

## **Four Questions Regarding the Charismatic Movement, Establishing Their Continued Exercise in the Church**

This is neither an endorsement nor a critique of the renewal of the Spiritual Gifts in its various forms in the Catholic Charismatic Movement. Rather, it is a general overview of what the Scriptures teach about spiritual gifts and charisms, and what we as Catholics should think and do about the gifts and charisms of the Spirit today.

I will address four questions:

**1) Does Scripture inform us that gifts have been given by the Spirit to individuals in the Church?**

**2) If so, do they have a “retirement clause” or were they expected to be normative in the whole life of the Church?**

**3) If they are normative, how should they be expressed and practiced today?**

**4) If the charisms have not been active in the Church in past centuries, is it possible or likely that the Holy Spirit might bring them back into practice at a particular time?**

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**1. Does Scripture inform us that gifts have been given by the Spirit to individuals in the Church?**

Yes, gifts to the Church as a whole and gifts given to individual Christians for the edification of the Body of Christ.

These were foretold by the Prophet Joel in the Old Testament and quoted by Peter on Pentecost to explain the supernatural experience happening in Jerusalem.

Acts 2:15–18: “For these people are not drunk, as you suppose, since it is only the third hour of the day. But this is what was uttered through the prophet Joel: “ ‘And in the last days it shall be, God declares, that I will pour out my Spirit on all flesh, and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams; even on my male servants and female servants in those days I will pour out my Spirit, and they shall prophesy.”

Peter, at this point, does not mention the more extensive list of manifestations provided later by himself and by Paul, but explains a hitherto unknown experience of the outpouring of the Holy Spirit not just on prophets, priests, and kings, but on all the believers, even sons and daughters, young and old, male and female servants.

We do not find an exhaustive list of what the New Testament calls χάρισμα (charisma) translated as “gift”. “In the NT this word always refers to spiritual realities, powers, or abilities that are freely given by God. The fact that this gift is typically intangible means that it can be rendered as “spiritual gift” (1 Cor. 1:7).”<sup>1</sup>

Paul encourages the believers in Rome to live in unity, with love and service for one another. He mentions the gifts as one of the ways unity is fostered and love is manifested:

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<sup>1</sup> Strauss, Mark L., and Tremper Longman III, eds. *The Baker Expository Dictionary of Biblical Words*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books: A Division of Baker Publishing Group, 2023. Page 345.

Rom 12:4–8: “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many, are one body in Christ, and individually members one of another. Having gifts [χάρισμα] that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

These services are not merely general attitudes we are to have toward one another, but actually gifts given individually to believers.

St. Peter reminds his readers of the Spirit’s gifts:

1 Pet 4:9–11: “Show hospitality to one another without grumbling. As each has received a gift [χάρισμα], use it to serve one another, as good stewards of God’s varied grace: whoever speaks, as one who speaks oracles of God; whoever serves, as one who serves by the strength that God supplies—in order that in everything God may be glorified through Jesus Christ.”

Paul provides a more complete explanation of the Spirit’s ministry and the distribution of spiritual gifts. He provides an inexhaustive list of gifts as examples to make his point. He makes no claim that this is an exhaustive list.

1 Cor 12:1, 4-11: “Now concerning spiritual gifts [pneumatikos (πνευματικός, or “the spirituals”)], brothers, I

do not want you to be uninformed. ...

“...Now there are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit; and there are varieties of service, but the same Lord; and there are varieties of activities, but it is the same God who empowers them all in everyone. To each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good. For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

In Greek, the two English words (spiritual gifts) are only one plural Greek word, pneumatikos (πνευματικός). — here the word functions as a noun referring to spiritual gifts (also Rom. 1:11; 1 Cor. 14:1). the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. All these are empowered by one and the same Spirit, who apportions to each one individually as he wills.”

In this passage, Paul lists nine spiritual gifts given by the Holy Spirit to individuals in the Church, to both clergy and laity.

Later, Paul continues his discussion of the χάρισμα.

1 Cor 12:27–31: “Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it. And God has appointed in the

church first apostles, second prophets, third teachers, then miracles, then gifts of healing, helping, administrating, and various kinds of tongues. Are all apostles? Are all prophets? Are all teachers? Do all work miracles? Do all possess gifts of healing? Do all speak with tongues? Do all interpret? But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way."

