

St Raymond De Penafort

"Welcome. Love. Serve."

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Dear Sisters and Brothers in Christ,

Grace was given to each of us according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore, scripture says: "He ascended on high and took prisoners captive; he gave gifts to men"...Living the truth in love, we should grow in every way into him who is the head, Christ, from whom the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, with the proper functioning of each part, brings about the body's growth and builds itself up in love. (Ephesians 4:7-8, 15-16)

Among the components of physical fitness, flexibility is the capacity for our joints to move smoothly through a full range of motion. In the spiritual life, this corresponds to the **component of SHARING**. The Church as Body of Christ in the world must remain flexible so that all the gifts are able to contribute freely to the mission of the People of God.

In the Letter to the Ephesians, the apostle Paul references Psalm 68:19, one of the great divine warrior psalms which portrays God as the liberator of his people, taking back prisoners of war and the sharing spoils of war with all the people. It is an image of the power of God which will work through the Church. Paul also interprets this in light of the Resurrection of Jesus. The Ascension of Jesus opens up the mission of the Church. Our mission is empowered with the gifts of the Holy Spirit which are given to the Church at Pentecost.

Three principles guide the sharing of gifts. The first is the necessity of all the gifts. *As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ...The eye cannot say to the head, "I do not need you," nor again the head to the feet, "I do not need you."* (1 Corinthians 12:12, 21) It is important that every gift be identified and harmonized into the movement of the Body of Christ so that our mission can be carried out effectively. If any gift is inactive, the whole Body is weakened.

The second principle is the communal character of the gifts. Gifts are not graces that God gives to us for our own private enjoyment. Gifts are given to us to give to others. *I urge you, by the mercies of God, to offer your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God, your spiritual worship. Be transformed by the renewal of your mind, that you may discern what is the will of God. For by the grace given to me I tell everyone among you not to think of yourself more highly than one ought to think, but to think soberly, each according to the measure of faith that God has apportioned.* (Romans 12:1, 3)

The Bible calls self-giving sharing of gifts "spiritual sacrifice". So, gifts are only activated as they are shared in community. And gifts can only be known in community. Paul talks about the humility that is necessary to have the accurate self-knowledge of what gifts we have. We need the help of other followers of Jesus to know what our gifts really are. Others may see gifts in us that we do not see in ourselves. Others may help us to see that we are we really are not gifted in a certain way.

Finally there is the complementarity of the gifts - the gifts only work when they work together. *There are different kinds of spiritual gifts but the same Spirit; there are different forms of service but the same Lord; there are different workings but the same God who produces all of them in everyone. To one is given through the Spirit the expression of wisdom - to another the*

expression of knowledge according to the same Spirit. To another faith by the same Spirit - to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit. To another prophecy - to another discernment of spirits. To another varieties of tongues - to another interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit produces all of these, distributing them individually to each person as he wishes. (1 Corinthians 12:4-11)

As I develop my own gifts, I must remember that my gifts are not effective by themselves, but only as they are complemented by the gifts of others. This is why mission and ministry are only successful as they are carried out in dialogue and collaboration.

As stretching is a common exercise to improve flexibility, so we must stretch ourselves in the spiritual life. It is only through opening ourselves to new challenges that our gifts can be developed. So, in this Easter season, let us ask ourselves honestly what gifts we have received from the Holy Spirit, and let us make sure that our gifts are active in the Body of Christ.

Peace be with you,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Fr. Scott Hebden". The signature is written in dark ink and is positioned above the printed name.

Fr. Scott Hebden, Pastor