanks and praise to almighty God, no matter how bad things may be going for you! No matter how out-of-whack or off-the-rails your life may be going right now; no matter how empty or deficient or lacking you may feel right now, you are NOT lacking in the gift of God's grace that is Christ Jesus. And this goes for congregations as well as individuals. "But Pastor, we're lacking in money. We're lacking in kids. We're lacking in attendance. We're dropping the ball. We're missing the mark. We're deficient. We're failing."

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No, we're not. We are NOT lacking in anything; at least not in what truly matters. How can I say such a thing? Easy. Listen to what Jesus has already said. "It is finished!" Jesus Christ has accomplished and fulfilled EVERYTHING for you and your salvation. And it's not just a one-and-done kind of thing that Jesus did on that one Friday a long time ago. NO! Jesus continues to bring the free and unmerited and over-flowing gift of Himself and His grace, mercy, and peace to you every time you hear His Word and receive His absolution and eat and drink His victorious Body and Blood. We, as a congregation, as individuals, are lacking in NOTHING. We have the gift that is the fullness of Christ Jesus—God's grace in the flesh—and nothing and no one can ever take this gift from us, not even a little bit. This fullness of this cruciform, charismatic reality is all the reason in the world to thank and praise God, from Whom all blessings flow.

To Him alone be all glory, all praise, and all honour. AMEN