

What Are Charisms & Why Are They Important?

by Joe Boroden

In order to understand why charisms are important we first need to understand what the mission of the Church is. The Documents of Vatican II describe the mission of the Church as follows:

“The church was founded to spread the kingdom of God over all the earth for the glory of God the Father, to make all men partakers in redemption and salvation, and through them to establish the right relationship of the entire world to Christ.” (Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Sec.2).

This three fold mission can be stated as follows:

1. Evangelization—announcing the Good News that through the Father’s love, Jesus’ life, death and resurrection make it possible for all to be reconciled to God and receive the fullness of salvation (John3:16).
2. Sanctification—helping us to live lives of holiness as children of God.
3. Renewal of the Temporal Order—restoring all things - social, moral, economic, natural - to right order and proper relationship as created by God.

The Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity also states that our Baptism calls us into full life in the Church. Our Baptism also calls us to share in the responsibility of carrying out the mission of the Church.

Our Baptism not only calls us to share in the responsibility in the Church’s mission, but at the same time empowers each person with the charisms needed to fulfill that responsibility.

“For the exercise of the apostolate (God) gives the faithful special gifts... for the building up of the whole Body in charity... From the reception of these Charisms, even the most ordinary ones, there arises for each of the faithful the right and duty of exercising them in the Church and in the world for the good of men and development of the Church, exercising them in the freedom of the Holy Spirit who breathes where he wills, and at the same time in communion with his brothers in Christ and with his pastors, especially.”(Sec. 3)

The Dogmatic Constitution on the Church offers a description of what is meant by the term Charism: “...(God) distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts he makes them fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and upbuilding of the Church. Whether these Charisms be very remarkable or simple and widely diffused, they are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation since they are fitting and useful for the needs of

the Church.”(Sec. 12)

1. Charisms are special graces, movements of the Holy Spirit not limited to the sacraments and ministrations of the Church; rather, they are special ways in which God works through the individual.
2. Charisms are given to all members of the Body (1 Cor 12:7), not limited to positions, offices or degrees of sanctity.
3. Charisms make the individual fit and ready for service, enabling them to effectively participate in the Church’s mission.
4. Charisms are given for the purpose of the renewal and upbuilding of the Church, making the Church capable of accomplishing its mission.
5. Charisms may be the remarkable charismatic gifts of 1 Cor 12:8-10 and the more common gifts of Eph 4:11 and Rom 12:7-8, or many, many others!

In proclaiming that each person is gifted by God with Charisms to be used to further the mission of the Church,

the Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity stressed the importance that these charisms be used: A member who does not work at the growth of the body to the extent of his possibilities must be considered useless both

to the Church and himself. (Sec. 2) It is only by each member using his/her charisms to their full potential that the Church reaches its full potential as the Body of Christ (Eph 4:15-16).



Only when the Church is operating at its full potential is the mission of evangelization, sanctification and renewal of the temporal order a possibility. The mission cannot be achieved by human effort; it requires the working of the Spirit through the charisms! Thus it is of vital importance to the Church’s mission that each person is aware of their role and of their charisms of service that empower them to carry it out!

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