



Oak Leaves

Newsletter of the ELS Historical Society

Volume 13

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Issue 2

Homily at the ELS Historical Society Meeting

Saturday, June 20, 2009

By Rudolph E. Honsey

Author's note, submitted along with the sermon:

We owe so much to the fathers and mothers and especially the early pastors who had to put up with inconveniences in so many ways: many scattered congregations, difficult roads, slow means of transportation, inconvenient housing, meager salaries, just plain hard work. How much easier it is for us! But even now, we realize we still have many spiritual enemies to contend with.

Dear members of the ELS Historical Society, fellow redeemed. Grace and peace be unto you from our Lord Jesus Christ. Hymn No. 180 ["Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds"] which we just sang is apparently based on the words of our text, which is recording in Psalm 78, verses 1 through 7:

A Contemplation of Asaph.

¹ Give ear, O my people, to my law;

Incline your ears to the words of my mouth.

² I will open my mouth in a parable;

I will utter dark sayings of old,

³ Which we have heard and known,

And our fathers have told us.

⁴ We will not hide them from their children,

Telling to the generation to come the praises of the LORD,

And His strength and His wonderful works that He has done.

⁵ For He established a testimony in Jacob,

And appointed a law in Israel,

Which He commanded our fathers,

That they should make them known to their children;

⁶ That the generation to come might know them,

The children who would be born,

That they may arise and declare them to their children,

⁷ That they may set their hope in God,

And not forget the works of God,

But keep His commandments;

These words were written by Asaph, who was inspired by God to write 12 psalms. Asaph was a contemporary of King David and was a prominent priest and musician and a leader in Israel's worship services. Psalm 78 is a long psalm of 72 verses. In verses following our text he recounts the past history of the people of Israel from their time in Egypt to the time he wrote the psalm. The rest of the psalm repeatedly tells of the people's forgetting God's blessings and benefits, sinning against Him, then being afflicted, crying out for help, being delivered, and repeating the cycle. How sad! How sobering! And how we ought to be warned and learn from that!

In our text, God through Asaph's words reminds us: "*Give ear, O My people, to My law.*" Here the word "law" means "teaching," "instruction," not only the teaching that **condemns** us for our sins, but also that **offers and gives** us forgiveness: the **GOSPEL**. The word "law," along with about ten similar words in Psalm 119, has that meaning throughout its 176 verses. A few of those words are also used in today's text.

As our text reminds us, it is very important for Christian parents to teach their children from early on. We who had Christian parents can truly be grateful to God for that. What a blessing to have been taught prayers, Bible passages, and hymn stanzas from our mothers as they tucked us into bed at night! I can still remember some of them. And what a blessing to have had Christian fathers! My father told me about two important church conventions that were held in our home congregation, Lime Creek, 60 miles southeast of Mankato: in 1918, when our ELS was reorganized, and in 1927, when our synod resolved to purchase Bethany Lutheran College. At the 1918 convention Mark Harstad's grandfather, Rev. Bjug Harstad, was elected its first president, and in 1927 Ted Gullixson's grandfather, Rev. George Gullixson Sr., made the important resolution to purchase Bethany Lutheran College. For both conventions my pastor, Rev. Henry Ingebritson, was the host pastor and played a leading role. He told me in some detail about both conventions. Now I wish I had asked him more. Over these years God has truly richly blessed our synod, our college, and our seminary.

Now I want to mention two important words in the opening verse of our text. That verse reads: *"Give ear, O my people, to my law; Incline your ears to the words of my mouth."* The words are "my people." In Hebrew it's one word: *'ammi* [אֲמִי]. The word *'am* [אֵם] has a significant meaning. It refers to the people ISRAEL, God's chosen people with whom God made a covenant. He would be their GOD, they His PEOPLE. The word for people is related to a word meaning "with," "in close relation to," the word *'im* [אִם]. It is contained in the name IM-MANUEL [אֵלִים אִמָּנֹוּל], which means "GOD

WITH US." It is found in Isaiah 7:14, where we read: "Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son and shall call His name IM-MANUEL." That prophecy was fulfilled in the manger at Bethlehem when Jesus Christ, true God from eternity, also became true Man. So, since He is true God and true Man, He is able to save us from sin, death, and hell, to keep the Law perfectly in our stead, and to suffer and die for us.

