

**GETTING SERIOUS  
ME, A PRIEST?  
1 CORINTHIANS 12  
SEPTEMBER 13, 2020**

He said, "When I was a boy, my father, a baker, introduced me to the wonders of song.

He urged me to work very hard to develop my voice.

Arrigo Pola, a professional tenor in my hometown of Modena, Italy,  
took me as a pupil.

I also enrolled in a teachers college.

On graduating, I asked my father, 'Shall I be a teacher or a singer?'

'Luciano,' my father replied, 'if you try to sit on two chairs,  
you will fall between them.

For life, you must choose one chair.'

"I chose one.

It took seven years of study and frustration  
before I made my first professional appearance.

It took another seven to reach the Metropolitan Opera.

And now I think whether it's laying bricks, writing a book—  
whatever we choose—

we should give ourselves to it.

Commitment, that's the key.

Choose one chair."

Those are the words of world famous tenor Luciano Pavarotti.

You don't rise to his level of performance by playing around at singing.

It requires getting serious about it,

and really giving yourself to it over a long period of time.

Just as you don't win a marathon by jogging around your block a few times  
and then trying really hard on marathon day.

You have to be more serious about it.

A training plan with daily runs, diet, sufficient rest...

You have to organize a major part of your life around it.

Sports, academics, music, it doesn't matter what.

To excel, to rise to the top, in any field of endeavor, requires real commitment.

It means getting serious about it.

For instance, you have to be pretty serious about your faith to be a Roman Catholic priest.

That celibacy thing weeds out a lot of folks.

I'd say that's a good reason to be a Protestant!

Are you ready to sign up to be a priest?

The usual institutional position and role of priests is a fairly exclusive club.

In the Old Testament it was only one of the twelve tribes of Israel who could serve as priests,  
the tribe of Levi.

In the Roman Catholic and Eastern Orthodox Churches it is only those who receive the training,  
take on certain vows, and are ordained.

A few Protestant Churches use the term "priest."

But many do not.

Yet even among those who do not use the term "priest,"

there is a traditional view of "the pastor" fulfilling that same role.

There's often special training required,

and ordination at the hands of some authority.

Some people think pastors are more spiritual than ordinary people,

our prayers have more power,

and we ought to be put on a pedestal.

Some pastors like that pedestal

because the pedestal can be a place where you are revered.

But it is also a lonely place.  
 It's a place that makes you a great open target to shoot at.  
 It is a height from which you will fall,  
 because no one really deserves to be up there.

Most Protestant Churches don't use the term "priest,"  
 but the idea is still there.

But the term "priest" in the New Testament it is greatly broadened....

To include everyone who claims to trust and follow Jesus.

To include YOU.

Writing to the church, Peter said,

"You also, as living stones, are being built up  
 a spiritual house, a *holy priesthood*,  
 to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ." (1Pe.2:5)

"But you are a chosen generation, a *royal priesthood*, a holy nation, His own special people,  
 that you may proclaim the praises of Him who  
 called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." (1Pe.2:9)

In the book of Revelation it says

Jesus "has made us kings and *priests* to His God and Father,  
 to Him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen." (Re.1:6)

He has "made us kings and *priests* to our God;  
 And we shall reign on the earth." (Re.5:10)

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection.  
 Over such the second death has no power,  
 but they shall be *priests* of God and of Christ,  
 and shall reign with Him a thousand years." (Re.20:6)

Priests.

That's you and me.

Our befuddlement may be because we don't really understand what a priest is.

The role of a priest is to mediate between God and the world,  
 bringing God's presence to bear on a lost and dying world,  
 and bringing needs of this world before God in prayer.

The "priesthood of all believers" was one of the key doctrines raised up in the Protestant Reformation.

Up until that time the idea of a priest had been restricted to the narrower definition of a select group.

But the reformers Martin Luther, John Calvin, and the rest pushed back to the New Testament definition,  
 in which every believer, every Christian, is a priest.

Consider, in the rubble of the twin towers that fell on September 11, 2001,  
 a man crushed under fallen masonry and steel  
 was gasping for air.

His life was slipping away.

A bystander who had run forward to offer help knelt beside him.

They were both covered in dust,  
 enough of it still in the air that it was difficult to breath.

He saw that he had knelt in a growing pool of the man's blood.

But he did not draw back.

He gently laid a hand on him and prayed aloud.

The man weakly whispered, "a priest?"

The bystander wasn't a Catholic, but he was a Christian.

He didn't correct the dying man.

He prayed over him, commending him to the grace of God.

The dying man relaxed, smiled, and breathed his last.

He wore no collar; he had no special training; he wasn't even Catholic.

But he was a priest.

Are you serious enough about your faith, serious enough about Jesus, that you would serve as a priest?

That's what we are all called to be and do.

We are not called to be consumers of religion.

