

The Holy Spirit and His 7 Gifts

Where does the teaching on the gifts of the Holy Spirit come from? Its foundation is found in the prophet Isaiah.

In 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 knowledge, the Spirit of wisdom..."* Before sitting down, Our Lord comments: *"Today this prophecy has been fulfilled."* Later, Christ repeatedly emphasizes that the Spirit He sends us is truly His Spirit, a divine breath. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, the same Spirit united with Our Lord, is truly the One who is communicated to us along with His seven gifts. These constitute the sacred septenary spoken of in the Pentecost sequence: *Da tuis fidelibus, in te confidentibus, Sacrum septenarium, "Grant to Your faithful who trust in You, the sacred septenary."* We have already received the Holy Spirit at our baptism because sanctifying grace, as Saint Thomas Aquinas says, is called *"the grace of virtues and gifts."* It always accompanies supernatural virtues: the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity) and the supernatural moral virtues (fortitude, justice, prudence, temperance).

Man, as a rational and free being, moves toward heaven through his own actions. But heaven is not naturally attainable without divine assistance. This is what Our Lord tells His apostles: *"Without me, you can do nothing."* I can stand up or sit down without the help of grace, but without it, I cannot do anything meritorious for heaven. Thus, we must acquire virtues: this is the perfection of our human nature, of our being. Every animal reaches its own perfection by instinct.

Man moves toward his own perfection consciously and freely: this is our dignity as images of God.

These human virtues, abundantly described by ancient philosophers, run the risk, due to the consequences of original sin, of never being deeply established. That is why God supports them with virtues and gifts infused with grace.

Acquiring human virtues is like an athlete's training—for example, learning to shoot a bow. The archer practices, and the more he trains, the easier it becomes to hit the target. This is the nature of virtue: it makes our actions good, easier, and perfects the virtuous person. Through repeated training, the athlete acquires the virtue of a skilled archer. He can thus hit a target that is within human reach without difficulty.

But to reach a target that is beyond his reach, training is no longer enough! He needs the infusion of a power that allows him to hit a target unattainable by human strength alone. This is the role of divine virtue, which assists acquired virtue. For if virtue has not been acquired, supernatural power is of no use. Acquiring virtues is therefore necessary, but grace is also necessary for these virtues to be meritorious for Heaven.

And what about the gifts of the Holy Spirit?

The farther the target, the more external elements can interfere with the shot. It is the same for us: our weaknesses, sins, and faults are all obstacles that can disrupt our progress toward Heaven. Thus, the Holy Spirit comes to correct what is too human in our virtues. The gifts of

the Holy Spirit allow us to be elevated from within and to be docile to the divine breath. They equip us better. But if there is no free and personal action, then these gifts are like sails that remain furled. We would be like a sailor trying to cross the ocean by rowing while having sails available.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are **seven** in number, a number of perfection in Scripture: **counsel, fear, piety, understanding, fortitude, knowledge, wisdom.**

- **Counsel** supports the virtue of prudence: directing one's whole life by choosing means proportionate to the end. I want to go to Heaven, so I must take the necessary means. We have many choices to make, decisions of varying importance. We must be docile to the counsel of the Holy Spirit, who does not decide in our place—such is not His purpose—but enlightens us in making good decisions. He acts through prayer, the advice of a priest, and so on. The gift of counsel is **not** a shield for indecision but a supernatural support for the virtue of prudence.
- ☞ **The fear of God** supports the will to love God for the right reasons. It is not servile fear (fear of divine punishment) but filial fear, that is, the fear of offending God because He is our Father. The perfection of love is wanting never to cause the slightest displeasure to the One whom we know to be infinitely lovable towards us. This is what we express in the act of contrition. Why do I fear sinning? *"Because God is infinitely good and infinitely lovable, and sin displeases Him."* The gift of fear, therefore, sustains our journey toward Heaven by making us love God concretely and effectively for the right reasons.
- ☞ **Piety** supports the virtue of religion. At Mass, the Holy Spirit prays with us, says Saint Paul, *"with inexpressible groanings"*, helping us recognize the majesty of God. Piety is that good habit that parents naturally try to develop in their children: a sense of gratitude, duty, respect, and obedience toward those to whom we owe something. The same applies to God. We must give Him the worship and adoration that are due to Him. And for this, we need to enter into the sacrifice of Jesus Christ because our own sacrifices and prayers alone would be too weak and ineffective. Piety is especially expressed at the offertory: the small drop of water poured into the chalice symbolizes our loving, filial gift of ourselves—offering our entire being in the one love of Christ for His Father.
- ☞ **The gift of understanding** does not make the weak-minded intelligent. It serves to support the virtue of faith. This is very concrete. The virtue of faith allows us to adhere to what God reveals: *"What You tell me is true."* Why is it true? Not because of the obviousness of the statement. The Holy Trinity, for example, is not self-evident. If I tell you *"1 + 1 = 3"*, your mind is troubled. So why can I say that the truths of Faith are certain? Because the One who tells me cannot be mistaken—it is Christ, the Son of God Himself. Accepting a truth is one thing. However, penetrating its depth, diving into the Mystery, can only be the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, you suddenly grasp a point of faith with new clarity, even though you have heard it thousands of times. Where does this come from? It comes from the gift of

understanding, which strengthens faith. The saints grasp divine revelation with greater clarity than the greatest scholars.

- **The gift of fortitude** is quite evident. It supports the virtue of fortitude, which is not physical strength but the moral strength needed to face trials, particularly the greatest obstacle in our life—death.
All spiritual authors speak of this strength of soul necessary to commit to holiness and to endure trials in a Christian way. In His Passion, for example, Our Lord shows us the effectiveness of the gift of fortitude.
- **The gift of knowledge** allows us to see earthly things from God's perspective. Since original sin, we tend to see people and events only through our human perspective. For example, in the Gospel, the episode of the adulterous woman: the Pharisees see this woman only with a human perspective and demand her stoning. Christ does not deny the reality of her sin, but He sees her from a higher viewpoint, in the light of God Himself.
The Holy Spirit teaches us to see everything through "God's eye." The person you dislike, the one for whom you have little affection, is not just that—he is a soul redeemed by the blood of Jesus Christ. That pagan, perhaps he is not yet Christian, but what prevents me from loving him and wanting his good? It is possible if I see him through the eyes of God.
- **The gift of wisdom, linked to charity**, allows us to taste and savor God and the things of God ("wisdom" comes from the Latin *sapere*, meaning "to taste, to savor").
The Holy Spirit thus teaches us to taste how good the Lord is and how everything is good in itself. Wisdom is the crowning of the gifts, just as charity is the queen of virtues. It supports us in our journey toward Heaven by spreading within and around us the sweet goodness of Divine Mercy.

Ultimately, it is the **Pentecost sequence** that best reveals to us the concrete yet mysterious action of the gifts. Everything happens deep within our souls, provided we open them widely to the breath of the Spirit.

*"You are the best consoler, the sweet guest of the soul, the sweet refreshment,
rest in labor, relief from heat, consolation in tears. (...)
Wash what is soiled, water what is dry, heal what is wounded.
Soften what is rigid, warm what is cold, straighten what is crooked. (...)
Grant the merit of virtue, grant final salvation, grant eternal joy."*