

THE CECILIAN

A NEWSLETTER TO HONOR ST. CECILIA, VIRGIN AND MARTYR
AND A CHRONICLE OF MICHAELA SASSE'S DISCERNMENT AS A CONSECRATED VIRGIN LIVING IN THE WORLD

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Before moving to Kansas, the idea of writing a newsletter came up many times in conversation. Personally, I have never thought of myself as much of a writer. In school, I always preferred taking tests to writing papers; I am not sure I wrote a single paper in optometry school, and that was a welcome relief.

Lately, I have spent time contemplating the Father's unique place for each of us. Since moving back to the Salina Diocese, I have had the privilege of meeting women in various stages of life. Some of these women are single and long to be married. Some are discerning religious life; some are professed sisters. Others are married and face the struggle of infertility; others are married and have many children. Still others are widows.

While every person's call to holiness presents certain challenges, God has a particular mission for each of us as members of the Body of Christ. Although I had not thought of myself as a writer, I saw that perhaps God was calling me to a new opportunity and to be open to serving the Church in a way I had not previously considered. I encourage each person to ponder their role in the Body of Christ and to listen to the promptings of the Holy Spirit.

How can one know where God is calling an individual to go, especially if this may be a new path? There are graces poured out by the Holy Spirit known as charisms. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* says the following about charisms: "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. It is in this sense that discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church's shepherds. 'Their office [is] not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good,' so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together 'for the common good'" (Par. 799-801).

Charisms (some sources identify as many as 26) are distinct from the gifts of the Holy Spirit in that the former are exterior, functional gifts aimed at serving the community (e.g., healing, writing, administration) while the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord) are for personal sanctification and spiritual growth. I have included a list of charisms at the end of this newsletter - please take time to reflect on them. Discerning charisms is necessary to identify the specific combination of gifts the Lord has given to you and to use those gifts to build up the Church. The Father has prepared a dwelling place for you; He designed you with a special mission in mind.

Two days ago I returned from a pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi. While I saw many beautiful places on pilgrimage, I was most captivated by the presence of Jesus in the quiet, simple chapel located in the guesthouse of Trinità dei Monti, an oasis of peace in the midst of the Eternal City. I felt incredibly blessed to spend ten days accompanying other pilgrims on their own personal paths of holiness. I reveled in the knowledge that the pilgrims and saints I walked alongside taught me far more about the Kingdom of God than any church, monument, or statue ever could. This month's newsletter honors St. Audrey, my patron saint. How I chose her (or rather, she chose me) is a story for another time!

PRAYER INTENTIONS

- For each person to have greater awareness of his or her charisms and to use them for the good of the Church
- For the sanctification of priests and religious and for vocations to the priesthood and religious life

ST. ETHELDREDA (AUDREY)

Virgin

Saint Etheldreda (other versions of her name include Æthelthryth and Audrey) was born around 636, one of the daughters of King Anna of East Anglia. She and her family were devout Christians, living in uncertain times when wars between Christian and pagan kingdoms in England was commonplace.

As Abbess of Ely, she was known for her piety, wisdom, and learning. She was married twice for political purposes. At an early age she married Tondberht, ealdorman of the South Gyrwas, but she remained a virgin. On his death, c. 655, she retired to the Isle of Ely, her dowry.

In 660, she was married to Egfrith, the young king of Northumbria who was then only 15 years old, and several years younger than her. He agreed that she should remain a virgin as in her previous marriage, but 12 years later he wished to consummate their marriage. Etheldreda, advised and aided by Wilfred, bishop of Northumbria, refused. Egfrith offered bribes in vain. According to St. Bede the Venerable, a Doctor of the Church who wrote about Etheldreda's life, she remained a virgin throughout both marriages. At that time, chastity was a sign of true devotion to the Christian faith. Eventually Etheldreda achieved her wish to be released from her marriage vows and become a nun. In 673 she returned to Ely, where she owned land, and founded a double monastery for monks and nuns.

Etheldreda died around 680 from a tumor on her neck, which she accepted from God as punishment for her youthful vanity of wearing elaborate necklaces. Some 16 years later, her body was taken from the simple grave she had requested, to be placed in a fine stone coffin in the Abbey Church. Her body was found to be incorrupt, believed to be a sign from God that she was a saint.

Her reputation as a saint grew, and pilgrims came to Ely from near and far, seeking miracles from her relics, which were believed to have healing powers, especially for throat and neck diseases. She became one of the most well-known and popular early English saints. In medieval times, several churches across the country were dedicated to St. Etheldreda, and images of her abounded.

Ely's monastery was closed in 1539 at the Reformation, and Etheldreda's shrine was destroyed shortly after. Interest in Etheldreda was rekindled in the 19th century, and a number of churches are still dedicated to her.

Today, St. Etheldreda is remembered on her feast days of June 23rd (her death) and October 17th (when her body was moved into the Abbey Church). A modern ledger stone marks the site of her shrine in the Presbytery of St. Etheldreda's Church in Ely Place, London, and some 14th century carvings of her life and miracles can still be found in the Octagon, rare survivals from medieval times. Her image, showing her with royal crown and her Abbess' staff, features in a number of 19th century stained glass windows. Some relics are alleged to be in St. Etheldreda's Church. Her hand, which was discovered in a recusant hiding place near Arundel in 1811, is claimed by St. Etheldreda's Catholic Church at Ely.

Although lesser known than some saints, St. Etheldreda's life serves as a powerful reminder that each of us are called to holiness according to God's unique design.

