



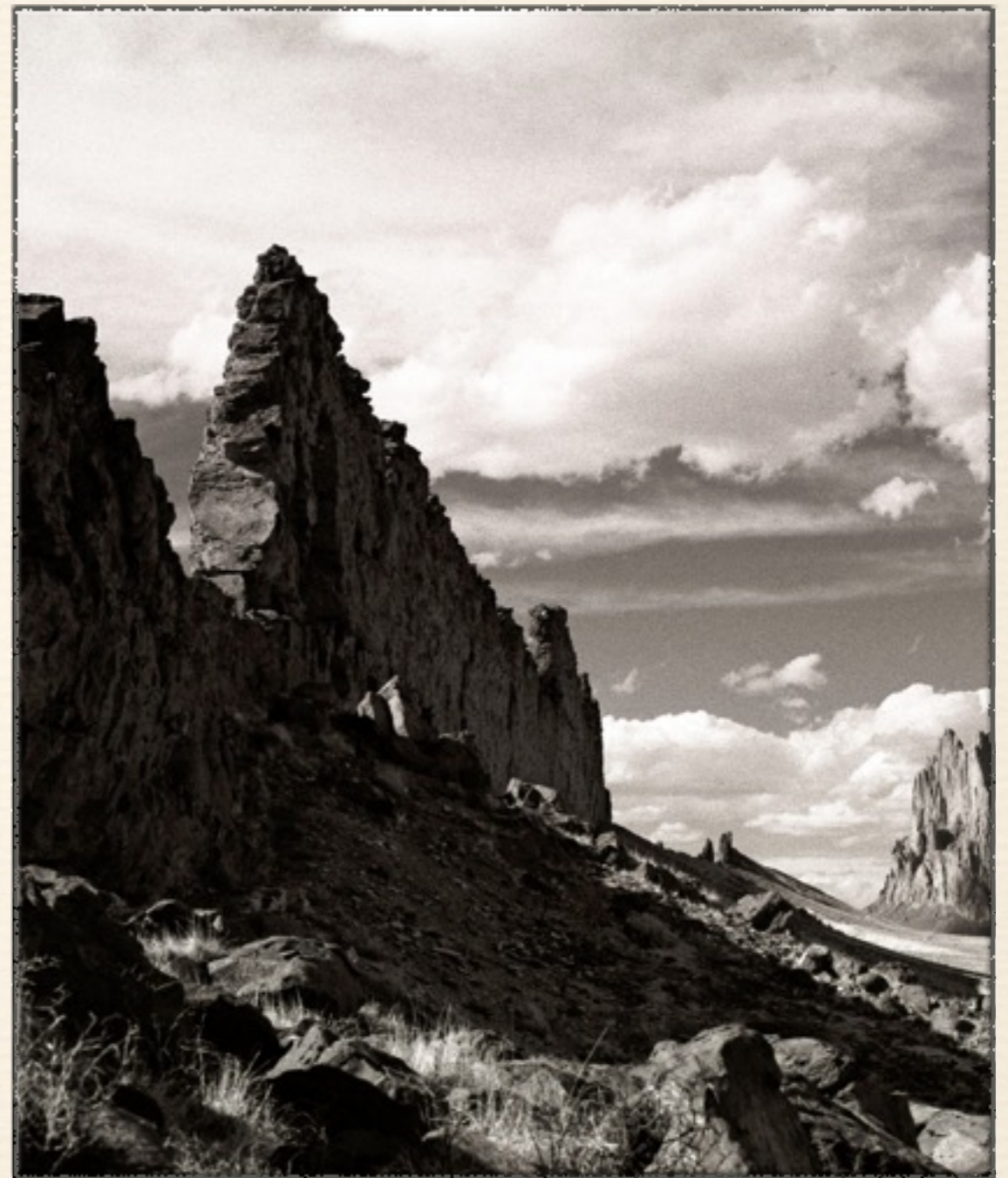
# The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

