**7 31 16*"THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK"***

***“Brethren, having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith”***

 Beloved in our Lord, St. Paul’s statement in Romans 12, tells us about the gifts of the Holy Spirit that have been given to each one of us in our Baptism and Chrismation. These gifts come from the presence of the Holy Spirit in us and are effected differently in each one of us by the same grace of God. There are two ways in which these gifts differ in their effect from person to person- they differ in first in quality and also in the quantity of their effect.

 Each person is distinctive and will not manifest exactly the same gift, even though the grace is the same. The way this gift is manifested depends on the inherent personality of the person as well as all of his or her distinctive life experiences. That is why we had 12 apostles and not just one. This is why we have 4 Gospels. St. Paul is sometimes considered the greatest of all of the apostles, and indeed he was the most brilliant and sublime, and yet apart from the 12 he is nothing (remember, we stand for the Gospel and yet sit for the epistle). On a contemporary level, what does this mean for us? Beloved in our Lord Jesus, our local congregations, as well as the church as a whole, are dependent on each and every individual who is a member. Each member of the church has a unique gift, which should be encouraged and utilized to the fullest extent. We sometimes see certain personalities with many negative attributes, and we judge and marginalize them. It is very important to understand that these particular people have a gift, and if we do not use it, the church herself is deprived of this unique gift. Every person who walks through our doors is somehow brought there by God, and we must not only accept this person but encourage them and help them to express their unique gift.

 Second, we must understand that the gifts and grace of God acts in each one of with different intensity and power depending upon our faith (which is intimately related to the state of our hearts). St. Paul states this clearly when he says to use them ***“in proportion to our faith.***” Now “faith” according to St. Paul is the ***“substance of things hoped for and the evidence of things unseen.”*** Beloved, what this means is that the things unseen are just as real, just as existent in our lives than the things we see; no, they are even more real! This means God, who is unseen, is a reality on which our whole lives depend and function. That is, we must trust Him in everything. As we work with each other in the church, this hope and this faith must be the center of our ways of dealing with each other. A successful event or program is not our ultimate goal, but rather, our priority must be to empower the grace of God by seeking His will and manifesting love for one another. Christ is present not in programs or teachings, but in His body. We must protect and nourish the body of Christ before any other thing in the Church. All else we do, including our programs and our teachings is aimed at this one thing. Everything we do in the church must be motivated not by our own agendas or plans, but by faith in the living God. This is how grace and power will come to us personally and to our congregations as a whole. Amen.