

November 6, 2011

21st Sunday After Pentecost

Father Pat's Pastoral Ponderings

Reading Paul's list of the "gifts" the triumphant Christ confers on the Church (Ephesians 4:11), students of Holy Scripture may profitably compare it to the earlier list in 1 Corinthians. The differences are striking. Let us limit ourselves to two considerations: the content of the two lists and their contextual ascriptions in each case.

First, the content of the two lists: The earlier one, in 1 Corinthians, includes the ministries of Christians endowed with wise counsel, knowledge, faith, healing, miracles, prophecy, discernment, charismatic utterance, and the ability to interpret such utterance (12:8-10).

The details of that list---and Paul certainly did not regard it as exhaustive of the Spirit's generosity---were determined by the immediate pastoral problems of the church at Corinth, chiefly the pretense of superior wisdom on the part of some of its members (cf. 3:18). Consequently, all the gifts listed were marked by a kind of "charismatic" flavor. The question of charism determined the context; they were gifts of "the same Spirit" (12:4,9,11).

In Ephesians 4, on the other hand, the listed gifts may be described as more---for want of a happier adjective---structural. Except for the prophets, the ministers mentioned in the later text seem to have an "official" standing in the Church: apostles, evangelists, pastors, and teachers. These vocations, which exercise and oversee the evangelical and teaching ministry, are determined by the Church's structure, its very constitution. They are more "official" than "charismatic." For this reason, even the prophets in this list should probably be understood as "those whom the Church recognizes as prophets."

Second, the contextual ascription of the gifts: Paul began the earlier list by asserting, "There are diversities of gifts, but the same *Spirit*. There are differences of ministries, but the same *Lord*. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same *God* who works all in all" (1 Corinthians 12:4-6). In this text Paul initially ascribes the gifts to each of the Three Persons of the Holy Trinity.

Nonetheless, when he treats of the various ministries individually, the Apostle speaks only of the Holy Spirit (five times in 12:8-11).

This pneumatological ascription of the diverse gifts is consonant with Paul's abiding concern in 1 Corinthians: the unity of believers in Christ. The integrity of the Corinthian church was threatened by all sorts of factions, not the least of which were occasioned by the sheer variety of the gifts. For this reason, Paul

insisted that the Holy Spirit was the source of congregational unity, not disunion: "the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one unto profit" (12:7).

With respect to the gifts listed in Ephesians 4, their ascription is both similar to, and different from, 1 Corinthians.

The similarity lies in an identical Trinitarian quality; just he did in 1 Corinthians 12:4-6, Paul begins the list of the gifts in Ephesians 4 with the Persons of the Holy Trinity, speaking of "one Spirit . . . one Lord . . . one God and Father (4:4-6).

Then, he narrows the ascription of the gifts, not to the Holy Spirit, but to the triumphant Christ: "to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift" (4:7). Whereas in 1 Corinthians 12 the accent was pneumatological, here it is entirely Christological: "He Himself gave some as apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers" (4:11). Indeed, Ephesians 4 does not again speak of the Holy Spirit in the context of the gifts.

Since both 1 Corinthians and Ephesians are concerned with the unity of the Church as the body of Christ---and the spiritual gifts serving that unity certainly come from both Christ and the Holy Spirit---why the shift of emphasis to Christology in the Epistle to the Ephesians?

It is related, I believe, to Paul's new awareness of Christ as the "head" of the Church. Since we do not find this idea in his thought until the Captivity Epistles---Colossians and Ephesians---I have always believed that the Apostle adopted this image from his discussions with Luke during the period of his imprisonment at Caesarea (cf. Colossians 4:14). From his beloved physician, he learned a new medical discovery: the head is the governing part of the body, the ruling principle of its unified activity.

The gifts listed in Ephesians were given "for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ" (4:12). Through them Christ governs the teaching and pastoring of His people. By reason of His Ascension the Lord not only reigns over the saints in heaven; He also rules over the saints on earth.

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