If we asked Paul, "Can you give us a complete list of gifts?", he would probably respond, "There is a great variety of πνευματικός the Holy Spirit gives as he wishes. Their variety cannot all be contained in a simple list."

Much of Charismatic teaching has held that tongues is the threshold gift that opens the door to all the other gifts—something all believers should possess. Unfortunately, the plain reading of these texts denies that claim. Paul asks the rhetorical question, "Do all speak in tongues?" The expected answer is "No". Some do, and others don't. Nowhere do we see tongues expressed as a necessity for a life in the Spirit, nor as a doorway to all the other πνευματικός or χάρισμα.

The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* concurs that the Spirit has given spiritual gifts or charisms to believers for the building up of the Church.

CCC 2003: "Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church. There are sacramental graces, gifts proper to the different sacraments.

There are furthermore special graces, also called charisms after the Greek term used by St. Paul and meaning “favor,” “gratuitous gift,” “benefit.” Whatever their character sometimes it is extraordinary, such as the gift of miracles or of tongues—charisms are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church.”

And further,

CCC 799-800: “Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world.

“Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms.”

In one of many of his affirmations of the spiritual gifts, Pope John Paul II said in his Wednesday audience on August 5, 1998,

“Paul then goes on immediately to stress the variety of charisms, and the unity of their origin: “There are varieties of gifts, but the same Spirit” (12:4). The gifts of the Spirit, which he distributes “as he wills” (12:11), can be numerous, and Paul provides a list of them (cf. 12:8–10), which obviously does not claim to be complete. The Apostle then teaches

that the diversity of charisms must not create divisions, and for this reason compares them to the various members of the one body (cf. 12:12–27). The Church’s unity is dynamic and organic, and all the gifts of the Spirit are important for the vitality of the Body as a whole.”

In his letter “*Proclaiming a Year for Priests on the 150th Anniversary of the ‘Dies Natalis’ of the Curé of Ars,*” we find one of many of Pope Benedict XVI’s references to the Charismatic gifts:

“In this regard, the statement of the *Decree Presbyterorum Ordinis* continues to be timely: ‘While testing the spirits to discover if they be of God, *priests must discover with faith, recognize with joy and foster diligently the many and varied charismatic gifts of the laity, whether these be of a humble or more exalted kind*’. These gifts, which awaken in many people the desire for a deeper spiritual life, can benefit not only the lay faithful but the clergy as well.”

In conclusion, there are spiritual gifts given to believers to be exercised in the Church for the building up of the body of Christ. They are to be acknowledged, encouraged, appreciated, learned, exercised, and “accepted with gratitude”, not despised or ridiculed. Granted, of course, that the gifts are genuine and under the authority of the shepherds of the Church (CCC 801).

**2. If the Holy Spirit did give spiritual gifts (χάρισμα) to the Church, do they have a “retirement clause” or were they expected to be normative in the whole life of the Church? If there was a “retirement clause”, where is it stated, and what was the expiration date?**

One can suggest that, yes, the Holy Spirit gave these spiritual manifestations to the Church to get it “off the ground” in the first centuries, but he retired them at a certain point as they were no longer necessary, too often abused, or outdated as the Church developed and grew. Or it can be said that the gifts of the Spirit are not in operation in our age; they went out with the apostolic church after their usefulness in authenticating the nascent church was no longer needed.

The verses frequently used to promote this view are 1 Corinthians 13:8–10: “Love never ends. As for prophecies, they will pass away; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will pass away. For we know in part and we prophesy in part, but when the perfect comes, the partial will pass away.”

The proposal is that the spiritual gifts were given as a substitute until the Bible was finally collected and canonized. With the inspired Scripture, there was no longer a need for the spiritual charisms. This is called “cessationism”. This was our Baptist family’s belief when my dad and mom first became Christians through Billy Graham in the 1950’s.

We were taught that the Bible was “the perfect” and that the gifts are no longer necessary to promote the faith. They were instituted temporarily during the short interim between the resurrection of Christ and the arrival of the New Testament.

Usually, it is the Baptists, Dispensationalists, or Pentecostals who play the “retirement clause” card, though certainly not limited to them, and not all of them subscribe to it either.

When Pentecostalism began in the early 20th century, many of its Protestant critics argued against the resurgence of the spiritual

gifts, especially tongues, called glossolalia. They asserted that these “sign gifts” were given to authenticate the apostles’ teaching but became unnecessary and ceased once the New Testament was completed.

