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# "It is a gift that God gives you"

In his 20 November general audience, Pope Francis continued catechetical cycle on how the Holy Spirit guides the People of God through salvation history, speaking about charisms.

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*Dear brothers and sisters, good morning!*

In the last three catecheses, we talked about the sanctifying work of

the Holy Spirit which is implemented in the sacraments, in prayer and by following the example of the Mother of God. But let us listen to what a famous text from Vatican II says: “It is not only through the sacraments and the ministries of the Church that the Holy Spirit sanctifies and leads the people of God and enriches it with virtues, but, ‘allotting his gifts to everyone according as He wills’” (cf. *1 Cor* 12:11) (*Lumen gentium*, 12). We too have personal gifts that the Spirit gives to each one of us.

Therefore, the moment has arrived to talk also about this second way the Holy Spirit works, which is charismatic action. Two elements contribute to defining what charism is. A somewhat difficult word, I will explain it. First, the charism is the gift given “for the common good” (*1 Cor* 12:7), to be useful to everyone. It is not, in other words, destined principally and ordinarily for the

sanctification of the person, but for the “service” of the community (cf. *1 Pt* 4:10). This is the first aspect. Secondly, the charism is the gift given “to one,” or “to some” in particular, not to everyone in the same way, and this is what distinguishes it from sanctifying grace, from the theological virtues and from the sacraments, which instead are the same and common to all. The charism is given to a specific person or community. It is a gift that God gives you.

The Council explains this too. The Holy Spirit, it says, “distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank. By these gifts He makes them fit and ready to undertake the various tasks and offices which contribute toward the renewal and building up of the Church, according to the words of the Apostle: ‘The manifestation of the Spirit is given to everyone for profit’” (*1 Cor* 12:7).

The charisms are the “jewels” or the ornaments that the Holy Spirit distributes to make the Bride of Christ more beautiful. One can thus understand why the Conciliar text ends with the following exhortation: “These charisms, whether they be the more outstanding or the more simple and widely diffused, are to be received with thanksgiving and consolation for they are perfectly suited to and useful for the needs of the Church” (LG 12).

Pope Benedict XVI affirmed: “Anyone who considers the history of the post-conciliar era can recognize the process of true renewal, which often took unexpected forms in living movements and made almost tangible the inexhaustible vitality of the holy Church.” And this is the charism given to a group, through a person.

We must rediscover the charisms, because this ensures that the promotion of the laity, and of women in particular, is understood not only as an institutional and sociological fact, but also in its biblical and spiritual dimension. Indeed, the laity are not the least, no, they laity are not a form of external collaborator or auxiliary troops of the clergy, no! They have their own charisms and gifts with which to contribute to the mission of the Church.

Let us add another thing: when we talk about the charisms, we must immediately dispel a misunderstanding: that of identifying them with spectacular or extraordinary gifts and capabilities; instead, they are ordinary gifts – each one of us has his or her own charism – that assume extraordinary value if inspired by the Holy Spirit and embodied with love in situations of life. Such an interpretation of the

charism is important, because many Christians, when they hear talk of charisms, experience sadness or disappointment, as they are convinced that they do not possess any, and feel they are excluded or second-class Christians. No, they are not second-class Christians, no, each person has his or her own personal, and also community charism. Saint Augustine responded to these in his time with a very eloquent comparison: 'If you love,' he told his people, "If you love, it is not nothing that you have: if you love unity, whoever has anything in that unity has it also for you. In the body, the eye alone sees; but is it for itself alone that the eye sees? It sees both for the hand and the foot, and for all the other members" (St. Augustine, *Tractates on the Gospel of John*, 32,8).

This reveals the secret of why charity is defined by the Apostle as "a still more excellent way" (1 Cor 12, 31): it

makes me love the Church, or the community in which I live and, in unity, all charisms, not just some, are “mine,” just as “my” charisms, little though they may seem, belong to all and are for the good of all. Charity multiplies charisms; it makes the charism of one, of one individual person, the charism of all. Thank you!

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## **ANNOUNCEMENT AND APPEAL**

On the occasion of the International Day of the Rights of Children and Adolescents, held today, I wish to announce that next 3 February the *World Meeting on Children's Rights*, entitled “Love them and protect them,” will take place here in the Vatican, with the participation of experts and figures from various countries. It will be an opportunity to

identify new ways of assisting and protecting millions of children who are still without rights, who live in precarious conditions, who are exploited and abused, and who suffer the dramatic consequences of wars.

There is a group of children preparing for this day, thanks to all of you who are doing this. And here, there is a brave girl who is coming here... now they are all coming! Children are like that: one starts and then they all come. Let us greet the children! Thank you! Good morning!

I want to say that next year, during the Jubilee for Adolescents, I will canonize Blessed Carlo Acutis, and that on the Jubilee for Young People, next year, I will canonize Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati.

Yesterday marked one thousand days since the invasion of Ukraine, a tragic milestone for the victims and



for the destruction it has caused, but at the same time a shameful catastrophe for the whole of humanity! However, this must not discourage us from continuing to stand beside the tormented Ukrainian people, nor from imploring for peace and working to make weapons give way to dialogue and confrontation to encounter.

The other day I received a letter from a university student from Ukraine, which said: “Father, when on Wednesday you remember my country, and will have the opportunity to speak to the entire world about the thousandth day of this terrible war, I beg you, do not speak only of our sufferings, but also bear witness to our faith: although it is imperfect, its value does not diminish, it paints a picture of the Risen Christ with painful brushstrokes. These days there have been too many deaths in my life.

Living in a city where a missile kills and injures dozens of civilians, witnessing so many tears is difficult. I would have liked to escape, I would have liked to go back to being a child embraced by my mother, I would have liked to be in silence and love, but I thank God because through this pain, I learn to love more. Pain is not just a path to anger and despair; if it is based on faith, it is a good teacher of love. Father, if pain hurts, it means that you love; therefore, when you speak of our pain, when you remember the thousand days of suffering, remember also the thousand days of love, because only love, faith and hope give true meaning to the wounds.” This is what was written by this Ukrainian university student.

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