Columns
Horizons
Spirituality



(Unsplash/Annie Williams)



by Jennifer Wilson

View Author Profile

Join the Conversation

February 7, 2025

Share on BlueskyShare on FacebookShare on TwitterEmail to a friendPrint

I stopped daydreaming and tuned into the second reading at Mass a few weeks ago. It was a day before Martin Luther King Jr. Day and the inauguration of the president of the United States. I sat and listened to the words from 1 Corinthians 12:4-11:

> Brothers and sisters: 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 each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit.

As these words were being proclaimed, I started to think about them in relation to the Catholic Church. A few weeks before this Mass, I had attended SEEK25 in Washington. I was there as part of the exhibitors who were either selling or promoting their organization or religious order. I joined 3,500 others to hear speakers, pray together, and attend Mass. Most of the attendees were college students.

The Mass that I had been dreaming of was a celebration of Martin Luther King Jr. That Mass had Gospel music, dancing, and an expressive style of worship quite different from the Masses at SEEK25. Yet both types of Mass honored God and who we are as people of God. As I sat there reflecting on the reading, I was struck by how, despite these different expressions of faith, we are still one church, worshiping the same God.

Advertisement

As a vocation minister, I often encounter women who love God, the Catholic Church, and feel called to religious life. I often hear three common themes in how they express their hopes for a community: They find God in the spiritual practice of adoration, they sometimes desire to wear a habit as an outward expression of their call to serve God, and they almost always want to live in community. As a vocation minister for an apostolic community that combines service with prayer, I often witness what seems like division in the church. I have heard members of different religious orders say things like, "Oh, that order is too conservative," and more than once, I have heard, "Oh, that order is Catholic in name only."

We now have a new president. In the coming weeks, divisions may deepen as our personal opinions and convictions align with political lines. We may look at our parents, friends or co-workers and think, "*How can they possibly believe that?*" — whatever the hot issue of the moment may be. And they are likely thinking the same about us.

On the day I attended a Mass celebrated by Fr. Kareem Smith, a visiting priest from the Bronx, New York. That day he was in Buffalo to celebrate Martin Luther King Jr. Day with us. He spoke about the diversity of gifts in our church and in our world. What made me pause and reach for my phone to write it down was when he said: "The secret to this diversity of gifts is love and each one of us is a reflection and model of God." He also said God calls us "his beloved because without him we are nothing. "

> We can find a sense of control and normalcy in our lives by using our gifts and encouraging others to use theirs, making our homes, parishes and work environments places where everyone is recognized and loved for who they are.
>
> Tweet this

Returning to the reading from that Sunday, 1 Corinthians 12:4-11 says:

> To each individual the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit. 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, mighty deeds; 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.

Pause for a moment and think about the gifts from this list that God has given you. Think about specific ways you use them. Now think about the people around you — what are their gifts, and how do they use them?



Jennifer Wilson is pictured with the mug she received this past Christmas. (Jennifer Wilson)

As I reflect on this, a particular person comes to mind — someone I know who has very different ideas about the church than I do. When I consider this person in the context of having received gifts from God, I am able to look at her perspective differently. I am less annoyed, less inclined to judge her way of being Catholic. In my mind, I see us standing together — not in total agreement, but in mutual respect. My hope is that we can work together for and within the church we both love. We are

both Catholic, and we are both loved by God — just as we are all Americans, or live here, and are all loved by God.

This past Christmas, I received a treasured gift: a travel mug that says, "You make the difference." The person who gave it to me made it herself. She designed the lettering in purple, my favorite color, and drew sunflowers on it, knowing they are my favorite flower. This gift — the saying, the care she took with the details — is a testament to how I have used my gifts to help her. Gifts given to me by the God who loves us both.

It is like Father Kareem said: "Love is the secret." Knowing we are loved — and that others are loved by the same God — should call us to reach out to one another. We cannot solve every problem, but our reactions in the coming days and weeks do matter. We can respond in love, using the gifts we have been given to seek common ground and move forward. We can find a sense of control and normalcy in our lives by using our gifts and encouraging others to use theirs, making our homes, parishes and work environments places where everyone is recognized and loved for who they are.

As Father Kareem has reminded us: "The secret to this diversity of gifts is love and each one of us is a reflection and model of God."