



CALLED AND GIFTED FOR THE THIRD MILLENNIUM

Introduction

The church is dynamic; always growing through its struggles and blessings as it moves through history professing the creed, celebrating the sacraments, and calling all to a virtuous life. This was clearly seen in the historic documents given to us through the Second Vatican Council. One particular document is the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*. From this council statement, the United States Catholic Bishops published a statement in 1980 entitled *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity*. In 1995 the Bishops of the United States once again authored *Called and Gifted For The Third Millennium*. This document offers their reflections on the thirtieth anniversary of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity* and the fifteenth anniversary of *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity*. This brief summary outlines the basic elements of the document. The entire document needs to be read for a full appreciation of the message that the bishops offer.

Overview

Called and Gifted For the Third Millennium embraces the original four calls found in *Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity* (holiness, community, mission and ministry, Christian maturity) and presents them in light of Church teaching, pastoral practice, and changing conditions in the world. The wisdom of this document is the bishops' ability to read the signs of the times and offer a challenge for the future based on the original *Called and Gifted: The American Laity*. It is without compromise that the bishops place the lay vocation alongside the clergy and together, in partnership, all of us can effectively re-evangelize the present world.

The Call To Holiness

When reflecting on holiness, the church is ever sensitive to how the spirit works in everyone's life, revealing that holiness is indeed a gift of the Holy Spirit received through baptism. Consequently, all of life has the potential to offer us glimpses of the divine and to beckon us to observe the creator at work in the world around us. The common thread of this holiness is relationship. Relationships in family, community, and parish bring us deeper into unity with Jesus Christ. Beyond these relationships certain conditions hold for us windows of opportunity, and challenge us to deal with the modern world in which we live. This holiness is often formed in suffering, generous service, and simplicity of life. All three of these conditions present a challenge to us for the new millennium as we deal with global injustices and ecological issues.

The Call To Community

This section identifies the experience of community as the center of that which fosters an individual's faith life. In both the domestic church and the parish church, men and women are able to express their faith and grow in unity with God and others, while continuing the saving mission of Christ. It is in these small communities that one finds the faith, wisdom, and courage to move out of one's self into the wider community and transform it by the power of the Gospel.

This experience of the Small Christian Community is the root of the Church's new evangelization, which focuses on sharing the good news of Jesus by being actively engaged with the world.

The Call to Mission and Ministry

Active and responsible participation in the Church's mission and ministry is to recognize that the Holy Spirit has endowed each person with gifts suitable for building up the Kingdom. These gifts reveal to us the call to mission and the need to develop the gifts that the Holy Spirit has given each of us by using them in every area of our life.

While there has been an explosion of ministries and offices in the church, the laity must also communicate the reality of God in the professional, social, political, and cultural life of society as part of its mission. By making this connection between gift and service, and expression and environment, we become a church that offers formative experiences for all of its members and assists them in transforming the human spirit.

The Call to Christian Maturity

This final section presents itself as a summary whereby holiness, community, mission and ministry are facets that come to full expression through development and growth, giving birth to a mature Christian faith.

By our active participation as individuals and as a community of faith we serve the common good. The Bishops point out that this is achieved through an attitude that fosters respect for differences, which reinforces our Catholic tradition that welcomes diversity as enrichment - not a threat. There are two final points that achieve this goal. The first is the catechesis of children and youth, and the second is the offering of religious and theological education what presents the best in Catholic intellectual and spiritual traditions to adults.

Reflection

Further study of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity, Called and Gifted: The American Catholic Laity*, and *Called and Gifted For The Third Millennium* provides the opportunity to see how the sometimes ordinary experiences of our lives present us with the extraordinary realities of God. Such a life requires a continual exercise of faith, hope and charity, resulting in a variety of opportunities open to the laity for the exercise of their apostolate of evangelization and sanctification. Living out one's faith in this manner becomes a testimony of the Christian life, that when expressed in the name of the spirit possesses the power to draw all people to believe in God.

Discussion Questions

- 1) What does the *Called and Gifted For The Third Millennium* document have to say to you?
- 2) How are the Four Calls evident in your life?
- 3) How do we as Serrans make these Four Calls a reality?

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