

REDISCOVERING THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

By Rev. Jerry J. Pokorsky
SUNDAY, JUNE 9, 2019

We received the Gifts of the Holy Spirit when we were confirmed, bringing to fullness the graces of Baptism. But the Gifts are easy to neglect. (How many of them can you identify?) So it's profitable to reconsider and rediscover the gifts promised by the Prophet Isaiah and fulfilled on Pentecost: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord.

The gift of Wisdom illumines the mind and instills an attraction to the divine. But our spiritual attention deficit disorder easily distracts us. The Israelites, impatient for the return of Moses from the Mount, turned away from God and worshiped a golden calf. Even the fleeting work of human hands can distract us – and the distractions today are more sophisticated than ever.

Years before he received a cardinal's hat, the great Carlo Caffarra accompanied a priest friend to New York City. He was awestruck by the skyscrapers: "How is it possible for a man to have faith with such magnificence?" Alas, as we know since 9/11, even those towers can collapse. The gift of wisdom remains – and is necessary to keep us focused on the Prize.

The gift of Understanding connects the various truths and orders our thinking in a heavenly direction. With understanding, we begin to see the hand of God in every event of our lives and to recognize that the Cross is the key to unlocking the mystery of our suffering. God's providence can be temporarily thwarted through the misuse of our freedom, but never ultimately defeated. Renewing a desire for the gift of understanding reignites our trust in His providence.

The gift of Counsel perfects the virtue of prudence in us, illuminating the will of God in particular circumstances. Jesus teaches, "If you love me, you will keep my commandments." (John 14:15) But in many situations, it's challenging to apply His laws:

burning questions of war, immigration, or even simple matters such as whether to work late again tonight and miss the family meal. We need to ask the Holy Spirit to inflame the gift of counsel to fortify our prudence.

The gift of Fortitude is courage under fire, enduring some evil while holding fast to the truth. When Jesus says forgive your enemies, it's disturbing to think that we have (and should have) enemies. Enduring, resisting, and confronting the enemies of God is necessary for every Christian life. But we often cower in silence, hoping the demons will leave us in peace; and sometimes we even defect to the enemy. The Devil will not give up until his victory is complete. With God's grace, neither should we. The gift of fortitude is vital if we are to avoid mortal sin and confront evil according to our means and state of life.

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The gift of Knowledge enables us to perceive reality as God sees it. In the first chapter of Genesis, God looks at His handiwork: “And God saw that it was good.” The gift of knowledge leads us to rejoice with the Psalmist: “I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made.” (Psalm 139:14) If with the gift of knowledge we saw ourselves

as God sees us, how many marriages would remain intact? How many unborn babies would see daylight?

The gift of Piety reverences almighty God and elevates religious practices with humility, trust, and love for His Majesty. In Genesis, Abel sacrifices “the firstlings of his flock and of their fat portions.” (Gen. 4:4) God accepts Abel’s sacrifices because he offers them with devotion. But the Lord rejects Cain’s offering. St. Augustine speculates that Cain gave God his offerings, but not entirely because his heart was divided. (*City of God*XV.7).

Cain lied to God; he just went through the ritual motions. But Abel’s external holocaust expressed his interior disposition, just as the Cross represents the perfect obedience of Jesus. The celebration of the Mass, according to the rubrics, is praiseworthy. But if the externals are without inner reverence, our worship is in vain. Priests and people need to pray for the gift of piety.

Fear of the Lord is a sense of awe in the divine presence and causes us to fear separation from His love. After the miraculous catch of fish, Jesus calls Peter to be a member of his Band of Brothers. In awe, Peter falls to his knees and exclaims, “Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord.”(Luke 5:8) Peter’s fear of the Lord is endearing but imperfect, in need of purification over his entire life.

After the Resurrection but before Pentecost, Jesus encourages Peter to love Him with sacrificial love. “Simon, son of John, do you love me [*agapas*, sacrificial love] more than these?” (John 21:15) In repenting of his threefold denial, Peter seems unable, without the Holy Spirit, to express his love for Jesus beyond filial love. “Yes, Lord; you know that I love you [*philō*, friendship love].” (John 21:16)

In the final scene of his life, Peter returns to Rome and is crucified, joining his beloved Savior in sacrificial love. The Holy Spirit, at last, purifies and elevates Peter’s servile fear.

The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit were embedded deep within our souls on the day of our Confirmation. They cannot be dislodged, only suppressed by our refusal to open our hearts to Him. But if we want to be full members of His Church, the gifts are available for the asking: “Ask, and it will be given you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you.” (Mt. 7:7)

The transformation is not instantaneous. It comes with the Gifts of the Holy Spirit conferred on us at our personal Pentecost, by

frequently remembering them and boldly practicing them in sacrificial love.

Come Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful, and kindle in them the fire of your love. Send forth Thy Spirit, and they shall be created. And Thou shalt renew the face of the earth.

**Image: Pentecost by Jan Joest, 1508 [St. Nicholas Church in Kalkar, Germany]. This one section of the Joest-designed altar at St. Nicholas. Pentecost is the bottom left square of the right four-panel.*



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