Therefore we can say that we are true *'am* [אֵם], true people of God. We became His children through Holy Baptism, and we have been nurtured and strengthened through His holy Word and the Sacrament of the Altar.

As God's people, we also have the opportunity of bringing others who do not know of our Savior the wonderful Good News of salvation through the written and spoken Word. And how thrilled we ought to be that the Gospel is also brought to people in other parts of the world, as we hear reports from our missionaries Terry Schultz, Tim Erickson, Young Ha Kim, and many others. As people of God's covenant of grace those too can join in singing hymns of praise to our Savior here below, and to all eternity with countless saints and angels.

May God bless you in your important mission. To God be all the glory. Amen.

Our closing hymn will be No. 583: "God's Word Is Our Great Heritage." This is an appropriate epilog to Luther's "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God." After the hymn, we shall close with the Lord's Prayer and the Apostolic Benediction.

Rudolph Honsey is professor emeritus of Bethany Lutheran College where he taught Hebrew, Latin, German, Norwegian, Religion, Philosophy, etc. He lives in retirement in Mankato, MN.

Celebrating our Norwegian Heritage

By Robin Ouren

“Celebrating our Norwegian Heritage” was the theme, and we did just that. The 13th annual meeting of the ELS Historical Society was held Saturday, June 20, 2009, at Bethany Lutheran College.

Norwegian goodies (sandbakkels, pepperkaker, and lefse) were served along with coffee during the morning registration.

After the singing of “Let Children Hear the Mighty Deeds” (ELH 180), Professor emeritus Rudy Honsey gave the opening devotion from Psalm 78, on which the hymn was based. The devotion was followed by the singing of “God’s Word is Our Great Heritage.”

Pastor Ted Gullixson entertained the group with his Power Point presentation of photographs taken by his late father, the Reverend Walther Gullixson. Walt was a “shutterbug” who took hundreds of formal and candid photos through the years, at Synod Conventions, church anniversaries, ordinations, and other gatherings. From beehive hairdos to 70’s sideburns and polyester suits, the photos celebrated and documented history within our Norwegian synod. Ted stressed the importance of preserving old photographs and slides, as well as identifying the photo subjects.

After a quick break to indulge in more Norwegian goodies, Ralph Olson from First Shell Rock Lutheran Church, Northwood, Iowa, gave a very interesting Power Point presentation on the 150th anniversary of that congregation. As it turns out, “First Shell Rock” was the fourth church in that area to be named “Shell Rock.” A granddaughter (Elvira Mellem) of one of the organizers of the congregation,

Gulbrand Mellem, is still living and a member at First Shell Rock.

As preparation for lunch, Professor Mark DeGarmeaux gave the group a crash course on how to say the Norwegian table prayer, which was then sung to the “Old Hundredth” tune.

During the lunch hour, Professor Adrian Lo entertained the group with fiddle tunes.

Following a brief business meeting, Professor Erling Teigen presented “Creating a Family History Web Site.” The Power Point presentation showed his family’s website, “All Things Tjernagel”, and explained how it came to be. He gave tips on what kinds of things to include on a website, information on how to set it up, and some programs that can be helpful in designing it.

The afternoon ended with the group learning and singing a few verses of “*I Himmelen*” (“In Heaven Above”) and “*Skriv deg, Jesus*” (“On My Heart”). This was followed by more coffee and Norwegian treats to tide everyone over as they journeyed home, having celebrated Norwegian heritage through language, music, food, fellowship, family and synod history, and most of all, through our shared faith in God.



Robin Ouren is a board member of the ELS Historical Society and a member of Norseland Lutheran Church in rural St. Peter, MN.

Music and Storytelling from a Pioneer Cabin

By Camilla Dashcund



This year's 2009 Synod Convention included an opportunity to interact in a musical and historical program about our Norwegian heritage held at the Ottesen Museum on the Bethany campus. Visitors were invited to the pioneer cabin room which is in the downstairs level of the museum. The room is an authentic replica and many artifacts of family life are on display. This was the cozy setting for about 15 to 20 people at a time to sit on benches and chairs and view the program.

