

Archbishop Stephen gave a reflection about understanding spiritual gifts on BBC Radio 4 as part of the Daily Service for Pentecost. This follows in full

There are many different manifestations of the Holy Spirit and there are many different gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, but it is always the same God who activates all of them in everyone. And each manifestation of the Spirit, however different, serves the common good.

In other words, all these things come from the one God, and serve the one purpose, that of human flourishing, well-being, peace and justice – the common good.

This is the context in which we are invited to understand the feast of Pentecost and the coming of the Holy Spirit. It demonstrates God's delight in the diverse beauty and variety of creation, and of our role, as stewards of creation, those who bear the image of God. Our human diversity reflects and is shaped and enlivened by the diversity of the God who is – one God: Father, Son, and Holy Spirit.

At Pentecost, the world doesn't suddenly speak, one language - God does not overlook or supersede the diversity of creation - the church speaks every language. God blesses diversity. Then we also discover through the experience of the first Christians as recorded for us in Paul's letters, the abundant variety of gifts and ministry that come from the Spirit of God, which is the very presence of Jesus, only now unconstrained by time or space.

And because some of these manifestations of the Spirit are dramatic and remarkable, there is a danger of one seeming superior to another, so Paul keeps emphasising as we heard that they come from the same God, and are part of the ministry of the same Spirit, and serve the one purpose.

And if we read on a little from the passage in Corinthians that we have just heard, we get an even clearer indication of Paul's, let us say, ambiguous estimation of the rather more spectacular gifts of the Spirit that have beguiled the Corinthians, because he says to them that, even if they do speak in the tongue of men or angels, i.e. using the languages of the world that can be understood, or the phantasmagorical language of angels that are the gift of tongues that has manifested itself in the Corinthian church, as it still does in many churches of charismatic and Pentecostal traditions today, if they don't have love, then they are no better than a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal (see 1 Cor. 13.1).

The one Spirit is part of the one God, who it turns out is revealed to us in Jesus, as being the three persons in one God, 'Father, Son, and Holy Spirit' God. It is this God, through the Spirit, that lavishes gifts upon the Church, so that those who confess the name of Jesus are filled with the Spirit, and in different and diverse ways, exercise the gifts of the Spirit, and manifest the fruits of the spirit and continue the ministry of Jesus in the world today.

But for a single purpose: to serve the common good - and here is the point of it all - to do in our world today, what Jesus did in his world then. Even to be the presence of Jesus.

Yes, that is the invitation and the opportunity. I can be the presence of Jesus in my family, my home, my school, my community, my place of work. Empowered, cajoled, prodded and picked up, inspired by the power of the Spirit, I can teach and heal and serve. I can act with generosity,

kindness, humility, self-control, mercy and grace. And love. Because the one God who gives us the one Spirit to serve the one purpose is love. And love is the greatest gift of all. And this God loves me. And has given me the Spirit.

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