But there is no passage of Scripture or teaching of the Catholic Church that suggests a retirement clause for the πνευματικός, or “the spirituals”. The gifts of the Holy Spirit did not retire or pass away, as we have already seen.

Catholics would never understand Paul’s phrase “the perfect” to be referring to the Bible. In fact, when Paul wrote those words, there was no indication that there would even be a book called the New Testament. Catholics understand the phrase “when the perfect comes” as referring to Christ and the end of time, when Christ returns — Christ is that which is perfect. This passage never hints that the gifts are temporary. Rather, the natural reading of the text demonstrates that Paul considered the spiritual gifts as normative throughout the church age until the return of Christ.

What is meant by τὸ τέλειον—“the perfect”? “Τέλειος ‘perfect’ refers to the time when God’s final purpose of salvation through Christ will be realized. Then the gifts of the Spirit that are part of this era and are only in part, will be done away with because ‘the complete’ will have arrived. So it has the sense of ‘having attained the end or purpose’ or of being ‘complete’. The ‘perfect’ comes at the Second Coming of Christ.” (*An Exegetical Summary of 1 Corinthians 10-16*).

A quick perusal of the Fathers demonstrates that none of them deny the charismatic gifts, their efficacy, or their continued presence in the Church, though there may be some nuances in

how they understood them. To the contrary, they are mentioned repeatedly as continuing gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Doctor of the Church, St. John Chrysostom, devotes a homily (Homily 32) to discussing Paul's passage in 1 Corinthians 12, explaining each gift and its relationship with the others. In the 4th century, St. Hilary of Poitiers, the "Athanasius of the West," spoke of the continued existence and use of the gifts in the Church in his masterpiece, "The Trinity."

They are also mentioned in the *Catechism of the Council of Trent* in Question 25, under the title "Graces gratuitously granted, and the other gifts of God, are common to [the whole] Church".

"But not only those gifts that justify, and endear us to God, are common; but graces gratuitously given, such as knowledge, prophecy, the gift of tongues and miracles, and others of the same sort, are also common, and are granted even to the wicked; not, however, for their own, but for the public benefit, for the building up of the Church. Thus, the gift of healing is given, not for sake of him who possesseth it, but for sake of him who is sick. In short, every true Christian possesses nothing that he should not consider as common to all others with himself, and should therefore be prepared and prompt to relieve the misery of the indigent."

I already mentioned one of many from St. Pope John Paul II and Pope Benedict XVI.

In conclusion, both in Scripture and the Church, we find nothing to suggest that the spiritual gifts and charisms are no longer given by the Spirit and no longer available to the Church. To the contrary, the authentic gifts and "spirituals" distributed in the early Church are still given today for the edification of the Church.

In simple terms, if one rejects the gifts or claims they are no longer for our age, they join a whole host of heterodox teachers, and they should get a pair of scissors and cut the “offensive pages” from the Bible and Church documents.

### **3. Since they are normative, how should they be expressed and practiced today?**

The early church met in homes called *dominus ecclesia*. Their meetings included more than just the *Divine Liturgy* (Breaking of Bread). They gathered for the liturgy, but from Paul’s writings it appears they also shared fellowship. It is likely that during these gatherings, with times of prayer and hymn singing, as well as table fellowship, the gifts were exercised among the believers.

I make no suggestion here that the Mass should be altered or that prophecy, tongues, etc., should become part of the Mass. Far from it. I find the short inclusion of “tongues” inserted in the Mass at Charismatic parishes distracting, gratuitous, and out of place. My analysis here is not to suggest the manner in which the πνευματικός should be practiced among believers, only that if they still exist in the Church, how should they be exercised among the brothers and sisters for everyone’s edification.

Since St. Paul obviously orchestrated these gifts in the local church while he was in Corinth and later wrote to correct misuses and abuses of what he had taught them, how would he implement the use of gifts in our local parishes today? If he were writing an epistle to us about the gifts, what would he say?

If we were to invite St. Paul to our parish today, we could ask him, “Paul, you taught the Corinthians about the πνευματικός in

person, practicing them in public and teaching through your instruction. Later you wrote and explained further that the spiritual gifts were given to individuals for the edification of the Church. How would you instruct us to implement your teaching on the gifts in our local parish today?”

