

Saint Mark Evangelist/III Easter 2021
Sermon – Saint Joseph Parish
Father Craig Looney
Ephesians 4.7-16 St. John 15.1-11



Each of us, Paul tells us, has received a special gift from Jesus. He gave us these gifts to prepare us for the work of Christian service, in order to build up the Church, the Body of Christ.

The English term *charisma* is from the Greek *χάρισμα (khárisma)*, which means “favor freely given” or “gift of grace”...something that can’t be bought or earned.

We hear the word Charismatic used to describe individuals who have an endowment or extraordinary power given by the Holy Spirit. Churches that emphasize the manifestation of these gifts are called Charismatic.

Anglicans are often surprised to learn we too are a Charismatic Body of Believers. All of us possess the singular gift of the Holy Spirit, which we received at our baptisms. We became members of the Church...the Body of Christ.

The Holy Spirit empowers us to do God’s work...not all of us have the same gifts. We shouldn’t spend time comparing our gifts to the gifts other people have. We’re supposed to use our individual gifts to build up the Church...starting with Saint Joseph Parish.

Sometimes we discover God has blessed us with gifts we didn’t know we had. We are supposed to be good stewards of our gifts and go about our work quietly. We shouldn’t seek fame and glory.

Today we are celebrating the Feast of Saint Mark the Evangelist. A curious feature about the Epistle and Gospel is they don’t mention him at all. We know very little about his early life. He was born in Cyrene, North Africa. He was not one of the original Twelve Apostles but was probably a disciple of Saint Peter.

Tradition identifies Mark as the founder of Christianity in Africa. He was the first Bishop of the Church of Alexandria, Egypt. The city’s pagan leaders resented Mark’s missionary work and he was martyred there in 68 AD. He is the Patron Saint of Lawyers and Venice,

Italy. Mark’s gift to us...the Gospel...the Good News...he was empowered to write.

Ephesus was a seaport city in Asia Minor (Turkey). Like Alexandria, it was a thriving center of pagan religions, especially the Diana fertility cult. Saint Paul wrote his Letter to the Ephesians at a time when the Church in Ephesus was under attack, not by armies outside the Church, but from within.

Disagreements and infighting among the Jewish and Gentile converts within the Ephesian Church threatened its existence. Some members were gloating over “special gifts”...others were forming separate groups. Paul, as we have seen in his other letters, doesn’t mince words. “Christians”, he writes, “you need to stop this nonsense and get along.” Good advice!

Paul reminds us to act like members of the same family who love each other and work for the good of each other. We must always remember Jesus is the head of the Body (the Church) and he loves us. If we keep our minds and hearts focused on his love and use the gifts God has given us according to his will, the Church stays spiritually healthy and grows. So do each of us!

When we give our lives over to God and let the Holy Spirit go to work in our lives, we build up the Church. We become the branches Jesus is talking about in the Gospel. Jesus calls himself the vine; we are the branches attached to the vine; we want the vine and its branches to grow and remain strong and healthy.

All of us possess the singular gift of the Holy Spirit. He empowers us with another special gift...the ability to love each other as much as Jesus loves us. That is what brings us together each week...to experience his love...and to share it with others.

When we let God’s love flow through us...we begin to understand what Jesus means when he says how much joy it brings him to share his Father’s love with us. Because we are able to experience his joy...our joy is full and complete.

What an amazing gift God has given us!

