

The Gifts of the Holy Spirits - Addresses

Sunday 9 April 1989

WISDOM

1. Within the perspective of the Solemnity of Pentecost, towards which the Easter season directs us, we want to reflect together on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which the Church's Tradition has always proposed on the basis of the famous text of Isaiah regarding the "Spirit of the Lord" (cf. *Is* 11:1-2).

The first and greatest of these gifts is wisdom, which is a light which we receive from on high; it is a special sharing in that mysterious and highest knowledge which is that of God himself. In fact, we read in Sacred Scriptures: "Therefore I prayed, and prudence was given me; I pleaded and the spirit of wisdom came to me. I preferred her to scepter and throne, and deemed riches nothing in comparison with her" (*Wis* 7:7-8).

This higher wisdom is the root of a new awareness, a knowledge permeated by charity, by means of which the soul becomes familiar, so to say, with divine things, and tastes them. St Thomas speaks precisely of "a certain taste of God" ("Summa Theol." II-II, q. 45, a. 2 ad 1), through which the truly wise person is not simply the one who knows the things of God but rather the one who experiences and lives them.

2. This sapiential awareness further gives us a special ability to judge human things according to God's standard, in God's light. Enlightened by this gift, the Christian is able to see into the reality of the world; no one is better able to appreciate the authentic values of creation, beholding them with the very eyes of God.

We find a fascinating example of this superior understanding of the "language of creation" in St Francis of Assisi's "Canticle of the Creatures".

3. Through this gift the entire life of the individual Christian, with all its events, hopes, plans, and achievements, is caught up in the breath of the Spirit, who permeates it with Light "from on high" as is attested to by many chosen souls in our day also and, I would say today especially by St Clelia Barbieri and her shining example as a woman who possessed a wealth of such wisdom, even at her young age.

In all of these souls the "great things" that the Spirit did in Mary are repeated. May she whom pious tradition venerates as the "Sedes sapientiae" lead each of us to taste interiorly divine things.

REGINA COELI

Sunday, 16 April 1989

UNDERSTANDING

1. In this Sunday reflection I want to pause today on the second gift of the Holy Spirit, Understanding. We know very well that faith is adherence to God in the chiaroscuro of mystery; but it is also search in the desire to know the revealed truth more and better. Now, such an interior urge comes to us from the Holy Spirit who, with faith, gives us precisely this special gift of intelligence and, as it were, intuition of the divine truth.

The word "intellect" derives from the Latin "intus legere", which means "to read within", to penetrate, to understand thoroughly. Through this gift the Holy Spirit who "sees into the depths of God" (1 *Cor* 2:10), communicates to the believer a glint of such a penetrating capacity, opening the heart to the joyous understanding of God's loving plan. Once again the experience of the disciples of Emmaus is renewed; having recognized the Risen Lord in the breaking of the bread, they said to one another: "Were not our hearts burning within us while he spoke to us on the way and opened the scriptures to us?" (*Lk* 24:32).

2. This supernatural intelligence is given not only to individuals, but also to the community: to pastors who, as successors of the Apostles, are heirs to the specific promise made to them by Christ (cf. *Jn* 14:26; 16:13), and to the faithful who, thanks to the "anointing" of the Spirit (cf. 1 *Jn* 2:20 and 27), possess a special "sense of the faith" (*sensus fidei*) which guides them in their concrete choices.

The light of the Spirit, in fact, while it sharpens the understanding of divine things, renders ever more clear and penetrating the understanding of human things. Thanks to it one sees better the many signs of God which are written in creation. Thus is discovered the not merely earthly dimension of events of which human history is woven. One can even arrive at prophetically interpreting the present and the future: signs of the times, signs of God!

3. Dear faithful, let us turn to the Holy Spirit with the words of the Liturgy: "Come, Holy Spirit, come! And from your celestial home shed a ray of light divine!" (Sequence of Pentecost).

Let us invoke him through the intercession of Mary Most Holy, the listening Virgin who, in the light of the Spirit, was able to read tirelessly the deep meaning of the mysteries which the Almighty worked in her (cf. *Lk* 2:19 and 51). The contemplation of the wonders of God will also be for us the source of inexhaustible joy: "My soul glorifies the Lord, and my spirit rejoices in God my saviour" (*Lk* 1:46 f.).

REGINA COELI

Sunday, 23 April 1989

KNOWLEDGE

1. The reflection which we began on the preceding Sundays on the gifts of the Holy Spirit leads us today to speak of another gift, the gift of Knowledge, by which we are granted to know the true value of creatures in their relationship to the Creator.

We know that modern man, precisely because of the development of the sciences, is particularly exposed to the temptation to give a naturalistic interpretation to the world. Before the manifold magnificence of things, their complexity, variety and beauty, he runs the risk of absolutizing and almost divinizing them to the extent of making them the supreme purpose of his very life. This happens especially when it is a matter of riches, pleasure and power, which indeed can be drawn from material things. These are the principal idols before which the world too often prostrates.