The evening was a nice mix of musical presentations, sing-alongs to Norwegian folk tunes, and mini historical talks about an item once used in a Norwegian home. Everyone enjoyed the event so much that by the second evening word had spread, and people had to wait for the second show.

The instrumental music for the evening was supplied by Professor Mark Harstad on mandolin and three members of the Halvorson family. Loren on guitar, Daniel on violin, and John on bass. A lively selection of Norwegian and other folk tunes was played by them with Madeline Halvorson frequently dancing a folk dance to the tunes. She was definitely a scene stealer. Toes were tapping and hands were clapping as the audience enjoyed these musical moments. At times Professor Mark DeGarmeaux would sing some of the tunes in Norwegian and then give the audience a crash course in the Norwegian language so that they could sing along. All participated and seemed to enjoy this opportunity to feel a part of Norwegian pioneer life.



Historical presentations were given by Rebecca DeGarmeaux and Pastor George Orvick. Rebecca showed us a wooden mangle board. This item was hand carved by a young man striving to win the hand of a Norwegian lass in marriage. He would hang it outside the front door of her house in hopes that she would take it in. This would be the signal that she had accepted his proposal of marriage. Woe to the man whose mangle board stayed by the door for all to see and know of his dismissal.

Pastor Orvick modeled an intricate collar worn by the pastors at one time. It was said that this collar would remind them of their responsibility to preach the truth as the Bible

says: “It would be better that a millstone was hung around your neck, and you were drowned in the depths of the sea.” Woe to the wife who had to keep the collar starched and ironed. These and other items gave us a peak into the lives of the Norwegian settlers and explained the uses of some of the items on display.



At least a hundred people were in attendance all totaled. Everyone thoroughly enjoyed the evening and hoped that this might become an annual event during synod week.

Camilla Dashcund is a board member of the ELS Historical Society and a teacher at Holy Cross Lutheran School in Madison, WI.

Oak Leaves Editor(s) Needed

The Board of Directors of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod Historical Society is seeking a new editor (or co-editors) for our newsletter **Oak Leaves**. The position oversees the work of producing four issues of the newsletter each year.

The work involves:

- soliciting articles on topics relating to the history of the Evangelical Lutheran Synod from various writers;
- editing the articles;
- planning the layout of each issue;
- getting each issue printed and delivered to the secretary who does addressing and mailing.

This is largely a “labor of love”, but there is a small stipend for the position.

The Board would appreciate input from our readership regarding possible candidates for the position.

Please contact the current chairman of the Historical Society:

Mark O. Harstad

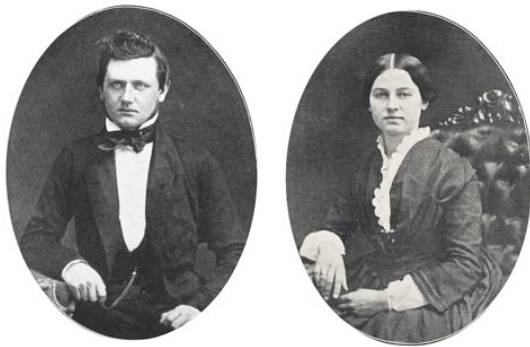
Email: mharstad@blc.edu — Office: (507) 344-7334 — Home: (507) 387-2885

“The Egge Cabin”

From *The Diary of Elisabeth Koren*, pages 186-188



Note: When Pastor and Mrs. Koren came to America at Christmastime in 1853, they were promised that a parsonage would be ready for them. It was not. And for the first months they lived with Mr. and Mrs. Egge in a small cabin. The cabin can now be seen at the Vesterheim Norwegian-American Museum in Decorah, Iowa.



We have lived here for some time now, but I have not yet described how our first home in America was arranged. The whole house is fifteen feet wide and sixteen feet long and consists of one room and the loft. About a third of the room is partitioned off by a shining chintz curtain with large, variegated flowers, which win universal admiration from those who visit Helene; they think they

are “frightfully fine flowers.” This curtained space is again divided by another, which thus forms the two sleeping chambers, with half a window for each; actually each has just room for a bed.