“Paul, you wrote to the church in Corinth, where you had personally instructed them for 18 months, about these gifts in the Church. But we don’t see this work of the Spirit in our parishes today. Would you still say to us today what you wrote to them?”

1 Cor 12:8–10: “For to one is given through the Spirit the utterance of wisdom, and to another the utterance of knowledge according to the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healing by the one Spirit, to another the working of miracles, to another prophecy, to another the ability to distinguish between spirits, to another various kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues.”

We know that these gifts are to be regulated and done decently and in order (1 Cor 14:40). Paul spoke in tongues more than any of the Corinthians, and the Corinthians were zealous to incorporate these gifts in their lives. He also says he preferred to “speak with his mind”—words that others understood, but they still encouraged prophecy and tongues with an interpreter.

1 Cor 14:15–19: “What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also; I will sing praise with my spirit, but I will sing with my mind also. Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when he does not know what you are saying? For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. I

thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.” (Also Romans 8:26).

“But Paul, we see none of these miraculous gifts practiced in our parishes today. Are we missing something, or are we supposed to ignore these spiritual gifts you practiced yourself and spoke so much about in your epistles? What would you teach us today if you were to give us a seminar on church life in our parishes?”

There are people trying to understand and implement the gifts today. They, like many concerned Christians, scratch their heads when they read these passages of Scripture. And there are good-intentioned folks in the Catholic Church who are trying, in the best way they know how, to implement them. The bishops in some dioceses have established personal parishes with a charismatic charism. This canonical arrangement has been established in accordance with the guidelines of the Catholic Church and the bishops.

They were encouraged by recent popes and have the blessing and approval of Rome. Does this mean they do everything perfectly? No. Does it mean they’re doing everything the way Paul would have it done? No. Did some of them make mistakes in their past ecumenical ties? Yes. Did they use incorrect and misleading “Protestant terms“ describing the movement? Yes. The commonly adopted phrase “the baptism of the Holy Spirit” is an example of problematic terminology.

Scripture and Catholic Tradition teach that the fullness of the Holy Spirit is imparted through the sacraments of baptism and confirmation. We have been baptized or placed into Christ

through baptism and filled with the Holy Spirit. In fact, in the Eastern Churches, baptism and confirmation are simultaneous.

Jesus said, “If you then, who are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will the heavenly Father give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Luke 11:13). This has been understood as an exhortation of Jesus to request the Holy Spirit. Pentecostals pray and appeal for the Holy Spirit. But Jesus spoke these words prior to Pentecost and the outpouring of the Spirit after he ascended to the Father. Some Protestants, and even some Catholics in the charismatic movement, might see this as a mandate to ask for the Holy Spirit, even though he’s already been given in baptism.

This terminology is unfortunate. Sacramentalized (but not evangelized) Catholics who’ve had no personal experience of the spiritual life may, at a moment of surrender to God with an appeal to know him better, have an emotional and deeply spiritual experience. It is easy to call this a “baptism of the Holy Spirit”, but in Catholic thought, it should rather be called a renewal or existential experience of the Holy Spirit. Whenever one surrenders to God and asks him to take over their life, they may sense a tremendous outpouring of the Holy Spirit in their lives. But it is not a baptism of the Holy Spirit.

However, aberrations and confusion in terms do not negate the fact that the πνευματικός and χάρισμα are real and cannot be ignored if we are to follow Scripture and the constant teaching of the Church. I would be remiss to categorically condemn those who understand that the gifts still exist and are trying their best to implement them in the local Catholic life.

My wife and I joined the Catholic Church in 1994 in a Charismatic parish with their emphasis on tongues. It was a great blessing as

the spiritual reality was palpable. However, we never bought into the forms of the Charismatic Renewal they promoted. Nor did we ever belong to the “covenant communities” that were often associated with the movement at the time. In fact, in my second year as a Catholic, at a Charismatic Ecumenical gathering, I gave talks that contradicted much of their teaching and practice.

We have always prayed that the Spirit of God would give us the gifts he wanted us to have — for the good of our personal lives and the Church. We are told to seek the gifts, and we have always been open to the gifts he might give us. We never begged for the gift of tongues, nor have we ever experienced that gift. However, we have sought to understand the spiritual gifts that the Spirit has given us and to exercise them faithfully.