REFLECTION

"She had long asked of the king that he would permit her to lay aside worldly cares, and to serve only Christ, the true King, in a monastery." - St. Bede the Venerable on St. Etheldreda

Are we able to deny earthly pleasures in order to store up treasure in Heaven, the Eternal Kingdom and our one True Home? St. Etheldreda knew that this life was fleeting, and she lived for Christ alone. As C. S. Lewis once penned, "If we find ourselves with a desire that nothing in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that we were made for another world." How do our desires point us toward the true King, who we hope to be united with someday in Heaven where He will always reign in our souls?

St. Etheldreda, pray for us.



CHARISMS

Administration

With this charism, individuals may plan and execute projects and goals in a way that exceeds learned skills.

Celibacy

This charism is self-explanatory, but it allows an individual to be most fulfilled and fruitful by remaining unmarried in devotion and obedience to Christ. It is always in conjunction with other gifts and creates freedom to use and pursue those gifts totally. Prominent examples of this are priests and religious men and women.

Craftsmanship

Through craftsmanship, individuals show God's goodness to the world through artistic, creative, or skilled work that brings order and beauty into others' lives.

Discernment

A person with the gift of discernment accurately and intuitively senses the spiritual source of something. This could be God, human, or demonic.

Discernment of Tongues

Someone with this gift will understand and translate a spoken message delivered in an unknown language into the common language of the gathered community.

Encouragement

Encouragement enables individuals to be effective emissaries of God's love and nurturing nature through their presence, ability to listen, and words of comfort and counsel.

Evangelism

An individual with this gift shares their faith and it is effective at a supernatural level – encouraging both conversion and dedication to the faith in those they minister to.

Faith

The charism of faith is expressed when someone trusts God and His will to a supernatural degree. This faith gives them great freedom to operate out of that trust in a way that builds the community's faith. Faith is not exclusive to a particular set of job or vocational circumstances. All baptized persons have the gift of faith, but the charism goes deeper.

Giving

This example of a charism isn't just about giving gifts; individuals are conduits of God's provision by practicing supernatural generosity with their time, talents, and resources.

Healing

Healing does not only refer to supernatural physical healing; an individual with a charism of healing becomes a unique expression of God's love in the world by curing illness and restoring health – be it physical, inner, or relational.

Helps

This charism of the Holy Spirit sounds like you might be available whenever anyone needs anything, but it's more complex. This charism provides particular support to another person's service, ministry, or vocation through the use of their talents and gifts. This charism is frequently seen in those with a "right-hand man/woman" type role in any organization.

Hospitality

The gift of hospitality encourages someone to open their hearts and homes to welcome others as if they are Christ, often by providing food, shelter, or relationships.

Intercession

Individuals who possess this charism pray without ceasing for the intercessions of others, with great faith that prayer changes things and often serves as a means by which God's love reaches others.

Knowledge

This charism differs from the gift of the Holy Spirit but has the same name. Knowledge, as a charism of the Holy Spirit, enables individuals to use their minds, study, and analytical skills to synthesize information that helps them better understand God and the world.

CHARISMS CONTINUED

Leadership

The leadership charism permits an individual to share their vision for growth and change with others in a way that motivates and compels others to participate in that vision under their direction.

Mercy

Mercy allows individuals to share Christ's empathy and compassion for others and urges them to take practical actions to love and serve them.

Missionary

A missionary charism is found in those who care deeply about the salvation of people everywhere. They are urged to act on that call by ministering to people in other cultures.

Music

By sharing God's goodness through music, this charism invites others into a deeper relationship with God. Of the charisms of the Holy Spirit, this one is often hard to discern compared to natural talent. Still, it's helpful to add the litmus test of looking at not just the beauty or skill of the music but also whether or not the music invites others into a sense of wonder, faith, or prayer.

Pastoring

Pastoring doesn't just mean being the pastor of a church or a priest; it's much more inclusive than that. Someone with a pastoring charism builds effective Christian communities and enters into long-term relationships of Christian formation that elevate the faith lives of the people they serve.

Prophecy

A person with the gift of prophecy hears from the Lord and shares His messages with others in a way that encourages, instructs, and invites them into a deeper relationship with God.

Service

This charism of the Holy Spirit doesn't just involve being a servant to other people. It permits an individual to see the needs in a community or organization and then do what is necessary to bridge the gap and support the task at hand.

Teaching

This one seems evident in the application—good teachers have the teaching gift! But many people can display this gift in numerous ways. Parents teach their children, and trainers and mentors teach their mentees. Teaching allows individuals to communicate ideas, skills, and information effectively and empoweringly to those they teach for the good of the student's personal and spiritual formation.

Tongues

Speaking in tongues is a spiritual gift wherein a person prays or speaks in unintelligible utterances or a language they have never learned.

Voluntary Poverty

Someone who embraces voluntary poverty lives in solidarity with the poor in a chosen and joyful way that helps build others' faith and confidence in Jesus. If you're Catholic, think of the Franciscans.

Wisdom

This is another charism of the Holy Spirit that is distinct from its gift of the Holy Spirit counterpart. Wisdom empowers an individual to creatively apply knowledge with insight to help solve problems, accomplish goals, or make decisions.

Writing

Someone with this charism uses words to express truth, beauty, and goodness in ways that reflect the fullness of the human experience and profoundly affect the reader.

The Charisms of the Holy Spirit. Many Parts Ministries. (n.d.). <https://manypartsministries.com/the-charisms-of-the-holy-spirit/>