

# Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are heroic character traits that Jesus Christ alone possesses in their plenitude but that he freely shares with the members of his mystical body (i.e., his Church). These traits are infused into every Christian as a permanent endowment at his Baptism, nurtured by the practice of the seven virtues, and sealed in the sacrament of Confirmation. They are also known as the sanctifying gifts of the Spirit, because they serve the purpose of rendering their recipients open to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in their lives, helping them to grow in holiness and making them fit for heaven.

## Wisdom

Wisdom is considered the first and the greatest of the gifts. It acts upon the intellect and the will. Wisdom is the knowledge of and judgment about “divine things” and the ability to judge and direct human affairs according to divine truth.

## Understanding

Understanding is penetrating insight into the very heart of things, especially those higher truths that are necessary for our eternal salvation—in effect, the ability to “see” God. Understanding further illuminates one's comprehension of Sacred Scripture, and it assists us to know the significance of religious ritual. This gift strengthens one's insight through prayer, scripture, and the sacraments, as well as giving a person a profound appreciation for God's providence.

## Counsel

Counsel allows a person to be directed by God in matters necessary for his salvation. Counsel functions as a sort of supernatural intuition, enabling a person to judge promptly and rightly, especially in difficult situations. The gift of counsel operates under the guidance of the Holy Spirit to illuminate the will of God.



## **Fortitude**

Fortitude denotes a firmness of mind in doing good and in avoiding evil, particularly when it is difficult or dangerous to do so, and the confidence to overcome all obstacles, even deadly ones, by virtue of the assurance of everlasting life. Fortitude is often identified with courage, but also to encompass endurance. This gift gives a willingness to stand up for what is right in the sight of God, even if it means accepting rejection, verbal abuse, or physical harm.

## **Knowledge**

Knowledge is the ability to judge correctly about matters of faith and right action, so as never to wander from the straight path of justice. The gift of knowledge allows one, as far as is humanly possible, to see things from God's perspective, allowing us to perceive the greatness of God and his love for his creations.

## **Piety**

Piety is, revering God with affection, paying worship and duty to God, paying due duty to all men on account of their relationship to God, and honoring the saints and not contradicting Scripture. A person with reverence recognizes his total reliance on God and comes before God with humility, trust, and love. Pope Francis said that piety is a recognition of "our belonging to God, our deep bond with him, a relationship that gives meaning to our whole life and keeps us resolute, in communion with him, even during the most difficult and troubled moments". Francis goes on: "Piety is not mere outward religiosity; it is that genuine religious spirit which makes us turn to the Father as his children and to grow in our love for others, seeing them as our brothers and sisters."

## **Fear of the Lord**

Fear of the Lord is wonder or awe. With the gift of fear of the Lord, one is made aware of the glory and majesty of God. Pope Francis said that it "is no servile fear, but rather a joyful awareness of God's grandeur and a grateful realization that only in him do our hearts find true peace." A person with wonder and awe knows that God is the perfection of all one's desires, and the fear is of offending God rather than fear of a punishment.



There are correspondences between the seven heavenly virtues and the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit:

- The gift of wisdom corresponds to the virtue of charity.
- The gifts of understanding and knowledge correspond to the virtue of faith.
- The gift of counsel corresponds to the virtue of prudence.
- The gift of fortitude corresponds to the virtue of courage.
- The gift of piety corresponds to the virtue of justice.
- The gift of fear of the Lord corresponds to the virtue of hope and temperance (forbidden pleasures).

There are connections between the gifts of the Holy Spirit and the Beatitudes (Matt.5:3-12).

- *Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*, reflects Fear of the Lord as the "poor in spirit" are the humble and God-fearing.
- *Blessed are they who mourn, for they will be comforted*, corresponds to the Gift of Knowledge, as the knowledge of God brings both an increased awareness of personal sin, and to some extent grieving at the abandonment of practices and activities that separate one from God.
- *Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the land*, relates to Piety.
- *Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be satisfied*, pertains to Fortitude.
- *Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy* demonstrates the Gift of Counsel.
- *Blessed are the clean of heart, for they will see God*, the Gift of Understanding.
- *Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God*, Wisdom.
- *Blessed are they who are persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven*.

These gifts are “habits,” “instincts,” or “dispositions” provided by God as supernatural helps to man in the process of his “perfection.” They enable man to transcend the limitations of human reason and human nature and participate in the very life of God, as Christ promised (John 14:23). The gifts are necessary for man’s salvation, which he cannot achieve on his own.