

## 1.19.2025 Epiphany 2 (Romans 12:6-16)

There's a story titled, *The Perfect Mistake*, which tells of a carpenter who was using his God-given gift of carpentry to build crates so that the church he attended could send some clothing to an orphanage in China. When this man finished the crates, he helped pack them full of clothing and load them into the trucks that were taking them to the shipping yard. On his way home, he reached into his shirt pocket to find his glasses, but they weren't there, and later, as he played back the events of the day in his mind, he realized that the glasses must have slipped out of his pocket and fallen into one of the crates which were now being loaded onto a ship headed for China.

To some people this would be a minor inconvenience, but this carpenter was a man of limited means, and the thought of having to come up with money to buy another pair of glasses really frustrated him, and he called out to God, "This doesn't seem fair. I've been trying to use the gifts you've given me to help others, and this is what happens." Well, several months later, the director of the Chinese orphanage that received the crates came to speak at this man's church, and he began by thanking them all for their generosity and faithfulness. The clothing was needed and appreciated, "but most of all," he said, "I want to personally thank you for the glasses you sent. You see, the authorities had swept through the orphanage, destroying everything, including my glasses, and I was left desperate. Even if I had the money, there was no way for me to replace them. The inability to see clearly, and the constant headaches, led us all to pray about this every day, and then one of your crates arrived with a pair of glasses lying on top of the folded clothes." The director paused for a moment, hoping to communicate the wonder of it all, and then continued, "My friends, when I tried on the glasses, it was as if they had been perfectly made just for me."

As the people in this church listened to the story about the miraculous glasses, they were a little confused. Eyeglasses weren't on the list of items they'd sent to the orphanage. However, sitting quietly in the back of the church, with tears in his eyes, was an ordinary carpenter who realized that the Master Carpenter had used him in an extraordinary way. God had provided, and fulfilled His plan, with a perfect mistake.

In our Epistle this morning, St. Paul, writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, speaks of us all having different gifts *“according to the grace that is given to us.”* Paul exhorts Christians, saying, *“Let us use them: if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith; or ministry, let us use it in our ministering; he who teaches, in teaching: he who exhorts, in exhortation: he who gives, with liberality; he who leads, with diligence; he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness”* (Romans 12:6-8 NKJV). We all have different gifts according to the grace that is given to us, and because God is the Divine Giver of *“every good and perfect gift”* (James 1:17), no gift is insignificant, and no gift is meant to be kept to ourselves. The gifts God so graciously gives to us are for the good of our brothers and sisters, and when we offer these gifts in service to Him and our neighbor, God will often use them in very unexpected, and even miraculous ways.

For example, through a “perfect mistake,” a carpenter not only gave back to God his God-given gift of carpentry, but also in that service, God used him to provide another man with a pair of glasses he so desperately needed. Completely unexpected, and miraculous, much like another example you’ll remember, that of a boy who was moved by his God-given gift of generosity to share his lunch of five barley loaves and two small fish, a lunch our Lord unexpectedly and miraculously multiplied to feed thousands. We might also consider the servants at a wedding feast in Cana, who followed Jesus’ command to fill six stone pots with water. They did as they were commanded, they served Him, and God used that gift of service in an unexpected and miraculous way by transforming that ordinary water into the most extraordinary wine.

These examples reveal the way God uses what we might consider to be ordinary gifts in extraordinary ways. The gifts of carpentry, generosity, or service, when offered to the Almighty, are no longer just wooden crates, a small lunch, or filling pots with ordinary water. Instead, when we do what we can by sacrificially offering to God the gifts He has given us, He uses those gifts to do what we cannot. He provides that which we would never expect. He multiplies our small offering. He transforms our service in such a way that the natural becomes the super-natural, the ordinary is made extraordinary, and the seemingly mundane becomes miraculous.