One wall of our chamber is full of nails; on one of these hang a dusty little bottle and a big pair of sheep shears; above the head of the bed hangs the towel. Under the ceiling there is a shelf; Erik keeps his writing case on it and there, too, Vilhelm’s clay pipes have their place, from which I should prefer they never descended, for there is a horrid smell from that molasses tobacco, with whose aroma Erik blissfully fills the room when he is home. On this shelf there is also a large box of cigars, from which I daily bring down a supply by crawling up on the bed. On this bed lie Vilhelm’s dressing gown, toilet case, a cigar box which at present serves me for a sewing case, and such other articles as we have no place for.

Then we have the living room, which takes up somewhat more than a third of these sixteen feet. It has two windows, with white curtains, directly opposite each other.

Beneath the one to the north is a large black walnut table, where Helene is usually busy. Beneath the other are Vilhelm's table and chair. Here I have my writing case and my work while Vilhelm is away; when he is home, on the other hand, I have to vacate the place and take my case away, for then the table is full of papers, certificates, and records. Near this window is the door that leads outside. Above the window Vilhelm has nailed a shelf for our books, which before lay on the bed. There is a similar shelf above the other window, where the library of the house is found in beautiful confusion next to candlesticks, an iron heater, a lamp, etc.

In the little space between the curtain and the window hangs a mirror above which, among many other beautiful things, Helene's comb is displayed on weekdays; it is used only on Sundays and state occasions. Here, too, are found Erik's tobacco pouch and the unlucky clock, in its green case with large round gilded feet, which has now probably stopped for good. It amazed us a couple of times by moving forward an hour or two, until at last we discovered Master Per had climbed on the table and brought about that marvel. Directly in front of the curtain there is a chair; the rest of the furniture consists of three stools, also of black walnut, which are moved about as they are needed. That is the picture here since we got our table and two chairs; before that there was a chest which was pulled here and there for a seat.

The last strip of the room is the kitchen. Here is the stove; its appurtenances are distributed round about. On the walls hang all the pans and the coffee roaster; under the ceiling a row of kettles, coffee cans, a flatiron, a tin funnel with matches, and our candle snuffers; in addition there is a crosspiece where all their belongings hang, together

with rags and I know not what else. Under the steps which lead to the loft (which also is hung with kitchen utensils) is a bench for dishes, with two small cabinets beneath. Right by our bed is the cellar trap door, very inconveniently located. The whole room is papered with all sorts of newspapers and prints, chiefly *Maanedstidende*, of which some are upside down and others sideways. The lowest part of the wall (it is of logs, as usual, with plaster in between) is not yet papered; but Helene is tireless in covering it with *Emigranten* whenever she manages to get hold of copies, although they are constantly being torn to pieces by some little meddler or other, of whom Burman is one.

The door leading to the loft is next to the door to the outside. In the loft, which is not plastered, the wind has free play. It is full of all sorts of things: a large wheat bin, pork barrels, large and small chests, our valises, a bed, meal sacks, some clothes, and a great many tools; Per's greatest delight is to get hold of these and then drive nails into the floor. In short here are found all the countless things usually found in a loft, and a great many more. There are two windows, too, one to the east and one to the west, where I have often stood and watched the sunset or been on the lookout for Vilhelm. When we can no longer bear the smell of pork or of roasting coffee, we leave the door to the loft open.

The house has a poor location. There is a dreary view toward the road to Decorah with a few scattered trees; but on the other side, where there is no window, there is a very pretty wood. Such is the place where we have lived more than three months.

I wish I knew what news Vilhelm is going to bring from Decorah. There he is now. I scarcely recognized him in that hat he has acquired.

God-given Talents at Work (Part 1 of 2)

By Julian G. Anderson

(Reprinted from the 1954 *Synod Report*)

Note: The theme of the 2009 ELS convention essay was stewardship. The following is part one of an essay on stewardship presented at the 1954 convention.

The subject of this essay is eminently practical—"God-given talents at work." It is also one which is highly personal, a topic which invites the most serious kind of soul-searching and self-examination, as we shall see. As a guide for our discussion we have divided the essay into four chief parts, as follows: 1) What Do We Mean By The Words "God-given Talents?" 2) What Are These God-given Talents Which We Have Received? 3) How Are We Expected To Use These God-given Talents? 4) How Does All This Apply To Us of The Norwegian Synod?