*What Are They & What Do They Do?*

- ❖ The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are, according to Catholic Tradition, 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 docile to the promptings of the Holy Spirit in their lives, helping them to grow in holiness and making them fit for heaven.
- ❖ The nature of the seven gifts has been debated by theologians since the mid-second century, but the standard interpretation has been the one that St. Thomas Aquinas worked out in the thirteenth century in his *Summa Theologiae*:

# Wisdom

- ❖ Wisdom is both the knowledge of and judgment about "divine things" and the ability to judge and direct human affairs according to divine truth
- ❖ Wisdom heals. It brings health because it gives you a sense of proportion. Why? It makes you intimate with Christ – the Word through whom all things were made – like an old friend. Pray for this Gift if you need help praying, or if you feel far from God. Also, pray for Wisdom if life gets confusing or frustrating. It overcomes anxiety and fear. Why? Wisdom gives a supernatural outlook. It helps when you feel stressed or anxious in the face of an uncertain future (all future is uncertain). When Wisdom soaks in, you might (or might not) enjoy and savor God's presence: "Taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). Wisdom is the greatest of the Gifts. It perfects your Charity or Love (Agape). At times, Wisdom might fill you with peace and a sense of intimacy with the Trinity. Through Wisdom, you won't just know about Christ, but you'll know Christ. It's contemplative. But helps active people. It produces the Beatitude, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called children of God."



# Understanding

- ❖ Understanding is penetrating insight into the very heart of things, especially those higher truths that are necessary for our eternal salvation
- ❖ Understanding grows Faith. It makes personal the teachings that a catechism book can make seem dry. Pray for this one when you want insight into the Bible, the Creed or the teachings of the Church. Great for Bible studies! Keeps you attentive to the readings and prayers at Mass. Students should pray for Understanding before studying religion and other subjects. It helps you see things through God's eyes, as far as that's possible. Through Understanding, the Holy Spirit enlightens the mind with intuitive insights into life's deepest mysteries and toughest questions. But watch out: Understanding will have a powerful effect on your memory. It flushes out the memory and imagination. This might be painful, for a while. Through Understanding, Holy Spirit digs up old bones – but with a twist: When the Holy Spirit brings up bad memories and past hurts, it's because He's cleaning these out of you – for good! Understanding teams up with Wisdom to resolve things. The Gift of Understanding has healing properties that, in turn, deepen your knowledge of God's Word and life's mysteries. Understanding perfects Faith. It clears the mind and purifies the imagination and memory. It produces the Beatitude, "Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God."

# Counsel

- ❖ Counsel allows a man to be directed by God in matters necessary for his salvation
- ❖ We're all confronted with situations we do not know what to say or do about. Our best judgment — and all the best advice — clears up nothing. We don't even know what is charitable or right. But God knows exactly what we should say or do, and what we should not say or not do. In this case, Counsel is for you. I recommend praying for this daily, so that you're ready to receive the Spirit's Counsel when He wants to give it and when you need it. Make yourself receptive to Counsel. It's a practical Gift. Pray for it before important discussions or giving advice. Through Counsel, the Spirit puts his good word on your lips. Counsel perfects the virtue of Prudence (good judgment). It produces the Beatitude, "Blessed are merciful, for they shall receive mercy." Counsel is the Gift of Mercy.



# Knowledge

- ❖ 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
- ❖ Knowledge knows human nature. It knows what people are like. “But Jesus, on His part, was not entrusting Himself to them, for He knew all men” (John 2:24). Pray for Knowledge if you’re confused about life, or if you’re wondering why “bad things happen to good people” or why “good things happen to bad people” or if there is someone or something in your life that you can’t figure out. Through Knowledge, the Holy Spirit gives intuitive insight into the human condition. Why are there so many injustices in the world? Why do innocent children suffer? Why so much cruelty and meanness? Why does so-and-so act that way? Knowledge sees through all of this. It may make you, to some extent and on some occasions, read souls and understand people’s behaviors in ways that helps you help them, with empathy. But, if you suspect the Spirit is working in you this way, do not let it go to your head.
- ❖ Knowledge performs “surgery” on your sensuality. It perfects the virtue of Temperance. At first, it might make you sad. But the sadness will give way to consolation and peace. It produces the Beatitude, “Blessed are the sorrowful, they shall be consoled.”