We all have different gifts according to the grace that is given to us, and when we give those gifts back to God in service to Him, He uses them, and us, to provide for others and to fulfill His plan for the world He gave the life of His only Son to save. Another example of that truth is found in the Gospel passage appointed for today. This morning we read about John the Baptist, and a description of gifts that were given to him by God. St. Mark wrote about John being a messenger *“which shall prepare thy way before thee. The voice of one crying in the wilderness, Prepare ye the way of the Lord, make His paths straight. John did baptize in the wilderness, and preach the baptism of repentance for the remission of sins”* (Mark 1:2-4).

John the Baptist was blessed by God with many gifts. This passage describes him as a messenger, a voice, one who baptized and preached, and we see in his example that these gifts were given to him that he might be used by God for the good of others. John was a messenger sent to prepare the way of the Lord, and by giving this gift back to God, a humble man, John, was able to create a clear path for people to follow that led them to God. John was a voice, and by giving that gift back to God, by preaching repentance, people were turned away from the world, the flesh, and the devil, and guided toward the kingdom of God, the Spirit, and righteousness. John was a baptizer, and his baptism of repentance, a baptism of water only, pointed toward Christ's baptism of water and the Holy Spirit, a baptism not only of the body, but of the soul, a baptism in which we are united to our Lord, as St. Paul states, *“...buried with Him in baptism... raised with Him through faith in the power of God”* (Colossians 2:12).

John strived to give back to God the gifts that were given to him, and the end of our Gospel passage describes what may be the pinnacle of his efforts as Jesus steps into the Jordan river to be baptized by John. Concerning this baptism, we read, *“And straightway coming up out of the water, he saw the heavens opened, and the Spirit, like a dove, descending upon Him: and there came a voice from heaven, saying, Thou art my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased”* (Mark 1:10-11). John the Baptist was so blessed as to be at the center of this moment in which one God, in three distinct Persons, was manifest to the world because by the grace of God, John gave back that which the Giver of *“every good and perfect gift”* (James 1:17) had given to him.

In every example we've considered today, there's a common thread of giving back to God the gifts He's so graciously given us. A carpenter offered his gift back to God by building crates, a boy generously gave his lunch to Jesus, servants offered their service to God by filling water pots, and John the Baptist used his God-given gifts to make "*a highway for our God*" (Isaiah 40:3), a clear path that leads us to Him. The common thread is offering to God what He has given us, and in conclusion, let's consider one final example of God transforming our small offering in such a way that the natural becomes the super-natural, the ordinary is made extraordinary, and the seemingly mundane becomes miraculous.

As we celebrate Holy Communion, the prayer of consecration describes gifts we offer to God. This prayer states: "Wherefore, O Lord and heavenly Father, according to the institution of thy dearly beloved Son our Savior Jesus Christ, we, thy humble servants, do celebrate and make here before thy Divine Majesty, with these thy holy gifts, which we now offer unto thee, the memorial thy Son hath commanded us to make..." Notice the language, "these thy holy gifts." These are God's gifts, which we now offer to Him, and these gifts are identified just a few sentences later, when ask Him to "bless and sanctify, with thy Word and Holy Spirit, these thy gifts and creatures of bread and wine..."

Two of the gifts we give back to God in the celebration of Holy Communion are bread and wine, and what does God do when we offer those gifts to Him? He gives back to us again in a way only God can. The prayer tells us "that we, receiving them according to thy Son our Savior Jesus Christ's holy institution, in remembrance of his death and passion, may be partakers of his most blessed Body and Blood." We give to the Lord the natural, ordinary gift He has given to us - bread and wine, He accepts our tiny offering, and transforms it in such a supernatural, extraordinary, and miraculous way that when He gives it to us again, we become partakers of His most blessed Body and Blood.

My friends, if God performs this unimaginable miracle with common bread and wine, just imagine what He intends to do with every good and perfect gift He has given you. The way you work and play and speak and sing and give

and serve and love. These are all gifts that God has given to you and I, and when we give them back to Him, they become not only gifts, but miracles.