

The Gift of Prophecy

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(This is the Fifth in a Series on the Charismata and the Holy Spirit today. Our Bishops are invited to forward these postings to their clergy. Anyone missing previous postings, please email me and I will send them to you.)

I remember one of the first clergy retreats I attended upon joining the Charismatic Episcopal Church. During the Eucharist Archbishop Douglas Woodall gave a prophecy. It was so refreshing to hear one of our Bishops (I was then a Canon) speak the Word of God to the priests and deacons with such authority. Among the members of the American House of Bishops he seems to have an exceptional gift of prophecy. Archbishop Chuck Jones can also be counted as one who receives prophecy and teaches from what he receives from the Holy Spirit.

In the early days of my charismatic involvement prophetic utterances were not as mature as Archbishop Woodall's words. "Jesus loves you" or "God is with us" were sometimes spoken by people who were attempting to yield to the Holy Spirit and the gift of prophecy. It was a beginning but when the Spirit really spoke through someone, you knew it. The utterance did not need a prefacing of "thus saith the Lord". You knew it was the Holy Spirit speaking and the edification was upbuilding for the Body of believers.

I am a very emotional person. I have been known to cry at some TV commercials. The few times the Spirit has used me for a prophecy I have had difficulty in speaking the words because I begin to weep. The awareness of God's anointing is overwhelming. I don't want the weeping to distract from the words being spoken, and it is difficult for me to utter the things the Spirit is giving. Perhaps some reader can help me in learning how to overcome this problem.

When I was temporarily "in charge" of our church in the Orlando area, I was blessed by Father James Barry who has the gift and ministry of prophecy. I wished I had recorded all his prophetic utterances. They were so inspiring. Almost every Sunday Father Barry had a Word from the Lord for the people. When Father William Sharpe was considering joining CEC, he and his wife Virginia, visited Ascension. During the Eucharist that morning two prophecies were spoken, and Virginia sang a third Word from the Lord. It

was a freeing experience for them because in their Episcopal Church this was not understood nor practiced. The Charismatic Episcopal Church was birthed because of a prophecy given to Bishop Adler and Bishop Motes that God was going to use them to do a "new work."

St Paul says prophecy edifies, exhorts and comforts the people of God (1 Corinthians 14: 2). The Church in this time of confusion and turmoil needs edification and strengthening, and I believe the Spirit is exhorting (calling) CEC to re-emphasize the *charismata* that was part of our beginning and in the previous decade. When we do He will bring seeking, inquiring people to us, and we will experience church growth. We will be fulfilling who the Lord called us to be - three streams:- evangelical, charismatic, catholic (liturgical-sacramental). The Holy Spirit is the one who "grows" the Church, not newspaper advertisements.

There are two kinds of prophecy. Foretelling and forth telling. The foretelling is predictive prophecy, speaking of something which will come to pass in the future. The forth telling is immediate and God's way of either calling out of the Body a response, or assuring the Body of His action. It can also be corrective if some error has occurred within the Body. Paul's connecting his teaching on prophecy to the gift of tongues may imply that praying in the Spirit will produce prophecy. The church's leadership can learn what God wants done in His Church if we go in prayer and seek the mind of the Holy Spirit and let Him speak through the "prophet" the will of God for the Church. That should be at the heart of true "consensus government".

When I pastored Holy Comforter Episcopal Church in Miami back in the 1970s the church was known throughout south Florida as a charismatic center. On an occasion I asked my Vestry serious questions as to our ministry. "If I were sick", I asked, "who in our Church is known to be effective in praying healing?" "If we have a serious issue involving a decision by the Vestry, to whom can we turn for a Word from the Lord (Prophecy)?" Who in your church has the gift of prophecy? Provide a time in the Eucharist when the prophet can edify and exhort the people. This may come during or following the time of Praise and Worship.

A good prophet can improve sermons a hundredfold.