

The Holy Spirit and His 7 Gifts

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Where does the teaching about the gifts of the Holy Spirit come from? Their 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,

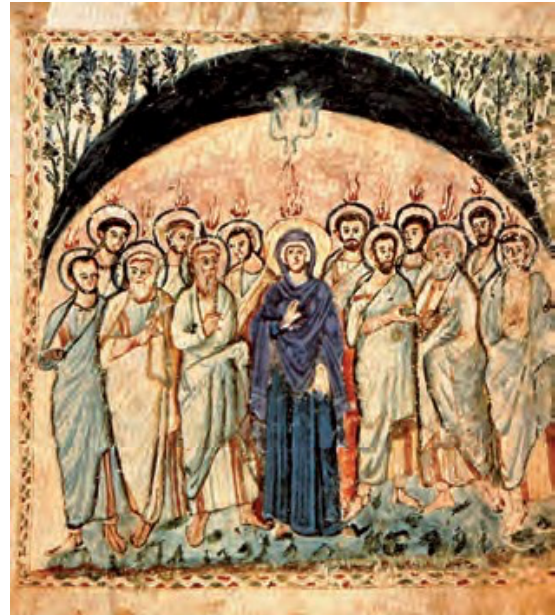
Our Lord comments: " *Today this prophecy has been fulfilled.* »

Subsequently, Christ insists many times on the fact that the Spirit he sends us is indeed his Spirit and therefore a divine breath. The Holy Spirit, the third person of the Trinity, the same Spirit united to Our Lord, is truly the One who is communicated to us with his 7 gifts. They constitute the sacred septenary of which the sequence of Pentecost speaks: *Da tuis fidelibus, in te confidentibus, Sacrum septenarium, " Give to your faithful who trust in you, the sacred septenary "*.

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* ." It always has as its procession the supernatural virtues: the three theological virtues (Faith, Hope, Charity) and the supernatural moral virtues (strength, justice, prudence, temperance).

Man, since he is a rational and free being, goes by his own actions towards heaven. But heaven is not naturally reachable without divine help. This is what Our Lord says 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 meritorious to 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: this is our dignity as images of God. These human virtues, abundantly described by the ancient philosophers, run the risk, because of the consequences



Pentecost, miniature of the Gospels of Rabula (586)

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

The human virtues to be acquired are like for a sportsman: for example, knowing how to shoot with a bow. The shooter trains and the more he practices the easier it will be to hit the target. This is the characteristic of virtue: it makes our actions good, simpler and perfects the virtuous man. The athlete, by dint of training, has therefore acquired the virtue of the good archeryman. This allows it to easily hit a target within human range. But to hit a target that is out of range, its training is no longer enough! He needs the infusion of power that allows him to hit a target unattainable by human forces. It is the role of divine virtue that will help the virtue acquired; for if you have not acquired virtue, supernatural power is of no use. To acquire virtues is therefore necessary, but grace is also necessary so that these virtues may be meritorious from heaven.

What about the gifts of the Holy Spirit in all this? The further away the target, the more external elements can interfere with the shot. The same is true for us: our weakness, our sins, our defects are all causes that can disturb the advance towards Heaven. Thus the Holy Spirit will come to correct what is too human in our virtues. The gifts of the Holy Spirit therefore allow us to be elevated from within and docile to the divine breath. We are better equipped by them. But if there is no free and personal action, then donations are like veils that remain folded. We would then be the sailor who would want to row across the ocean while he has sails.

The gifts of the Holy Spirit are 7 in number, the number of perfection in Scripture: counsel, fear, piety, intelligence, strength, knowledge, wisdom.

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

- **The fear of God** sustains the will not to love God for the wrong reasons. It is not servile fear (fear of punishment

but filial fear, that is, the fear of offending God because He is our Father. It is the perfection of love not to wish to cause the slightest displeasure to Him whom we know to be infinitely lovable to us. This is what we say in the act of contrition. Why am I afraid of sinning? " *Because God is infinitely good and infinitely lovable, and sin displeases Him.* The gift of fear will therefore sustain our impulse towards heaven by making us love God concretely and effectively for the right reasons.

► **Piety** sustains the virtue of religion. At Mass, the Holy Spirit prays with us, says St. Paul, in unspeakable groans to make us recognize the majesty of God. Piety is that good habit which parents naturally try to develop in their children: a sense of gratitude and duty, of respect and obedience to those to whom we owe something. The same is true of God. We must worship Him and worship Him due. And for this we need to enter into the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, for our sacrifices and prayers alone would be too weak and ineffectual. Piety is expressed in particular at the moment of the offertory: the little drop of water that we pour out is this loving, filial gift of all ourselves: the offering of our whole being in the one love of Christ for his Father.

► **The gift of intelligence** does not make the feeble-minded intelligent. It serves to sustain 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 this true? Not because of the obviousness of the statement. The Holy Trinity, for example, is not obvious. If I say to you, " $1 + 1 = 3$," your mind is troubled. So why can I say that the truths of the Faith are certain? Because the One who tells me this 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 depths, to plunge into the Mystery, can only be the work of the Holy Spirit. For example, you grasp a point of faith with new acuity when you have heard it thousands of times, where does it come from? It comes from the gift of intelligence that sustains faith. The saints thus grasp revelation more acutely than the greatest scholars.

► **The gift of strength** is quite obvious. It supports the virtue of strength, which is not physical strength but the moral strength necessary in the face of hardships, and in particular in relation to the major obstacle of our life, which is death.

All the authors speak of the fortitude necessary to commit ourselves to holiness and to endure trials in a Christian way. In his Passion, for example, Our Lord shows us the efficacy of the gift of strength.

► ***The gift of knowledge*** makes us see the things of the earth under the gaze of God. Since original sin we have had 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 a human gaze and ask for her stoning. Christ does not deny the reality of his sin, but sees it in a higher gaze, in the light of God himself. The Holy Spirit thus teaches us to see all things with the "eye" of God. The one who is unsympathetic to you, the one for whom you have not much affection, he is not just that: he 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 wishing him well?! It is possible if I see it in God's eyes.

► ***The gift of wisdom***, linked to charity, makes us taste, savor God and the things of God ("wisdom" comes from the Latin "*sapere*" to taste, to savour). The Holy Spirit thus teaches us to taste how good the Lord is and how good everything is in itself. Wisdom is the crowning glory of gifts, as charity is the queen of virtues. She sustains us in the journey towards Heaven, spreading in us and around us the sweet goodness of Divine Mercy.

Finally, it is the sequence¹ of Pentecost that best allows us to perceive the very concrete but mysterious action of the gifts. Everything happens in the depths of our souls as long as we open them wide to the breath of the Spirit.

*"Thou art the most good
Comforter, the sweet guest of the
soul,
the sweet refreshment,
rest in work,
relief in the heat, consolation in
tears. (...)*

*Wash what is defiled, water
what is arid, heal what is
wounded.*

*Soften what is stiff, warm up what
is cold, straighten out what is
distorted. (...)*

*Give the merit of virtue, give
the final salvation,
Give eternal joy. »*

1. The sequence of Pentecost is the song that follows (*Sequentia* means "continuation" in Latin) and extends the verse of the Alleluia during the Pentecost Mass.