

Let's have a show of hands: how many of us have experienced a campfire, or a wood fire in a wood-stove or fireplace? So we know it takes some work to get the fire started and keep it going. This was a lesson I learned a long time ago while camping in Girl Scouts and one I continue to experience each time we have a fire in our wood stove. Unless we feed the fire, the flames will die, become hot coals, and eventually go out. If, however, we add wood and use bellows for more oxygen, we can fan those glowing coals into flame again.

I think this image speaks to the message of Paul's letter to Timothy that reminds us "to fan into flame the gift of God." Each of us is a gift of God and has particular gifts that make us who we are. God wants us to fan into flame the gift we are. For that to happen we need to acknowledge our gift, feed its development, and use it to build up others. Let's consider a couple examples.

The Business Section of a recent issue of the *Philadelphia Inquirer* (Sunday, September 15, 2013, pp. D1, D5) highlighted the founder of the Vanguard Financial Group, John Bogle. John, who is now 84, said this: "I'm quite sure that my highest and best use...is doing what I'm doing...trying to build a better financial world and a better country." He named his gift—understanding financial markets—but it goes deeper than that. His business is building up others in giving good careers to 14,000 people in a company that is value, service, and integrity-oriented. John says this: "...treat everybody as an equal. I can't stand it when somebody demeans somebody who's doing the hard work. The world should work exactly the opposite. They should get much more credit than the big shots and suits." Here is a man, grounded in love, who has fanned into flame his gifts of integrity, respect, and teamwork in the context of the financial world. Not an easy thing to do! He has shared not only his financial knowledge, but also his nuggets of wisdom, with many groups and offers this advice: "Try to be yourself and

live your own life.” John has spoken and lived the message of today’s reading: name our gifts, develop them, and use them to build up others’ lives.

As a second example of firing up our gifts, this illustration centers around the gift of prayer. A few weeks ago I asked our community for prayers for a 2-year old boy Jack. After receiving the request, Ceal asked me if she could send it to the Dominican Community of 1,000 people. When I read Ceal’s email, I felt enveloped in a flaming love of support and connected to so many throughout the country. When I told Jack’s aunt that over 1,100 people would be praying for him, she felt goose bumps and expressed extraordinary gratitude. This gift of prayer was overwhelming. The flame of their gift deeply touched the hearts of Jack’s family with comfort, support, and a radiant love. This gift of prayer—fanned into flame—is being named, generously offered, and used to build up God’s people in times of sadness and challenge.

Each of us has gifts, and we use these gifts in many different contexts. God is there in all of them. Today’s scripture challenges us to own our gifts and passionately bring God to expression in living them. I also invite us to consider as gifts our growing edges—those shadows that Katch spoke about in her recent homily—to nurture them and fully integrate them over time so that they are part of that flame. One of my growing edges is how I respond to being pushed to do something. I like to do it when *I’m* ready. So learning to respond with honesty, yet without an unpleasant edge, is a shadow I need to bring to the light. Hopefully one day it will be fully integrated and fully fanned into flame. So let’s honor and own our gifts, including our growing edges.

The last point to consider is self-care. We need energy to fan our gifts into flame. This is a gentle reminder to fill our own lamps so that our flame doesn’t go out. On an ongoing basis we need to feed ourselves—relax, rest, and regroup to keep our flame aglow. This is our equivalent

of wood and bellows for a campfire. Writer BJ Gallagher offers these words of wisdom: "...one whose flame has extinguished can no longer fulfill their mission in life—lighting up the world...Take time to fill your lamp. The world needs your flame—but first, you need your oil."

(Lisa Hammond & BJ Gallagher, *Oil for Your Lamp*, p. 55)

As I look at each of you, I see sparkling gifts of hope and encouragement, forgiveness and justice, hospitality and welcome, financial knowledge and medical care, business acumen and creative teaching, and many, many others. Take care of yourself so your light can continue to shine brightly.

Beneath your seat are a pen and paper. If you would now take them in your hands. I invite you to name a gift, including a growing edge if you choose, that you feel a desire to fan into flame. And then write that gift on the paper.

- Quiet moment -

This week I encourage you to reflect more on this gift and the way God is calling you to fire it up.

Live your Gift. Let it glow and burn brightly. For you are God's Fire of Love in the world.

Scripture Readings—27th Sunday in Ordinary Time
Habakkuk 1: 2-3; 2: 2-4
2 Timothy 1: 6-8, 13-14
Luke 17: 5-10

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