We are not called to simply observe a worship service or Bible study.

We are called to be priests,  
 mediating God's presence to a sin-sick and dying world,  
 and lifting up the needs of this world to God in prayer.

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And before you insist "I'm not able to do that, I'm not trained or equipped to do that,  
 let me remind you that you ARE equipped,  
 FULLY equipped,  
 by the presence and power of the Holy Spirit in your life.

The equipment we have, the abilities given us by the Holy Spirit, are called "spiritual gifts."  
 Let's see what Paul tells us about this.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 12:1-3

If you say and truly believe "Jesus is Lord,"  
 that is evidence that God's Holy Spirit is at work in your life.  
 The test is not whether you can speak in tongues or heal the sick,  
 but if you mean it when you say, "Jesus is Lord."  
 In other words, every true follower of Jesus has the Holy Spirit.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 12:4-11

"Now to EACH ONE the manifestation of the Spirit is given..."  
 In other words, every believer has one or more spiritual gifts,  
 abilities given us by God that he intends for us to use in ministry.  
 Paul says the gifts are given "for the common good."  
 Your spiritual gifting is not for you to have a spiritual thrill,  
 not to make you feel great,  
 not to elevate you above others,  
 but for the common good,  
 to build up the church and bless other people.

There is a great variety of gifts.

And not just these mentioned in 1 Corinthians.

Romans 12 names additional gifts of generous giving, serving, teaching,  
 encouragement, mercy and leadership.

(Ro.12:6-8)

And Ephesians 4 adds to the list gifts of evangelism and pastoring.

(Ep.4:11-12)

In the Old Testament, in Exodus,

we find a man who has a God-given gift of craftsmanship.

(Ex.31:1f; 35:31)

There is no single list that names them all.

In fact, there may well be other spiritual gifts not named in Scripture.

There could be spiritual gifts in the arts or in technology.

God gives us the abilities we need to fulfill the ministry, do the work, he made us to do.

Paul repeatedly hammers the point that each of these spiritual gifts come from the same source, the Holy Spirit,  
 and so they are all equally spiritual.

There is no single gift that is more spiritual than the others.

Notice, too that one point Paul makes in verse 11 is that

each person receives whatever gift from the Spirit "just as he (the Holy Spirit) determines."

It's not because one person is more or less spiritual than another,

or this person begged God for particular ability,

or that prays better than another.

It is determined solely and completely by the will of God.

In verses 12-26 Paul plays with the image of the physical body and makes two important points.

First, no one body part is all important, and can say it has no need of the others.

And, second, no one body part can say it is unimportant or not needed.

On the first point...

When one body part, one organ, one tissue,

grows beyond its own place, crowding out other parts,  
 we call that "cancer,"

and we do what we must to stop its growth or cut it out.

No one body part should ever think it doesn't need the others.

It should not grow beyond its own right place.

No single spiritual gift should ever be lifted up

as most important and not needing the other gifts.

On the second point...

No single body part should assume it is inferior or unneeded.

Every part has its place and is needed for the body to be health and fully functioning.

You might think your little toe is not all that important.

Imagine that you can't sleep,

and you get up in the wee hours,

and you don't turn a bedroom light on

because you don't want to wake your husband or wife,

and while walking to the family room

you whack your little toe on a piece of furniture.

In that moment your entire body is affected.

Your journey to the couch is stopped.

You feel pain that overwhelms you, head to toe.

Your vocabulary is expanded.

Your little toe is not so unimportant after all.

And the same is true of the body of Christ.

Those parts we might think are not so important, less spiritual...

Just try having a well-functioning church without

someone with the gift of service emptying trash cans,

setting up tables and chairs, and such,

or someone with the gift of encouragement

pouring into others who might become discouraged.

Every body part has its proper place and role in the body.

And believers with different spiritual gifts all have their place and their role.

None are unimportant, and no one gift is all-important.

Everybody's got their place.

YOU have YOUR place.

### 1 CORINTHIANS 12:27-31

The body needs all its various parts

Each one of us is needed for the body of Christ to be whole and fully functional

There are different gifts distributed to different people.

No one gift required for everyone.

No one gift is proof of being saved or being spiritual.

Every gift is important in its own right

In Romans 12:6-8 Paul says,

"Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us,

let us use them:

if prophecy, let us prophesy in proportion to our faith;

or ministry, let us use it in our ministering;

he who teaches, in teaching;

he who exhorts, in exhortation;

he who gives, with liberality;

he who leads, with diligence;

he who shows mercy, with cheerfulness."

(Ro.12:6-8)

In other words, whatever gift you've been given,

USE it, and use it WELL.

I think of Jesus' parable of the talents.

The master portioned out his money to his servants for them to use on his behalf.

Then he left on a journey.

When he returned he called his servants to give an account of

what they'd done with what they'd been given.

