

A message from the Rector. September 15, 2026

Sunday Sept. 13th during our silence after the songs of praise, one of our members offered a word in tongues. After a period of waiting, the Lord gave an interpretation through another member about the importance of forgiveness, and the Lord's desire for forgiveness – an interpretation that tied directly to the theme of my sermon. Through that message in tongues the Lord made it clear to those present that the primary theme for that Sunday morning was forgiveness. Praise be to the Lord for his work in our midst!

After church a few people asked me about the message in tongues, asked about our practice of waiting on the Lord in silence, and expressed their own past experiences with spiritual gifts. Those conversations stayed with me into my retreat time with our diocesan clergy, and I shared with our bishop what the Lord has been doing in the midst of our worship. The Bishop affirmed our quiet time of waiting, and he encouraged me to do some additional teaching about spiritual gifts, especially regarding “words” or “messages” for the congregation (whether they are offered in English or in tongues).

Is Scripture is clear that the Holy Spirit remains present and active in God's people and in the church? The only scripture that directly mentions a cessation of spiritual gifts is 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...but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.” Most Anglicans and others who affirm the Holy Spirit's work in the world interpret v.10 “when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears” to mean the gifts of the spirit will continue until Jesus returns (that is when perfection will have arrived). Others interpret “the perfect” to refer to the canon of Scripture, thus believing that the gifts of the Spirit are no longer operative roughly after the fourth century. (*If you have strong feelings here, let's talk over coffee!*)

We at COTS are firmly in line with most Anglicans and those who hold that the gifts of the Spirit are active today, and will continue until Jesus returns. My intent in this letter is to provide additional instruction so that we can continue to be open to the Lord's work through the Holy Spirit in our worship, and at the same time seek to avoid controversy in our worship that might disrupt and distract.

In our current practice of silence after the songs of praise, I have encouraged our members to listen for what the Lord might be saying to them or doing in them. I have also encouraged those who feel strongly that the Lord has a message for the congregation to share out loud what they have heard with confidence. The Bishop reminded me that it is my role as Rector to discern with church members whether the message they have received is for the whole church, or if it is intended for the work of the Lord in their own lives. The bishop also reminded me that there is no immediate urgency regarding messages from the Lord – they can be written down and reflected upon before being shared with the congregation.

With this in mind, I am making some changes to our practice of silence after the songs of praise.

You all are still encouraged during that time to be still, and to listen for what the Lord may be speaking to you. I encourage you to have a pen, and to jot down the things you hear, or draw the picture you might see. ***IF you sense that what you have received is for the church, I ask that you find me during the “peace” and share it with me, so I can discern whether it is for the congregation or just for you.*** It may be that I allow that word to be shared as a testimony that morning, it may be that after reflection I allow that word to be shared in the weekly email or during worship the following week, or it may be that I discern that the word is not for the congregation.

In all these things my desire is that we faithfully proclaim the Gospel of Jesus Christ, we grow in our relationship with the Lord and in our ability to hear the Holy Spirit's voice, and that we grow together in our faith and in our discernment regarding the Lord's work in our midst.

If you have any questions regarding these issues, I look forward to meeting with you to discuss further.

Fr. Bill

Scriptures Regarding Spiritual Gifts and Speaking in Tongues:

Acts 2:4 ⁴ And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit gave them utterance. [*sign for outsiders/unbelievers*]

Acts 19:6 ⁶ And when Paul had laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came on them, and they began speaking in tongues and prophesying. [*sign of the Holy Spirit's presence in/on a believer*]

Prayer Languages...

Romans 8:26 ²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words.

Messages in Tongues in Worship...

1Corinthians 14:5 ⁵ Now I want you all to speak in tongues, but even more to prophesy...unless he interprets, so that the church may be edified.

- “The interpretation of the tongue brings it within the framework of intelligibility, which in turn means that it too can edify the community. This does not imply that such a tongue is to be understood as directed toward the community, but that what the person has been speaking to God has now been made intelligible, so that others may benefit from the Spirit's utterance.”¹

1Corinthians 14:6-12 ⁶ Now, brothers, if I come to you speaking in tongues, how will I benefit you unless I bring you some revelation or knowledge or prophecy or teaching? ⁷ If even lifeless instruments, such as the flute or the harp, do not give distinct notes, how will anyone know what is played? ... ⁹ So with yourselves, if with your tongue you utter speech that is not intelligible, how will anyone know what is said? For you will be speaking into the air. ... ¹² So with yourselves, since you are eager for manifestations of the Spirit, strive to excel in building up the church.

1Corinthians 14:6-13-18 ¹³ Therefore, one who speaks in a tongue should pray that he may interpret. ¹⁴ For if I pray in a tongue, my spirit prays but my mind is unfruitful. ¹⁵ What am I to do? I will pray with my spirit, but I will pray with my mind also ... ¹⁶ Otherwise, if you give thanks with your spirit, how can anyone in the position of an outsider say “Amen” to your thanksgiving when they do not know what you are saying? ¹⁷ For you may be giving thanks well enough, but the other person is not being built up. ¹⁸ I thank God that I speak in tongues more than all of you. ¹⁹ Nevertheless, in church I would rather speak five words with my mind in order to instruct others, than ten thousand words in a tongue.

- **1Cor 13:7-12** Spiritual Gifts only cease at the end times, as all things cease and we see “face to face.”
- *No spiritual gifts are greater than others. Messages from the Lord are not expected every week.*

¹ Gordon D. Fee, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Commentary on the New Testament (Eerdmans, 2014), 659.