

THE SEVEN GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

But a shoot shall sprout from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him; a spirit of **wisdom** and of **understanding**, a spirit of **counsel** and of **strength**, a spirit of **knowledge** and of **fear of the Lord**. (Isaiah 1:1-2)

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit were named in Isaiah's prophecy of the Messiah. Jesus was blessed with the fullness of these gifts by His Father, and everyone who believes in Him receives the same gifts by the Holy Spirit in Baptism and they are sealed by the Holy Spirit in the sacrament of Confirmation. They are not mystical powers. St. Thomas Aquinas defined them as "habits" or "instincts" provided by God as supernatural helps to believers in the process of their "perfection".

The seven Gifts work in synergy with the three Theological Virtues (faith, hope, charity) and four Cardinal Virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance). Each time we practice a virtue the gifts are strengthened. They help us to rise above human reason and nature to participate in the life of God, as Jesus promised (John 14:23). St. Thomas is emphatic about these gifts being necessary for our salvation, which we cannot achieve on our own. He wrote that because "grace builds upon nature" (ST I/1.2.3), the gifts work interactively with the seven virtues and the proper practice of the gifts lead to our receiving the fruits of the Spirit in our lives as Christians: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.

Our ultimate goal, through the synergy of the virtues, the gifts and the fruits is to attain the eight beatitudes Jesus taught to the crowds, during his Sermon on the Mount. (Mt. 5:1-8).

Although theologians have debated the nature of the gifts since the 2nd century, the standard interpretation has been the one that St. Thomas Aquinas worked out in the thirteenth century in his *Summa Theologiae*:

- **Wisdom** is both the knowledge of and judgment about "divine things" and the ability to judge and direct human affairs according to divine truth (I/1.1.6; I/II.69.3; II/II.8.6; II/II.45.1–5).
- **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 (I/1.12.5; I/II.69.2; II/II.8.1–3).
- **Counsel** allows a man to be directed by God in matters necessary for his salvation (II/II.52.1).
- **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 (I/II.61.3; II/II.123.2; II/II.139.1).
- **Knowledge** is the ability to judge correctly about matters of faith and right action, so as to never wander from the straight path of justice (II/II.9.3).
- **Piety** is, principally, revering God with filial 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. The Latin word *pietas* denotes the reverence that we give to our father and to our country; since God is the Father of all, the worship of God is also called piety (I/II.68.4; II/II.121.1).
- **Fear of God** is, in this context, "filial" or chaste fear whereby we revere God and avoid separating ourselves from him—as opposed to "servile" fear, whereby we fear punishment (I/II.67.4; II/II.19.9).