Should those who seek to understand and implement Paul’s practice and instruction be criticized? I don’t think so. Critiqued, yes. Ridiculed and slandered, no. **But most importantly, while seeking the gifts or critiquing the movement, charity is what Paul commands.** “But earnestly desire the higher gifts. And I will show you a still more excellent way. If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal.” (1 Co 12:31–13:1).

Who is less in the right, those who earnestly attempt to understand and practice, or those who lack charity and become a clanging cymbal?

**4. If some biblical and ancient practices have been missing, neglected, or set aside during certain ages of the Church, does that suggest or prove that it is impossible for the Holy Spirit to rekindle or reinvigorate aspects of Church practice, as he has in many other ways?**

Is it unthinkable that some aspect of the Christian and liturgical life could be neglected or set aside, only to be brought back later for the good of the Church?

We know the spiritual gifts, as mentioned by Paul, especially the “sign gifts,” may not have been part of the normal day-to-day life of the Church as they appear to have been in the early centuries. Though it is also apparent that they have been experienced by many saints over the centuries.

Let’s look at the office of permanent deacons. Deacons were part of the liturgical life of the Church in Paul’s time and beyond. They are mentioned five times in the New Testament. They were part of the life of the Church and active in the liturgy. Deacons are first mentioned in the selection of Stephen. Although these seven men were not called deacons at that time, the Greek word used in Acts 6:2 to describe their work comes from the same Greek root word διακονέω (diakoneō).

In 1 Timothy 3:8-13, Paul devotes 6 verses to describing the ordained office of deacons and their qualifications.

But the office of the deacon disappeared. The Catholic Church experienced a prolonged period when permanent deacons ceased to exist in our Western tradition. Notably, there was no official edict revoking the permanent diaconate—the shift occurred gradually as ecclesiastical practices changed. Permanent deacons did not exist in the Roman Catholic Church for over 1,200 years before their restoration in the 1960s. With Vatican II and Pope Paul VI’s *Motu Proprio Sacrum Diaconatus Ordinem* (1967), the permanent diaconate was restored.

Yes, there has evolved a transitional diaconate, a step from seminarian to priest, but the office of a permanent deacon faded into non-existence.

Should we conclude that deacons were only for the Church's initial stages and were no longer needed thereafter? Since they were non-existent for 1,200 years, should we not accept them now? Is it possible for the Holy Spirit at a later date to reintroduce this ordained office?

It is estimated that today there are in excess of 52,000 permanent deacons in the Roman Catholic Church, with their numbers increasing annually.

This is an example of a scriptural and traditional reality in the early church that faded away—but has been reinstated. It's not too far of a stretch to suggest the same has been done with the spiritual gifts and their restoration in the Church as she presumably enters the last days. Just because they faded away for many centuries does not mean the Holy Spirit might not bring this biblically mandated practice back into the life of the Church.

### **In Conclusion:**

In conclusion, many Christians of goodwill are trying to understand and implement the charismatic element in the Church—imperfectly, yes, but often with fervent and earnest desire. There may be abuses and disagreements over things like the charismatic movement. If one is not interested or disagrees, fine. Step aside and seek your own spirituality and devotions. But in case this is a working of the Spirit, Paul warns us, “Do not quench the Spirit” (1 Thess 5:19).

And even if we reject the spiritual gifts, we still do good to practice the fruits of the Spirit in regard to our “Charismatic-seeking” brothers and sisters in Christ—exercising toward them the fruits that include love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control (Gal 5:22-23).

Jesus said we can know a tree by its fruit. One can’t deny much of the fruit of the charismatic movement—in the number of vocations, if nothing else. With my own four kids and well over twenty grandkids, the effects of the Charismatic Movement have been resoundingly positive. I could not ask for more devout, more Catholic, more spiritual, and balanced results than what I witness in our kids and grandkids.

If there is disagreement and even a conviction of it being illegitimate, that is not an adequate reason to forgo charity, the benefit of the doubt, and prudent respect. It is not wise to cause dissension or alienate others in this regard. Constructive criticism respectfully offered, yes. Paul says that charity and respect should govern our lives together. Truth is important, but love is also. The greatest of these is love.

And this applies to family members, especially with parents: “Honor your father and mother” (this is the first commandment with a promise), that it may go well with you and that you may live long in the land” (Eph 6:2–3).

There are many spiritualities, movements, and charisms in the Catholic Church, just like there are many religious orders and institutions. We need to be gracious and loving as the Lord works these things out in our lives and in His Church.