Those who used what he'd given them were praised and rewarded.

But there was one who was fearful of his master,

who had buried the money so it could not be lost,

but it also could not bring the master a profit...

What he had been given was taken from him.  
 He was cast into the outer darkness,  
 where there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. (Mt.25:14-30)

Finally, Paul writes a few more words about spiritual gifts to the church in Ephesus.

#### **EPHESIANS 4:11-12**

These are often referred to as leadership gifts.

These are gifts given *not* so leaders can *do all the ministry*,  
 but so they can *equip all* the believers to employ *their* spiritual gifts in ministry,  
 “to prepare God’s people for works of service.”  
 Ministry was not done by a small group of folks and consumed by a much larger group.  
 The smaller group had the task of equipping and deploying ALL believers to  
 the various ministries to which God called them.

In the historical development of the church,

certain ministry functions were given over to a special group of people  
 in order to protect the integrity of those functions.  
 For instance, there had been some wrongheaded experimentation  
 with different words and actions for baptism and the Lord’s Supper.  
 There had been some quite unbiblical ideas taught in certain places.  
 So a set-apart group with special training were tasked with  
 protecting the integrity of the church’s ministries of Word and Sacrament.  
 With that there developed the idea that  
 this set apart group, the clergy, were “the ministers.”  
 And over time, all others became the consumers of ministry.

But if we would be the church God calls us to be,

healthy and strong and fully functioning,  
 we will have to fight against that centuries old tradition.  
 We still need to maintain the integrity of Word and Sacrament.  
 They are not open to experimentation to “fit in with the times.”  
 But we will need to return to what Jesus intended the church to be and do,  
 what the Holy Spirit empowers us to be and do.  
 We will need to be more serious about what the Bible says about the church  
 than what traditions we’re used to.  
 We will all need to take our place as priests of the most high God.

YOU have one or more spiritual gifts.

YOU have a place in ministry.

YOU are a priest.

Are you ready to get serious about it?

Are you ready and willing to take what God has put in you and put it to his kingdom purposes?

Ted was cleaning out his junk drawer.

You know what that is;

You have one too.

He found a flashlight he hadn't used in a year.

He turned it on but there was no light.

He shook it,

and then he unscrewed one end to release what were probably dead batteries.

The batteries wouldn't come out,

but finally, after some effort, he shook them loose.

What a mess he found!

Corroded batteries with acid seeping all over the mechanism –

all because he hadn't used the flashlight regularly!

Batteries are designed to be turned on, to be used, not neglected or ignored.

The spiritual gifts and abilities God has put in you and me...

are not to be tucked away in the junk drawer.

They are meant to be used.... used for the kingdom.

Are you using the gifts and talents God has given you?

Are you living as a priest

who mediates God's grace to others,  
 and who lifts up others to God in prayer?  
 And whatever you do for the kingdom...  
 If it is up front and visible to others, stay humble.  
 Remember it's not about you,  
 and it's not by your own power.  
 It's about Jesus,  
 and it's by the power of his Holy Spirit.  
 And if what you do is seemingly small and hidden in unseen places,  
 do not underestimate what God might do with that.  
 In 1878, when the Salvation Army was really beginning to make its mark in England,  
 men and women from all over the world began to enlist.  
 A man who had once dreamed of becoming a bishop in another denomination  
 crossed the Atlantic from America to England to enlist in the Salvation Army instead.  
 His name was Samuel Brengle.  
 Brengle left a fine pastorate to join William Booth's Army.  
 At first General Booth accepted his services reluctantly and grudgingly.  
 Booth said to Brengle, "You've been your own boss too long."  
 So in order to instill humility in Brengle,  
 he made him work by cleaning the boots of other trainees.  
 Discouraged, Brengle said to himself,  
 "Have I followed my own fancy across the Atlantic  
 in order to black boots?"  
 Then, as in a vision,  
 he saw Jesus bending over the feet of rough, uneducated fishermen.  
 "Lord," he whispered, "you washed their feet;  
 I will black their shoes."  
 Samuel Brengle went on to establish the Salvation Army in America.  
 At the time of his death,  
 the Salvation Army was thriving in both the United States and in Canada.  
 Just before his death Brengle sent out a short memo to all of his top leaders.  
 This memo had one single word written on it:  
 "Others."  
 Are you ready to get serious about being a priest?  
 To mediate God's presence to the world and lift up the needs of the world to God?  
 What will you do with the spiritual gifts God put in you?

### **SERMON NOTES:**

Traditional ideas about priests

You are the New Testament Priesthood (1Pe.2:5, 9; Re.1:6; 5:10; 20:6)

You are equipped by the Holy Spirit (1Cor.12)

Use what you've been given (Ro.12:6-8; Mt.25:14-30)

Leadership gifts (Ep.4:11-12)

Your action plan