

## Christocentric Charisma

I guess it's just part of human nature that we try and make everything about ourselves. We children of Adam are a *very proud and self-centered* people. We always find a way to make the conversation about ourselves. We always find a way to make whatever is happening be all about us. That's why loving God and loving our neighbor is so impossibly difficult. *We're too busy loving and worshiping and glorifying ourselves!* Our Church forefathers referred to this self-centeredness as "*curvatus en se*," which is a fancy Latin way of saying we're curved in on ourselves. Like a satellite dish or a magnifying glass in the sun, everything ultimately gets focused in on and made to be about us. We're at the center. We're star of our own show.

Now, the reason I lead with this *ugly little ego-centric reality* is because in our Epistle lesson for today we hear St. Paul offering up his praise and thanksgiving because the Corinthian Christians "are not lacking in any gift." Some translations even say that the Corinthians were not lacking in any "*spiritual gifts.*" **That's impressive.** Apparently these folks were *God's gift to the Church*, certainly worthy of praise and adoration. "*You're not lacking in any gift.*"

Now, you know as well as I do that some people honestly believe this to be true about themselves. Some folks honestly believe that if it wasn't for them, the church walls would fall in. *In their minds, they are God's gift to the Church, lacking in nothing...except for the praise and adoration they think they deserve.* But most of us, though...? We know the truth. I don't know about you, but I hear this language of "not lacking in any gift" and I immediately begin to think, "*Man, I wish I was that good. I wish I wasn't lacking in any gift.*" I confess: I hear these Old Testament and Gospel lessons for today, and I can't even do something as simple as love God and love my neighbor; *that's how lacking and deficient I am. **I can't even do the easy things!*** Man...I wish I was like those Corinthian Christians.

No...you don't. **You shouldn't.** Those Corinthian Christians were an *absolute mess!* They were some of the most *self-centered, self-serving hypocrites* the Church has ever known. These folks kept St. Paul awake at night, and for good reason. There's a reason why Paul wrote not one, but two letters to the Corinthian Christians—they were a *self-centered, self-indulging, self-aggrandizing mess!* For example, they were so messed up that some of their own parishioners weren't even getting communion because the more self-centered, well-to-do folks had turned the Lord's Supper into their own little Martha Stewart feast. *They were getting drunk at communion, and leaving nothing for the others!* And Paul says that he gives thanks for this?! **These are people who aren't lacking in any**

**gifts?!** Sounds to me like they're severely lacking; lacking and deficient in some pretty basic Christian catechesis and love! They really don't get it, do they?

Well...here's the thing: When Paul says that they're not lacking in any gift, *he isn't referring to the Corinthians and what they bring to the table; what they have to offer the Church.* Again, that's how we often hear this and understand this. Clearly, it has to be about us, right? No! The word that Paul uses here is *charismata*, which is translated as "gift/spiritual gift." I know some of you perked up when heard this word because you hear the word "charismatic," don't you? Based on what we know in today's culture, *this isn't necessarily a good thing, is it?* The charismatic preacher isn't just an outgoing kind of extrovert. He (or she) is the one handling snakes and acting like the ringmaster or the used car salesman. The charismatic congregations are the ones who are flopping around and hopping around and dancing and speaking crazy gibberish, claiming that the Holy Spirit has given them the spiritual gift of speaking in tongues or the spiritual gift of interpreting such gibberish. Charismatic congregations are all about putting on the *biggest, brightest, best show in town.* Coffee bars and rock-climbing walls and concerts and really dynamic speakers that get you all fired up and ready to re-commit to Jesus. That's how we often understand charismatic in today's culture and Church.

Even good Lutherans fall prey to this misunderstanding of *charismata*—*spiritual gifts.* We hear Paul using this term with the Corinthians, and our minds immediately go into a very curved-in "spiritual inventory" mode. *What gifts do we have? What can we offer the Church? What good can we do? Where are we deficient and lacking?* "Pastor, if we really want to make an impact and grow, we need to step up our game. We need to get people with real gifts on board." Folks: That's **NOT** what Paul is saying here (or anywhere else in Scripture, for that matter)! Think about it like this: When has salvation and forgiveness and grace and mercy and peace ever been *contingent on what you can bring to the table?* When has your forgiveness and salvation ever hinged on what gifts you have to offer to God in exchange? Answer: **NEVER!**

That word (*charismata*), when you break it down and parse it out, simply means "a gift of grace; a free gift." *Hmmm...who is the Giver of the gift of grace? Who is this "grace gift"?* Answer: **Jesus!** Not only is God the Giver of this free and unmerited gift of grace, **but He IS the gift of grace.** Jesus Christ is God's *charismata* in the flesh; the Gift of God's grace and peace; the absolutely undeserved and unmerited gift of God's compassion and love and mercy. And God gives this gift to the entire world. "God so loved the world that He gave...." God takes this gift of His grace and mercy and love, and He nails it to a cross for all to *behold and receive and hold fast to.*

And I want you to think about what this means for you in terms of your daily life. I know...a bit contradictory of me to now encourage you to consider yourself after going on and on about all the problems with being curved in on yourself. *What does this [the crucifix] mean for you?* After all, Jesus didn't die for generic, hypothetical people and generic, hypothetical sins, did He? He died for YOU! He died for YOUR sins. He died to save YOU. *So...what does all this mean for YOU?*

My dear brothers and sisters in Christ: You have every reason in the world to give thanks and praise to almighty God, no matter how bad things may be going for you! No matter how out-of-whack or off-the-rails your life may be going right now; no matter how *empty or deficient or lacking* you may feel right now, you are **NOT** lacking in the gift of God's grace that is Christ Jesus. And this goes for congregations as well as individuals. *"But Pastor, we're lacking in money. We're lacking in kids. We're lacking in attendance. We're lacking in a better, high-tech and entertaining facility. We're deficient in making people happy and giving them what they want. They don't want boring old sermons. They want fun and excitement and dancing and coffee shops. They want the whole Disney experience that the other places are offering. We're dropping the ball. We're missing the mark. We're deficient. We're failing."*

No, we're not. We are **NOT** lacking in anything; at least not in what *truly matters*. How can I say such a thing? Easy. Listen to what Jesus has already said. *"It is finished!"* Jesus Christ has accomplished and fulfilled **EVERYTHING** for you and your salvation. And it's not just a one-and-done kind of thing that Jesus did on one particular Friday a long time ago. **NO!** Jesus continues to bring the *free and unmerited and over-flowing gift* of Himself and His grace, mercy, and peace to you each and every time you hear His Word and receive His absolution and eat and drink His victorious Body and Blood. We, as a congregation, as individuals, are **lacking in NOTHING**. We have the free gift that is the fullness of Christ Jesus—God's grace in the flesh—*and nothing and no one can ever take this gift from us, not even a little bit*. This fullness of this cruciform, charismatic reality is all the reason in the world to thank and praise God, from Whom all blessings flow.

May this cruciform, charismatic reality fill and over-flow your heart, your soul, and your mind with His peace that surpasses all understanding. It is finished. *You lack nothing*. May this over-flowing, abundant charisma (gift) of God's unconditional peace and love be over-flowing in all that you say and do in your daily life. Basically, may your life be a simple profession of repentant, humble faith and thanksgiving—a humble, thankful response—for all that Christ has *already* done and *continues* to do for you and for all us children of Adam.

To Him alone be all glory, all praise, and all honor. **AMEN**