# Piety

- ❖ 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
- ❖ This Gift is not what you think it is. It won't make you say loads of novenas. Rather, it'll give you a deep sense of gratitude – or affection – to God the Father for creating you and giving you everything and everyone whom you love. It'll make you grateful to Jesus for suffering and dying for you. Piety could just as well be called Gratitude. It heals affections and emotions. Pray for this Gift if you're having relationship troubles with your spouse, girlfriend/boyfriend, parents, children, relatives, friends, neighbors or co-workers. It'll help you be charitable to people you don't like. Also, pray for this Gift if you suffer from emotional troubles, or if you've had painful experiences in life that need healing. It's most fruitful to call upon the Virgin Mary and St. Joseph when praying for Piety. Piety also works best after an extended period of quiet meditation (perhaps 20-30 minutes) so you can wind down and perhaps (or perhaps not) feel the Holy Spirit anoint your soul. Piety perfects the virtue of Justice, and it produces the Beatitude, "Blessed are the gentle of heart, for they shall inherit the earth."



# 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
- ❖ Pray for this Gift when your Catholic faith is challenged. Fortitude gives perseverance in keeping the faith in the midst of life's trials and temptations. It gives endurance in trials that last a long time. "The one who endures to the end, he will be saved" (Matthew 24:13). The martyrs are the greatest witnesses to Fortitude. This Gift perfects the virtue of Courage, and it produces the Beatitude, "Blessed are those who thirst for justice, for they shall be satisfied."

# Fear of the Lord

- ❖ 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
- ❖ Pray for this Gift when you are tempted to commit sin, especially serious sin. The sense of “fear” that you’ll receive through this Gift is NOT like the fear you’d have for a “boss,” someone who “holds something over you” or someone who would harm or threaten you. That would be “servile fear,” which is not what the Spirit’s “Fear of the Lord” is about. Rather, it’s the kind of “fear” that comes with love, known as “filial fear”: fear of doing something that will offend a loved one or harm a friendship. Through the Gift of Fear, we fear offending God and breaking up our friendship with Him. Therefore, this Gift turns us away from sin. It has a special effect on us: Sins we once thought attractive become repugnant. We lose our taste for them. Fear of the Lord perfects the virtue of Hope, because it holds the promise of freeing us from everything that keeps us from God and Eternal Life. It perfects the Beatitude, “Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.”



- ❖ These gifts, according to Aquinas, 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). Aquinas insisted that they are necessary for man's salvation, which he cannot achieve on his own. They serve to "perfect" the four cardinal or moral virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance) and the three theological virtues (faith, hope, and charity). The virtue of charity is the key that unlocks the potential power of the seven gifts, which can (and will) lie dormant in the soul after baptism unless so acted upon.
  
- ❖ Because "grace builds upon nature" (ST I/I.2.3), the seven gifts work synergistically with the seven virtues and also with the twelve fruits of the Spirit and the eight beatitudes. The emergence of the gifts is fostered by the practice of the virtues, which in turn are perfected by the exercise of the gifts. The proper exercise of the gifts, in turn, produce the fruits of the Spirit in the life of the Christian: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, modesty, self-control, and chastity (Gal. 5:22–23). The goal of this cooperation among virtues, gifts, and fruits is the attainment of the eight-fold state of beatitude described by Christ in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:3–10).

# The gifts perfect

the understanding  
enlightened by faith

for the penetration of truth

GIFT OF:

understanding

faith

to judge

divine things

wisdom

charity

created things

knowledge

hope

our actions

counsel

prudence

the will and the  
sensitive appetites

relative to worship due to God

piety

religion

against the fear of danger

fortitude

against disorderly concupiscences

fear

temperance

Corresponding virtues