

From the Director

Is the gift of tongues for everyone?

Does God want to give the gift of tongues to everyone, or only to some people? The teaching of St. Paul appears at first glance to be ambiguous on this question. In 1 Corinthians 12 Paul mentions tongues and prophecy along with the other gifts, and affirms that Christians do not all receive the same gifts (12:29-30). But in 1 Cor. 14:4 Paul says, "Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy." Later in the same chapter he speaks of the possibility of all speaking in tongues (14:23) and of all prophesying (14:31). How can we resolve this seeming contradiction?

The answer lies in understanding the different functions of the gift of tongues. Tongues can serve as: (1) a sign of the presence of the Spirit (thus the appearance of tongues in Acts when people receive the Spirit); (2) a prayer language valuable for one's own spiritual growth (1 Cor 14:4,18); and (3) a prophetic means of addressing the community when accompanied by the charism of interpretation (1 Cor 14:5, 27-28). Paul indicates that the third use, addressing a message to the community (accompanied by an interpretation) belongs only to some, while the second use, tongues as a prayer language, is available to all. On Pentecost, for example, the apostles, the Blessed Mother, and many others (about 120 people) "all spoke in tongues as the Spirit gave them the ability" (Acts 2:4). But they went on to serve the Lord in a wide variety of ways, with diverse

charisms for building up the body of Christ.

Many Catholic Charismatic Renewal leaders can testify that if people desire the gift of tongues as a prayer language and if they are taught how to yield to it, they receive this charism sooner or later. Some people, through misunderstanding or bad experiences of being pressured to pray in tongues, develop a block about this gift. In those instances, it is wise to recommend that they not concern themselves about tongues, but simply continue to seek and be open to the Spirit in other ways. Some will end up receiving the gift of tongues; others may experience the Spirit working through them powerfully in other ways.

How can someone receive the gift of tongues when praying alone? While some people find it easier to begin praying in tongues in a group, others find it easier to do so when alone.

So what to do? When you are praying and directing your mind to the Lord, ask for the help of the Spirit. Then stop praying in your own language, and allow yourself to speak to God in any syllables or sounds that come out of your mouth. It may sound like baby talk at first. Don't worry. God is as pleased as any human father who delights in seeing his son or daughter trying to communicate with him!

Keep speaking to the Lord, letting go and allowing the range of sounds you are making to the Lord to grow wider. The biggest temptation for people at this stage is to pay too much attention to what they're doing and get inhibited, or to think "It's just me, not the Holy Spirit," and quit. Instead, keep praying and the gift will become clearer and stronger. Pray that way for five, ten, or fifteen minutes a day. After a month or

so, you will most likely see a fluency that you recognize does not come from yourself, but really is the Holy Spirit forming your speech into a language you don't know.

How can someone grow in the gift of tongues? Practice is the main thing. We can pray in tongues when we're driving the car, taking a walk, sitting in church or taking a shower. It is a great way of "praying constantly" (1 Thes 5:17) or "praying at all times in the Spirit" (Eph 6:18). When we pray in tongues it is the Holy Spirit praying through us (Rom 8:26-27; 1 Cor 14:2), so it is an excellent way of communicating with the Lord. Another thing that helps is praying regularly with others who exercise the gifts of the Spirit. Whenever you find yourself challenged, either by a ministry need or family need, intercede for it in tongues. When you are seeking guidance from the Lord, intercede in tongues and then listen to what the Spirit seems to be saying. Try singing in the Spirit, letting the Lord supply the melody as well as the words. Ask the Lord to give you the interpretation of what you are praying in tongues. Perhaps alternate prayer in tongues and prayer in your own language, letting the Spirit guide your words in both. Ask the Lord to give you other tongues in which to pray and then allow the Spirit to speak them through you. Lord, help us to open up to all your gifts and to become docile sons and daughters, musical instruments through whom you can play any tune that you choose.

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