I. What Do We Mean by the Words, "God-given Talents"?

"For it is as when a man, going into another country, called his own servants, and delivered unto them his goods. And unto one he gave five talents, to another two, to another one; to each according to his several ability; and he went on his journey." (Matthew 25:14-15, A.S.V.)

The word "talent," about which our essay revolves, is one of those interesting words which has undergone an almost complete change of meaning in the 1,900 years between the time of Christ and our own day. Furthermore, the word is an unusual one in that its present-day meaning is one which is directly traceable to the Christian Church as the result of its theological interpretation of the original word "talent" as used in the 25th chapter of the Gospel according to Matthew, quoted above. Let us see, then, how this shift of meaning has come to take place.

In the ancient world of Jesus' day the word "talent" had two meanings. In the first place, it was the largest common measure of weight in use at that time, representing an approximate equivalent today of 57 pounds. At the same time, as in the case of the English "pound" today, a talent was also a unit of money or coinage, representing the value of a 57-pound weight of solid gold or silver. As you can see, therefore, a talent of gold was a very large sum of money, the value of which; would be worth about \$24,000 as measured by today's standards; and a

talent of silver, based on the ratio of 1 to 12 in use then, would be worth about \$2,000.

In the Parable of the Talents, therefore, recorded in Matthew 25, the principle thought is simply this—that a certain wealthy business man; finding it necessary to leave home for some time on an extended business trip, called in three of his most trusted and capable employees and turned over the management of his large business into their hand during his absence. He did so, however, in a rather unusual way. To the first man he turned over some 60% of his assets, amounting to many talent's worth of money and property (about \$120,000 worth), and instructed him to carry on his business for him and personally watch over that part of his property until his return. To the second man—apparently a man of lesser ability—he turned over 25% of his property—two talents' worth, or \$48,000—with the same instructions. And to the third man—still less experienced and capable—he entrusted the remaining 12% of his estate—one talent, or \$24,000 worth—again with the same instructions. And having thus taken care of the management of his property and business during his absence, he departed.

This, then, is the story; and since it was told as a parable, it is plain that our Lord intended to teach thereby certain spiritual lessons about the Kingdom of God. From the very earliest times, therefore, the Christian Church has invested this parable with the following interpretation, which is quite obvious and self-evident. The business man is an obvious type and symbol of Christ, the Lord of the Church. His departure on a long journey symbolizes Christ's ascension into heaven. The three employees (actually slaves) are intended to symbolize, then, the various individual members of the Christian Church, among whom, of course, we must place ourselves. And lastly, the business represents the work of the Kingdom of God; and the talents, or assets, represent not material values, but rather the various abilities, skills and aptitudes necessary to carry out the work of the Kingdom.

It is from this interpretation of the parable, then, that our present usage of the word “talent” has arisen, meaning, as we all know, certain abilities, skills or aptitudes, certain natural capacities or endowments which a person may, or may not, have. Thus we commonly speak of “talents *and* abilities,” using the two words as almost synonyms. And in this connection there are two points especially to be noted. First, that “talents,” as we shall use the word from this point on, means certain *special* abilities or skills with which a person is born, or which he acquires by education or experience or practice. And second, that these “talents,” or special skills and abilities, are by nature *gifts—God-given* gifts, as depicted in the parable where the business man *gave* these talents into the hands of his employees during his absence. Now, then, let us inquire more specifically:

II. What Are These God-given Talents Which We Have Received?

“For even as we have many members in one body, and all the members have not the same office: so we, who are many, are one body in Christ, and severally members one of another. And having gifts differing according to the grace that was given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of our faith; or ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or he that teacheth, to his teaching; or he that exhorteth, to his exhorting; he that giveth, let him do it with liberality; he that ruleth, with diligence; he that showeth mercy, with cheerfulness.” (Romans 12: 4-8, A.S.V.).

“Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are diversities of ministrations, and the same Lord. And there are diversities of workings, but the same God, who worketh all things in all. But to each one is given the manifestation of the Spirit to profit withal. For to one through the Spirit the word of wisdom; and to another the word of knowledge, according to the same Spirit; to another faith, in the same Spirit; and to another gifts of healings, in the one Spirit; and to another workings of miracles; and to another prophecy; and to another discernings of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; and to another the interpretation of tongues: but all these worketh the one and the same Spirit, dividing to each one severally even as he will.” (Corinthians 12:4-11, A.S.V.)

