

MEDITATION F



5. The Holy Spirit and His 7 Gifts

Where does the teaching about the gifts of the Holy Spirit come from? Their foundation is found in the prophet Isaiah. At the synagogue of Nazareth, Our Lord opens the sacred book: "*The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, he has consecrated me, the Spirit of strength, the Spirit of sciences, the Spirit of wisdom. Before sitting down, Our Lord comments: "Today this prophecy has come true. "*

Thereafter, Christ repeatedly insists on the fact that the Spirit he sends us is his Spirit, therefore a divine breath. The Holy Spirit, third person of the Trinity, the same Spirit united to Our Lord, is truly the One who gives us his seven gifts. They are the sacred sevenfold, mentioned in the Pentecost sequence *Da tuis fidelibus, in te confidentibus, Sacrum septenarium*, "Give your faithful who trust in you, the sacred sevenfold."

We have already received the Holy Spirit, at our baptism because sanctifying grace, as St. Thomas Aquinas says, is called "*the grace of virtues and gifts.*" Sanctifying grace always infuses the supernatural virtues: the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity) and the moral supernatural virtues (Strength, Justice, Prudence, Temperance).

Man, since he is a rational and free being, goes towards heaven by his own actions. But heaven is not naturally attainable without divine help. This is what Our Lord said to his apostles: "*Without me you can do nothing.*" I can get up or sit down without the help of grace; but without it I cannot do anything that is meritorious for heaven. We must thus acquire virtues: it is the perfection of our human nature, of our being. Each animal goes to its own perfection by instinct.

Man goes to his own perfection consciously and freely: it is our dignity as images of God. These human virtues, abundantly described by the ancient philosophers, run the risk,

because of the consequences of original sin, of never being deeply established. This is why God supports them with virtues and gifts infused with grace.

Acquiring the human virtues is like an athlete: for example, knowing how to shoot a bow. The archer trains and the more he trains, the easier it is to hit the target. This is the characteristic of virtue: it makes our actions good, more simple, and it perfects the virtuous man. The athlete, by force of training, thus acquired the virtue of good archery. It can easily reach a target that is within human reach. But to reach a target that is out of reach, his training is not enough! It needs the infusion of a power that can reach a target unreachable by human effort. It is the role of divine virtue that will help the acquired virtue; for if you have not acquired virtue, supernatural power is useless. Acquiring virtues is therefore necessary, but grace is also necessary for these virtues to merit Heaven.

And the gifts of the Holy Spirit in all this? The farther the target is, the more the outside elements can interfere with the shot. It is the same for us: our weakness, our sins, our faults are so many causes that can disturb our progress towards Heaven. So the Holy Spirit will come to correct what is too human in our virtues. The gifts of the Holy Spirit allow us to be elevated from within and submissive to the divine breath. We are better equipped with them. But if there is no free and personal action then the gifts are like sails that remain folded. We would then be the sailor who wants to cross the ocean with oars while he has sails.

The gifts of the Holy Ghost number seven, a figure of perfection in Scripture: counsel, fear of the Lord, piety, intelligence, fortitude, knowledge, and wisdom.

- **Counsel** supports the virtue of prudence: to direct all one's life by the choice of means proportionate to our end. I want to go to Heaven, I have to use the appropriate means. And we have plenty of choices to make, more or less important decisions to make. We must be docile to the advice of the Holy Spirit who will not decide for us - this is not the goal - but to enlighten us to take the right decisions. He will act in prayer, through the advice of a priest, etc. The gift of counsel is therefore not the window of indecision, but a supernatural support of the virtue of prudence.

- **The fear of Lord** supports the will not to love God for the wrong reasons. It is not servile fear (fear of divine chastisement) but filial fear, that is, the fear of offending God because He is our Father. It is the perfection of love that we do not want to cause the slightest displeasure to Him whose infinite loveliness we know towards us. This is what we say in the act of contrition. Why am I afraid to sin? "*Because God is infinitely good and infinitely lovable and sin displeases Him.*" The gift of fear will therefore support our momentum to heaven by making us love the good God concretely and effectively for the right reasons.

- **Piety** supports the virtue of religion. At Mass, the Holy Spirit prays within us, says St. Paul, in groans too deep for words, to make us recognize the majesty of God. Piety is the good habit that parents naturally try to develop in their children: a sense of gratitude and duty, respect and obedience to those to whom we owe something. It is the same with regard to God. We must give Him worship, the adoration which is due to Him. And we need to enter

into the sacrifice of Jesus Christ because our sacrifices and our prayers alone would be too weak and ineffective. Piety is expressed especially at the time of the Offertory: the little drop of water that we pour is the loving gift, filial, of all ourselves: the offering of our whole being in the unique love of Christ for his Father.

