

The Theology of Charisms

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Theology of charisms is the idea that charisms, or spiritual gifts, are given to Christians by the Holy Spirit to enable them to proclaim the Kingdom of God and spread the Good News of the Gospel, Christ's life, death, and resurrection.

In the early Church, St. Paul observed certain behaviors, workings, actions, and phenomena in the early Christians, such as teaching, preaching, encouragement, hospitality, serving, prophesying, healing, miracles, praising in song, tongues, leadership, pastoring small communities, and scripture sharing, and more. Paul did not have a word to describe what he saw so he labeled them "graces" or what the Greek translation refers to them as charisms.

In the Catechism of the Catholic Church, we learn "There are special graces, called charisms after the Greek term used by St. Paul and meaning "gratuitous gift, benefit, favor freely given, or gift of grace" (#2003). The Catechism defines charisms as "graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church". They are considered to be gifts or graces that aid Christians not only live the Gospel of Jesus Christ but also to spread the gospel message and build the Kingdom of God.

October 1, 2014, in a general audience, Pope Francis celebrated charisms saying, "From the beginning, the Lord filled the Church with the gifts of His Spirit....Distinguished among these gifts are some that are particularly precious for the building and journey of the Christian community: they are the charisms."

4-29 October 2023 Catholic bishops, priests, and lay women and men from all over the world gather in Rome for the Synod of Bishops to discuss "synodality" — the way in which all members of the church participate in the church and its mission.

As I consumed the document I grew more and more excited about what was written regarding the significance of charisms and charism discernment in the Church. I summarized all that the Synod had to say about charisms in another document. Every word written in the document affirms the work I have been doing with both my publications and the retreats and workshops, since 2010.

I highlighted below, a few Synod passages which discuss charisms and charism discernment.

The grace of Pentecost abides in the Church through the Sacrament of Confirmation.... Its importance requires greater emphasis, and it needs to be located in relation to the variety of charisms and ministries that form the synodal face of the Church.

In their immense variety, the charisms of the laity represent distinct gifts to the Church from the Holy Spirit that must be called forth, recognized, and fully appreciated. There is a need to continue to deepen the theological understanding of the relationships between charisms and ministries in a missionary key.

Pastoral structures need to be re-organized so they can readily recognize, call forth, and animate lay charisms and ministries, inserting them into the missionary dynamism of the synodal Church. The Church has always benefitted from the gift of charisms, be it from the most extraordinary to the simplest. Through them the Holy Spirit rejuvenates and renews the Church with joy and gratitude.

This most recent Church document is perhaps the most significant exhortation and presentation of the rationale for charisms and charism discernment in the Church today. It highlights just how vital charisms are to the life of the Church.

The theology of charisms can easily be accessed through careful review and study of all that scripture, the Church, and the saints have written about and lived out. We are all encouraged to discern what our charisms are and use them to build up the Body of Christ in service to others. What are your charisms? The following are a list of some but not all -- evangelizing, exhortation, healing, hospitality, knowledge, intercession, music, teaching, pastoring, prophecy, or writing, with still many more listed in Paul's letters to the Corinthians, Romans, and Ephesians. What will you do to learn about your charisms? These charisms are the tools of intentional disciples – used for mission to build the Kingdom of God? As St. Paul says, if I have the charism of teaching, I must teach; if pastoring, I must pastor; if intercession, I must intercede; if healing – I must be God's instrument for healing; if encouragement, I must encourage; if exhortation, I must exhort and so on. For every charism with God's grace is the way we are anointed to evangelize – to bring Christ to others – to bring others to Christ?