In these two passages from the letters of Paul we find the most complete list of the special talents or abilities required to carry out the work of the Kingdom. To begin with, then, let us simply list these talents with a few words of explanation on each one.

We begin, as does Paul, with the gifts of wisdom and knowledge which the Lord supplies to every Christian in a greater or lesser degree.

We realize, of course, that all our mental and intellectual gifts and abilities are gifts of God in a special sense. The ability to think and reason is one of the things which separates man from the animal kingdom. It is one of the things which marks man as having been created in the image of God. In every area of our lives a certain amount of wisdom and knowledge is required. And this is particularly true with regard to our spiritual lives. In every case our personal salvation depends upon a certain knowledge and understanding of the saving truths of God’s Word as crystallized in the Gospel of Christ crucified for our sins. It goes without saying that it is this type of wisdom and knowledge of which Paul is speaking here—the knowledge of God’s word.

The point which Paul emphasizes, however, is that while all Christians possess the ability to know and understand the Word of God in some measure, there are some who possess this talent and ability in a much larger measure. There are some whose natural endowments and education have given them a much greater wisdom and understanding of the Scriptures than others. These, whether pastors or laymen—and there are many of the latter—have been singularly blessed and constitute the leaders of the Christian Church.

We hasten to add that every phase of the Church’s work depends upon a proper and adequate understanding of the Word of God. This gift of wisdom and knowledge, therefore, is absolutely basic and essential, and whether we possess it to a great or small degree we should regard it as one of our greatest blessings and strive always to cultivate it to a higher and more perfect degree.

Closely connected with this primary gift of wisdom and knowledge, however, is the gift of “prophecy,” as Paul calls it. In this connection, let us first ask, “What is ‘prophecy,’ and what is a ‘prophet?’” Basically, a “prophet” is one who speaks on behalf of the Lord, and “prophecy,” therefore, is simply the act of bringing the Word of the Lord to men. It should be clearly understood, however, that these words are used in a two-fold sense in Scripture—first, of a very small and select group of men and women who received direct revelations from God and made those things known to men, such as Moses and Elijah and Paul and the daughters of Agabus;

and secondly, in a much more general way any person who preaches or expounds or otherwise brings the War of God to men—a “preacher,” in other words, as we would say today. It is almost unnecessary to point out that the Church always needs a adequate supply of such preachers, or “prophets,” and that for this reason the Lord supplies this special talent to certain individuals with the Church—the ability to publicly preach and expound the Word God.

Then there is the special talent or gift for teaching, the ability to make things plain and thereby to instruct others, especially in the Word of God. We all realize that this, too, is a special talent which is supplied by the Lord to some individuals in greater measure than others. We all realize also how vital and important this talent is in the work of the Church. The Christian Church, if it is to succeed in its God-given work, must be a teaching Church. It must start with the children in their very earliest years and continue to teach them regularly and diligently through adolescence and adulthood, and on to the very end of life. Thus it becomes quite clear that the Church, if it is to carry on its work successfully, must have a plentiful supply of well-trained and consecrated teachers to teach in its schools and congregations.

Also closely connected with the primary gifts of wisdom and knowledge of the Scriptures is the specialized talent for “discerning the spirits,” as Paul says—the ability to detect errors and false teachings, the ability to see through the specious arguments and logic of false teachers. Every Christian, of course, is admonished to “test the spirits whether they be of God,” but amid the welter and confusion of errors and false prophets in the world today, the Church stands in dire need of those men called “theologians” who have this special ability to detect theological errors and bring them out clearly into the light of day.

Then there are the specialized talents of “tongues” and the “interpretation of tongues.” By this we do not mean speaking in gibberish and unintelligible sounds, as certain fanatics maintain, but rather the ability to read and speak and understand other languages and to translate these languages into other tongues. This gift of tongues is an obvious necessity in the work of foreign missions and the translation of the Bible,

and is particularly important in the training of pastors in the Biblical languages.