- The gift of **intelligence** does not make the weak of mind intelligent. It serves to support the virtue of faith. It's still very concrete. The virtue of faith enables us to adhere to what God reveals to us: "*What you tell me is true.*" Why is it true? not because of the obviousness of the subject. The Holy Trinity, for example, is not obvious. If I say, " $1 + 1 = 3$," your mind is troubled. So why can I say that the truths of Faith are certain? Because He who says it to me cannot be mistaken: it is Christ, the Son of God himself.

Adhering to a truth is one thing. On the other hand, to penetrate its depth, to plunge into the Mystery, can only be the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, you understand a point of faith with new acuteness when you have heard it thousands of times: where does that come from? It comes from the gift of intelligence that sustains faith. The saints thus seize revelation more acutely than the greatest scholars.

- The gift of **fortitude** is pretty obvious. It supports the virtue of strength which is not physical strength but the necessary moral force in the face of hardship and especially in relation to the major obstacle of our life which is death. All the writers speak of this force of soul necessary to engage us in the holiness and to address our trials in a Christian way. In his Passion, for example, Our Lord shows us the effectiveness of the gift of strength.

- The gift of **knowledge** makes us see the things of the earth with the gaze of God. As a result of original sin we have a tendency to see people, events, only through our human eyes. For example, in the Gospel, the episode of the adulterous woman. The Pharisees only see this woman through human eyes and ask for her stoning. Christ does not deny the reality of her sin, but he sees it with a higher gaze, in the light of God himself. The Holy Spirit teaches us to see all things with the "eye" of God. The one who is unpleasant to you, the one you do not have much affection for, is not just that: it is a soul saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. This pagan, perhaps he is not yet a Christian, but what prevents me from loving him and wanting him good? It's possible if I see with God's gaze.

- The gift of **wisdom**, linked to charity, makes us taste, savour God and the things of God (the Latin for wisdom "*sapientia*" comes from "*sapere*" taste, savour). The Holy Spirit teaches us to taste, as the Lord is good and as everything is good in itself. Wisdom is the crowning of gifts, as charity is the queen of virtues. It supports us in the walk towards Heaven, spreading in us and around us the sweet goodness of the Divine Mercy.

It is finally the sequence of Pentecost that gives us the best insight into the very concrete but mysterious action of the gifts. Everything happens in the depths of our souls, as long as we open them very wide at the breath of the Spirit.

Thou, of all consolers best,
Thou, the soul's delightful Guest,
Dost refreshing peace bestow.

Thou in toil art comfort sweet,
Pleasant coolness in the heat,
Solace in the midst of woe...

Heal our wounds; our strength renew;
On our dryness pour Thy dew;
Wash the stains of guilt away.
Bend the stubborn heart and will;
Melt the frozen, warm the chill;
Guide the steps that go astray...

Give them comfort when they die,
Give them life with Thee on high;
Give them joys that never end.

Quotations

Why an octave?

It is the space of eight days which elapses from a feast to the day which concludes its solemnity and which is, rigorously speaking, the day that owns this name: Octava dies, the eighth day.

The Octaves of Easter and Pentecost, under the name of Weeks, go back to the cradle of Christianity and are but the continuation of the same Octaves that were celebrated under the old law, with old figures replaced by the new reality. The Catholic Liturgy, Abbot J.B.E. Pascal

[...] Let us consider the offices of the Breviary for Pentecost and its Octave as the most important, perhaps all year long. Blessed John Henry Newman

When on the day of Pentecost the Holy Spirit filled the disciples of the Lord, it was not the beginning of a gift but a largesse added to others: the patriarchs, the prophets, the priests, the saints who lived ancient times were nourished by the same sanctifying Spirit ... although the measure of gifts was different. Saint Leo the Great, Sermon 76: PL 54, 405-406

What the soul does in all members of one body, the Holy Spirit does in the whole Church. St. Augustine, Sermon 267, 4: PL 38, 1231

If there is no Church without Pentecost, there is no Pentecost without the Mother of Jesus, for she has lived in a unique way what the Church experiences every day, under the action of the Holy Spirit. Benedict XVI - General Audience - 14 March 2012

"He will give you another Comforter - the Spirit of Truth." Faith, as knowledge and profession of the truth about God and man, "is born of what is heard; and what we hear is the

announcement of the word of Christ," says St. Paul (Rom 10:17). Benedict XVI, Mass of the Holy Spirit May 26, 2006

It will then be the Holy Spirit who will teach all things to the disciples and remind them of all that Christ has said (Jn 14:26), because he is the Spirit of truth (cf. Jn 15:26), leading the disciples into the whole truth (cf Jn 16:13). Benedict XVI, in Verbum Domini, of September 30, 2010