

Praise the Spirit of Grace!

✠ **Shining the Light of Jesus (vv.1-6)**

✠ **Showing God's gifts for good (vv.7-11)**

In the name of Jesus, our shining Epiphany Lord, dear mirrors of God's grace in Christ:

In the Seminary married students lounge a classmate was very upset. After listening a while, I tried with the rest to encourage him. But he turned in anger and said, "You have way too many gifts!" I replied, "Why don't you ask the Holy Spirit for the gifts you need, then trust Him to deliver through His Word?" He just shook his head and kept complaining. A few years later he resigned his ministry.

Our sinful nature tries to drag us down with jealousy and envy like a dead chicken tied around our neck. Then we either get upset, or feel downright useless. As the Lord tells us through James, "**Where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.** (3:16) Today the dear Holy Spirit wants to pierce this darkness with God's Epiphany light in Christ. After singing God the Father's praises for Jesus our newborn Savior, let's **Praise the Spirit of Grace** first for...

✠ **Shining the Light of Jesus (vv.1-6)**

O God of all grace and mercy, You have called me, a poor unworthy sinner, to be a servant of Your Word and have placed me into the office which preaches the reconciliation. You have given me this flock to feed. By myself I am totally incompetent to perform the work of this great office. Therefore, I pray You, make me an able minister of Your Church. Give me Your Holy Spirit, the Spirit of wisdom and knowledge, of grace and prayer, of power and strength, of courage and joyfulness, of sanctification and the fear of God. Fill me with the right knowledge and open my lips to proclaim the honor of Your Name. Fill my heart with a passion for souls and with skillfulness to give to every sheep or lamb entrusted to my care what it needs at the proper time. Give me at all times sound advice and just works. And wherever I overlook something or in the weakness of my flesh speak or act wrongly, please set it right. Help me so that through me no one suffers harm to his soul.

Much like the old *Lutheran Lectionary*, "A Pastor's Daily Prayer," Paul had to pray for the church in Corinth which was very talented, but immature and unspiritual. Yet in a remarkably evangelically tone the Lord's apostle writes kind correction: "*I always thank God for you because of his grace given you in Christ Jesus. For in him you have been enriched in every way—in all your speaking and in all your knowledge – because our testimony about Christ was confirmed in you. Therefore you do not lack any spiritual gift as you eagerly wait for our Lord Jesus Christ to be revealed. He will keep you strong to the end, so that you will be blameless on the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. God, who has called you into fellowship with his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, is faithful.*" (1 Corinthians 1:4-9 NIV) Instead of focusing on their what they lacked, the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to keep **Shining the Light** on Jesus to reflect into their minds and hearts. They needed a vital lesson about what it meant to be "spiritual people."

We could translate more literally, "*Now about spiritual people, brothers, I do not want you to be ignorant.*" In the old city of Corinth between two major ports of ancient Greece, money flowed in and out for gross immorality like prostitutes of up to 1000 in one of at least twelve pagan temples. So Paul writes, "*You know that when you were pagans, somehow or other you were influenced and led astray to mute idols. Therefore I tell you that no one who is speaking by the Spirit of God says, "Jesus be cursed," and no one can say, "Jesus is Lord," except by the Holy Spirit.*" Look at your fellow Christians in the Epiphany light of Christ. "*There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.*" When we realize that the dear Holy Spirit gives generous gifts

for service and administration in His church to spread the Gospel, don't we have to hang our heads in shame for envy and jealousy? Such gifts cannot be earned and are certainly undeserved. Yet the Holy Spirit keeps **Shining the Light of Jesus** to give forgiveness and relief from dark, sinful feelings among believers. Live in the bright sunshine of God's love and **Praise the Spirit of Grace!** He's...

 **Showing God's gifts for good (vv.7-11)**

Glory and honor, praise and thanks be to You, God – Father, Son, and Holy Spirit – for all the mercy and faithfulness You have shown to this congregation. Your Word has not returned to You empty, but You have gathered people who know You and fear Your name. Give me Your Holy Spirit to help me always see the good things in this congregation and praise and thank You for them. Bless Your Word in the future, that it may preserve the believers in Your grace, convert those that are not yet Yours, and bring back the wandering and absent members. Gather Your people as a hen gathers her chickens under her wings, and be a protecting wall of fire all around Your congregation.

Trying to see the Holy Spirit is like trying to see the wind. Dust or leaves blowing, yes, but the wind is invisible. Likewise, you can see the effects of the Holy Spirit always **Showing God's gifts for good**. *“Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good.”* Think what that means for you. Every Christian has at least one charismatic, grace-gift from God the Holy Spirit. In fact, such gifts are the epiphany of the Holy Spirit by which He manifests His work among us. Yet the focus of His camera is never us, nor Himself. The bright, beautiful picture is always Jesus our Savior.

Years ago a new member was very concerned about this. He had tried to serve as a committee director, but finally came to his pastor rather dejected. “I don't think I have any gifts,” he confided. “I just don't seem to fit into ministry.” “1 Corinthians 12 says every Christian has at least one gift,” pastor replied. “Do you really not see yours?” “You mean you know what my gift is?” he perked up. “Each time you talk to anyone including me, we all feel better. You have the rare gift of encouragement which the Holy Spirit identifies in Romans 12:8. He's still serving with his gift of encouragement as an Elder.

“To one there is given through the Spirit the message of wisdom...,” applying Bible facts to real life. *“To another the message of knowledge by means of the same Spirit...,”* sharing God's Word as the foundation on which the Holy Spirit builds up faith to confess, “Jesus is Lord.” *“To another faith by the same Spirit...”* On 9/11, while wondering how I could minister to others, prayers from our WELS website restored my *faith-confidence* in God's unshakeable mercy as my fellow Christians prayed for me and I for them. God's Epiphany Word lights up the world even in the darkest night. *“To another gifts of healing by that one Spirit, to another miraculous powers, to another prophecy,”* basically preaching, proclaiming God's truth. *“To another distinguishing between spirits...,”* being able to tell the good from the bad on the religious scene. *“To another speaking in different kinds of tongues, and to still another the interpretation of tongues,”* like Chinese and English on the tongues of WELS members.

“All these are the work of one and the same Spirit, and he gives them to each one, just as he determines.” That's the secret for joy and satisfaction in Christ's church as we learn God's Word and apply it to our lives. The Holy Spirit's gifts and the power to use them give every congregation in Christ's harvest field what they need for that place and time. Per communicant giving keeps increasing – financially and with time and talent as new challenges arise to meet with God's Word and sacraments. By God's grace your pastor can *“prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.* (Ephesians 4:12-13 NIV)

Hear me, most merciful God, in all my humble requests which I offer up to You in the name of Jesus Christ, Your Son, my Lord, to whom with You and the Holy Spirit, be all honor and glory, world without end. Amen.