

Chad Varah was an Anglican priest in London. In 1953 he buried a girl who had killed herself. The coroner, at her inquest, suggested that she might not have done this desperate act if someone had been around who would have listened to her troubles. Chad Varah decided to use his London church and a telephone to listen to people who were in despair. He put a small advertisement in the local paper and in the first week he had 27 calls. Soon he was listening and advising people 12 hours a day. So he decided to train a group of his congregation to help him in this work. Fifty years later, the Samaritans work in 50 countries with over 40,000 volunteers. The gift of the Spirit was certainly at work in Chad Varah.

In 1948, an Albanian nun, working in Calcutta as a teacher, was walking down the street when she came across a woman who was half-dead. Moved with compassion she stayed with that woman until she died. That experience began her lifetime of service to poor and terminally ill people. When Mother Theresa died in 1997, the Missionaries of Charity were working in over 40 countries, with over 1 million co-workers. All from that day in Calcutta when a teacher decided to do something rather than teach. The gift of the Spirit was certainly at work in Mother Theresa.

Two thousand years ago, in a room in Jerusalem, 12 very frightened men, ordinary men like fisherman and tax collectors, were in hiding from fear of the Jews. Their leader had been executed and they did not know what to do next. At Pentecost, they received the gifts of the Spirit and they were totally changed. Rushing out, we are told, they could speak in tongues, perform miracles and preach and spread the Good News of Christ's death and resurrection. Today, the Christian religion is world-wide and has over 2 billion adherents. And it began with one man and his 12 followers.

The apostles, like Mother Teresa and Chad Varah, had received the Holy Spirit.

And of course we too receive the Holy Spirit with his gifts through the sacrament of Confirmation. You might say that is all very well, but I can't speak in tongues or work miracles.

But is that really the case?

Through Jesus and the Holy Spirit we learn the language of faith, by which we

believe that the God who created us, loved us so much that he sent his only Son to die a terrible death for us on the Cross, to die for our sins. We learn the language of hope, as we await the fulfilment of our eternal promise with God in heaven. Very importantly, we learn the language of love, by which we try to do as Jesus did, by loving all people and caring for them.

So we have received the gift of tongues. What about working miracles?

We think of miracles as totally out of the ordinary experiences, but for the most part, God will work through ordinary people to help others. What we may consider as a routine experience or help we give to someone can, for that person, be the miracle they have been looking for. And it doesn't have to be great. It can be the friendly greeting to a lonely person, money for a cup of tea to a beggar, spending time listening to someone's problems when no one else will. It may not be significant for us, but it can seem miraculous to another person. And we achieve this just by doing as Christ would do, by being Christ to others and recognising Christ in others.

So we have it in us to work miracles too.