

## **THE JOY THAT COMES FROM THE HOLY SPIRIT**

### **Exodus 33: 12-23**

The Lord Promises to be with his People.

The Lord shows compassion and pity.

There is a dazzling light of his presence.

### **Isaiah 45:1-7**

The Lord will give you the strength you need.

He creates both light and darkness.

### **1 Thessalonians 1:1-10**

‘We remember ... how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard, and how your hope in the Lord Jesus Christ is so firm. You received the message with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit’.

In the church planning meeting last week, we were asked what our Spiritual Gifts from God are. The internet lists many possible ones, but in St Paul’s letters to young churches he provides three major lists of gifts in Romans, Corinthians and in Ephesians.

In the Book of Romans, these are: prophecy, service, teaching, exhorting, giving, leading, and mercy.

In Ephesians, the list is added to but with the purpose being: “to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”.

In First Corinthians, Paul adds wisdom, knowledge, faith, healing, miracle working, the ability to distinguish between spirits, various kinds of tongues and their interpretation, and states that all of the gifts are for the common good. Paul wants believers to understand that although there are a variety of gifts, it is the same Spirit of God that empowers them, and they serve the same Lord with no one gift being more important than any other.

An image that is often used with the Gifts and Fruits of the Holy Spirit is that of a tree. The deep, hidden roots are the gifts of the Holy Spirit; there are strong branches holding the visible fruits of the Spirit. Those Holy habits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control. If we are led by the Spirit and open to God’s gifts, the fruits of the Holy Spirit will be evident in our lives and in this way people will see that the Holy Spirit is active

in our lives, in our work, in the way we treat others and in the way we serve the community of the Church as the practical living-out of the gift of the Holy Spirit.

Many commentaries describe the three theological virtues: the faith, hope, and love discussed in 1 Corinthians 13:13 and that these virtues are The Guidelines for our spiritual gifts. All gifts should be motivated by Faith and Hope. And above all, all gifts must be motivated by love.

The reading from Exodus shows us what a personal relationship Moses has with God. The Lord shows compassion, and His light is a dazzling presence. In the following chapter, after Moses received the 10 commandments, we are told that having been in the presence of God, his own face glowed.

**Robert Fulgham** is, among many other things, a Parish Minister and a storyteller and relates this tale of Professor Alexander Papaderos, who was teaching at a course on culture held on the island of Crete. The Institute it was held at is on the site of a terrible massacre during the Second World War, which involved local Cretans and the invading German army, and the windows look out over the separated graveyards.

Towards the end of the last session, Papaderos opened the floor for questions and Robert asked him: "What is the meaning of life?" After a few moments Papaderos pulled his wallet from his pocket, removed a tiny, quarter-sized mirror, and replied:

"When I was a small child, during the war, we were very poor and we lived in a remote village. One day, on the road, I found the broken pieces of a mirror. A German motorcycle had been wrecked in that place. I tried to find all the pieces and put them together, but it was not possible, so I kept only the largest piece. This one. And by scratching it on a stone I made it round. I began to play with it as a toy and became fascinated by the fact that I could reflect light into dark places where the sun would never shine -- in deep holes and crevices and dark closets. It became a game for me to get light into the most inaccessible places I could find. I kept the little mirror, and as I went about my growing up, I would take it out in idle moments and continue the challenge of the game. As I became a man, I grew to understand that this was not just a child's game but a metaphor for what I might do with my life. I came to understand that I am not the light or the source of light. But light -- truth, understanding, knowledge -- is there, and it will only shine in many dark places if I reflect it. I am a fragment of a mirror whose whole design and shape I do not know. Nevertheless, with what

I have I can reflect light into the dark places of this world -- into the black places in the hearts of men -- and change some things in some people. Perhaps others may see and do likewise. This is what I am about. This is the meaning of my life."

Our community is full of people who have found their purpose in life and shine their light into the dark places:

**Awor Mabil** is the Young Australian of this Year, 2023. He co-founded the not-for-profit organisation *Barefoot to Boots*, which aims for better health, education, policies and gender equality for refugees.

On receiving his award, he said:

"For me, the most important thing is to help the next generation and also inspire them to be themselves and follow their dreams."

**Amar Singh** was named NSW Local Hero at the NSW 2023 Australian of the Year Awards last November. He founded *Turbans 4 Australia* in 2015 in a bid to counter racism, foster multiculturalism and show Australians that the traditional beards and turbans of his Sikh faith were nothing to be afraid of.

Through his team of dedicated volunteers, Amar's organisation helps Australians in need, and specialises in disaster aid and food relief.

Every week, *Turbans 4 Australia* packages and distributes goods and grocery hampers to people experiencing food insecurity across Western Sydney.

The organisation has also delivered hay to farmers experiencing drought; supplies to flood victims in Lismore and bushfire-impacted people on the South Coast; and food hampers to the isolated and vulnerable during the COVID-19 lockdowns.

Ordinary people who have discovered their purpose and how to let their light shine.

In the New Testament times the Christians saw themselves as a community, a group of people who have in common the presence of Christ, mediated by the Holy Spirit. We still need the community of faith; we need each other's love and support and discernment and to be connected to the stories and traditions of the past. To share struggles and gain strength from them, but also to learn from each other's mistakes; people who come to church to worship and

nurture their faith and go into the community to build bridges and open doors. Building up of our own faith.

**Augustine of Hippo**, about 400 CE, wrote that as we are born in the image of God, we have a built-in capacity to relate to him. Created things, material objects, do not satisfy us and we have a feeling of longing.

‘You have made us for yourself, and our hearts are restless until they rest in you,’ he wrote. **C.S. Lewis** calls this longing “joy” – an unsatisfied desire, but still more desirable than any other satisfaction. This vague and unshaped feeling is a longing for God, and this experience can begin now, however imperfectly.

For those who have not done this type of exercise before there are some *Spiritual Gifts Inventories* for you to take home. And there are electronic versions available as well, with automated marking. These exercises allow focus and tell the participants probably what they already suspected as being true. The instructions suggest to not think too much, but answer with your first reactions; and be honest, as you do not need to tell anyone else the results. But this helps you discern what your special gifts are and in what way God has chosen you for His special purpose.

One of the joys about exercising your gifts is that it is a delight rather than a duty, accompanied by fruitfulness and fulfillment. The spiritual gifts build the community of faith and through the Spirit we develop those Holy habits of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, and self-control. The nurturing faith of the Spirit makes these empowering gifts a blessing and fills our need for God’s presence within us.

To experience the same personal relationship enjoyed by Moses.

**Nelson Mandela** said that ‘Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves “Who am I to be brilliant? Actually, who are you not to be. Your playing small does not serve the world. There’s nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won’t feel insecure around you. We were born to make manifest the glory of the God that is within us. It is not just in some of us, it’s in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people the permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our fear, our presence automatically liberates others.”

Just to repeat the words from Paul's letter to the Thessalonians – 'We remember ... how you put your faith into practice, how your love made you work so hard, and how your hope in the Lord Jesus Christ is so firm. You received the message with the joy that comes from the Holy Spirit'.

So ... open your gifts, the present that God has given us – that one of spiritual gifts, and open the Glory of God within you – you might be surprised by joy!