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St. Luke's Episcopal Church – Anchorage, Kentucky
The Third Sunday after Epiphany – January 24th, 2016
I Corinthians 12:12-31a

Several years ago Joe and I had season tickets to the Jacksonville symphony orchestra. It was always such a treat to attend the performances, as there is nothing quite like listening to the magnificent sound of a symphony orchestra. The blending of the string, wind, brass, and percussion instruments create a sound that can prove to be soothing to the soul. Though, each instrument makes its own unique and beautiful sound, when played in unison, the gift of a harmonious melody fills the air. There is a synergistic energy that evolves from the blending of the instruments. Synergy is derived from the Attic Greek word Synergia meaning “working together” and that is what each musician is doing as they play their perspective instrument in concert with their fellow orchestral musicians. The late English poet and playwright Robert Browning puts this most eloquently as he stated “Who hears music feels his solitude peopled at once.”

Perhaps my favorite instrument in the orchestra is the cello. I am a real fan of cellist, Yoyo Ma. The cello consists of many parts such as the scroll, the peg box, the upper bout, the tailpiece, and several other parts. Each distinct part plays an important role in creating the mellow, soothing sound of the cello, but without the smallest parts there would be no sound. Every part of the cello, including features that appear to be for decoration, like the small holes on the front of the instrument, are necessary for achieving the low tone beloved by listeners around the world. The tiniest holes, though perhaps to be insignificant because of their size, are crucial

to developing the beautiful soothing sound of the cello. However, no part is inferior to the other. Each part plays an equally important role.

As uniquely beautiful a sound that the cello produces, when played in concert with other symphonic instruments the sound that is produced becomes more powerful and many times even more beautiful. When the instruments are played in unison the music becomes delightful and exquisite, as all parts are integrated and work in concert. Each instrument makes a contribution that creates the gift of music.

Paul's letter to the Corinthians' similarly illustrates that each person plays an integral role in the body of Christ. We often declare this to be true, as we proclaim this in our liturgy and in our prayers as we send out the lay Eucharistic visitors as we recite "we who are many are one body because we all share one bread, one cup." When we are baptized, we are adopted by God into God's family, which we call the Church. Holy Baptism is ""the full initiation by water and the Holy Spirit into Christ's Body – the Church" (BCP p.298). Each of us has an important role to play within this Body of Christ. Paul emphasizes to the people of Corinth that the workings of the Holy Spirit within the greater church are gifts that are given by God.

Today's Epistle illustrates Paul's passion regarding spiritual gifts, as he writes to the people of Corinth. He writes the letter as an effort to amend the division the Corinthians had made, in that some had spiritual gifts that were superior to others, and that the weaker gifts were less important. Paul called upon the Corinthians to come together and become one body, for one another's peace and well-being. Similarly today, as members of the same community, here at St. Luke's or even within the greater Church, each of us are given gifts by the same spirit, we are called to rejoice and suffer together. We are to be one body. The body of Christ

We need to be leery that we don't perceive our gifts to simply be perceived as 'talents', as this can be of the ego, which can cause us to fall into self-pride. Rather, as Paul exhorts, in order to reach our God-given potential, we are to be fully aware that every good gift comes from God, and we are called to use our gifts to benefit the entire community. I don't imagine that Paul would not want us to spend our time gazing into the mirror and asking what profile of gifts each of us has. On the contrary, I believe that he would encourage us to be about the business of using our gifts in service to the community. Just as each of us is uniquely different, so are our spiritual gifts. There is richness in diversity, which can create a beautiful wholeness within the church.

When we learn to be in concert with one another, we can benefit the body of Christ. From the smallest to the greatest contribution, each is of significant value. Just as when the ear hears beautiful music, each member of the human body is engaged, so we too are called to be engaged in sharing our spiritual gifts with one another as the whole body of Christ. So, what are your spiritual gifts? May I encourage each of you to ponder this question, as you continue to discern your gifts, through prayer, discernment and contemplation? Listen closely for the prompting of the Holy Spirit, for it is then that you may hear the still, small voice.

Almighty and everliving God, ruler of all things in heaven and earth, hear our prayers for this parish family. Strengthen the faithful, arouse the careless, and restore the penitent. Grant us all things necessary for our common life, and bring us all to be of one heart and mind within your holy Church; through Jesus Christ our Lord. *Amen.*