Then there are those special talents and abilities needed to carry on the various works of charity within the Church—talents which again the Lord supplies to certain individuals in extra measure. Paul mentions specifically the work performed by the deacons in the New Testament Church—ministering to the poor, the aged, the widows and orphans. He also mentions those who perform works of mercy in a more general way—men and women who care for the sick and dying, for those who are in prison, and for those who are in special trouble of one sort or another. Today we should take this to include the whole wide field of welfare work—to the important work of Christian doctors, nurses and psychiatrists, Christian lawyers, welfare workers in general—for which special talents and abilities are necessary.

Then there is also the special talent for “management” —executive ability, as we would speak of it today. Certain it is that the Church also must have those who can organize and manage and direct the manifold affairs of the Kingdom of God in an over-all way—officers and trustees in our congregations, and administrators and business managers in our schools and other organizations. And these, too, must be equipped with special talents and abilities which the Lord supplies in His gracious way.

Then there is also the talent for “exhortation,” i.e. the ability to stir others into action. As we have all observed, in any group there seem to be certain folks who possess the almost intangible, but very real, capacity for filling others with enthusiasm and spurring others on to greater efforts. This they do either by admonishing others to stop doing certain things, or by exhorting and urging them to put forth more effort. They are the so-called “spark-plugs of the Church, the ones possessed of an extraordinary amount of faith and vision and enthusiasm; and with human nature so prone to become lazy and indifferent, the Church sorely needs those who have this talent.

And finally, undergirding the whole work of the Church and all these other talents is the ability to give and share of our material substance for the Church’s work. Here we are reminded that almost all of the aforementioned duties and

activities of the Church—preaching, teaching, works of charity—demand money to carry them out successfully. And Paul, therefore, does not neglect to mention that money and material resources also are gifts from the Lord, gifts which He supplies to His disciples and which He expects us to use in the work of the Kingdom.

As we consider all these talents we cannot help but say, “How wonderfully does the Lord provide for His Church! How abundantly does He provide for the work of His Kingdom! What a great wealth of talents and gifts has He given us!” And let us emphasize again that these are all *gifts*—gifts of pure grace which we have received from our Lord without any merit or worthiness of our own. They are all bestowed upon us by the operation of the Holy Spirit, divided among the various members according to their several abilities, as Paul points out, even as the businessman did in the Parable of the Talents. The gifts themselves, as we have seen, are very different and diversified. Different gifts are given to different individuals in differing degrees. But all by the *same Spirit* and all for *one purpose*—to prosecute the work of the Kingdom of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. All these talents are given, as Paul says, “to profit withal”—to profit the Lord Jesus Christ, Who is the Lord of the Church!

Therefore we have the Church pictured here as one great body—the Body of Christ—of which we are all individual members; and the comparison is made between this Body of Christ and our own bodies of flesh and blood. In masterful fashion Paul points out that just as in our own bodies we have many thousands of separate members and, parts, each one wonderfully different and having different functions, and yet all taken together form one body, so it is in the case of the Church. There, too, we have many, many different Christians, each of whom has different talents and abilities and functions, but all joined

together into one grand spiritual body—the Church Universal!

And from this picture we draw two very important lessons. First, that each and every Christian, as a member of the Body of Christ, has *some particular talent*, or talents and gifts, which he must recognize and with which he must be content. Paul is very careful to point out that to *each one* God has portioned out and given a measure of faith—certain gifts; and “to *each one* God has given the manifestation of the Spirit.” There is *no Christian* who has not some God-given talents, for to *all* have been given *some* wisdom and knowledge of the Word, and *some* money and material gifts, and in addition to these, various other gifts, whether it be the ability to preach or teach, or the gift of management, or exhortation, or other specialized talents for service. Let each one, therefore, recognize his God-given talents and thank God for them!

And secondly, we learn that the overall health of the Church and its success in carrying out its great work depends *directly* upon how faithfully and well each individual member uses his talents and carries out his own particular task. He knew that if but one member of our body—say the liver or the stomach or the heart—becomes sick and fails to function properly, the whole body becomes sick. We know also that if each and every individual member of our body remains healthy and functions properly, then the body as a whole remains healthy and vigorous and performs its work successfully. Let each and every one of us remember, therefore, that our talents, whatever they may be, are *urgently needed* in the work of the Kingdom; that the over-all success of Christ’s work depends upon *us*—yes, upon each one of us individually; and that we, therefore, must not only recognize our talents, but *use* them to the fullest! Which brings us to our third point: [*To be continued in the next issue...*]

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