2. In order to resist such subtle temptations and to remedy the pernicious consequences to which they can lead, the Holy Spirit aids people with the gift of Knowledge. It is this gift which helps them to value things correctly in their essential dependence on the Creator. Thanks to it, as St Thomas writes, man does not esteem creatures more than they are worth and does not place in them the end of his life, but in God (cf. "Summa Theol.". II-II, q. 9, a. 4).

He thus discovers the theological meaning of creation, seeing things as true and real, although limited, manifestations of the Truth, Beauty, and infinite Love which is God, and consequently he feels impelled to translate this discovery into praise, song, prayer, and thanksgiving. This is what the Book of Psalms suggests so often and in so many ways. Who does not recall some instances of this raising of the soul to God? "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (*Ps* 18 [19]:2; cf. *Ps* 8:2). "Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights.... Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars" (*Ps* 148:1, 3).

3. Enlightened by the gift of Knowledge, man discovers at the same time the infinite distance which separates things from the Creator, their intrinsic limitation, the danger that they can present, when, through sin, he makes improper use of them. It is a discovery which leads him to realize with remorse his misery and impels him to turn with greater drive and confidence to him who alone can fully satisfy the need of the infinite which assails him.

This was the experience of the saints; it was also, we may say, the experience of the five Blessed whom I had the joy of raising to the honors of the altars today. However, in a very special way this was the experience of Our Lady who, by the example of her personal journey of faith teaches us to travel "among the events of the world, having our hearts fixed on where true joy resides" (Prayer of the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time).

REGINA COELI

Sunday, 7 May 1989

COUNSEL

1. Continuing the reflection on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, today let us consider the gift of Counsel. It is given to the Christian to enlighten the conscience in moral choices which daily life presents.

A need that is keenly felt in our days, disturbed by not a few crises and by a widespread uncertainty about true values, is that which is called "reconstructing consciences". That is to say, one is aware of the necessity of neutralizing certain destructive factors which easily find their way into the human spirit when it is agitated by passions, and of introducing healthy positive elements into it.

In this commitment to moral restoration the Church must be, and is, in the forefront; hence the prayer that arises from the hearts of her members - of all of us - to obtain especially the help of light from on high. The Spirit of God responds to this plea through the gift of Counsel, by which he enriches and perfects the virtue of prudence and guides the soul from within, enlightening it about what to do, especially when it is a matter of important choices (for example, of responding to a vocation), or about a path to be followed among difficulties and obstacles. In fact experience confirms that "the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans", as the Book of Wisdom says (9:14).

2. The gift of Counsel acts like a new breath in the conscience, suggesting to it what is licit, what is becoming, what is more fitting for the soul (cf. St Bonaventure, "Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti", VII, 5). Thus the conscience becomes like the "healthy eye" of which the Gospel speaks (*Mt* 6:21), an eye which acquires, as it were, a new pupil, by means of which it is able to see better what to do in a given situation, no matter how intricate and difficult. Aided by this gift, the Christian penetrates the true meaning of gospel values, in particular those expressed in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. *Mt* 5:7).

Let us therefore ask for the gift of Counsel! Let us ask for it for ourselves and, in particular, for the pastors of the Church, so often called, by the demands of their work, to make arduous and agonizing decisions.

Let us ask for it through the intercession of her who, in the litany, is greeted as "Mater Boni Consilii", Mother of Good Counsel.

REGINA COELI

Sunday 14 May 1989

FORTITUDE

1. "Come, Holy Spirit!". Dear brothers and sisters, this is the invocation which insistently and confidently arises from the whole Church today, the Solemnity of Pentecost: Come, Holy Spirit, come and

"on us who evermore
Thee confess and thee adore,
With thy sevenfold gifts descend" (Sequence of Pentecost).

Among these gifts of the Spirit there is one on which I wish to dwell this morning: the gift of Fortitude. In our time many extol physical force, to the extent of also approving the extreme forms of violence. In fact, man has daily experience of his own weakness, especially in the spiritual and moral sphere, yielding to the impulses of internal passions and external pressures.

2. Precisely to resist these multiple stimuli, it is necessary to have the virtue of fortitude, which is one of the four cardinal virtues on which the whole structure of the moral life rests. It is the virtue by which one does not compromise in fulfilling one's duty.

This virtue finds little room in a society in which surrender and accommodation on the one hand, and domination and toughness on the other, are widespread in economic, social and political relations. Timidity and aggressiveness are two forms of lack of fortitude which are often found in human behavior; they result repeatedly in the distressing sight of one who is weak and cowardly towards the powerful, or of one who is arrogant and overbearing towards the defenseless.

3. Perhaps today as never before the moral virtue of fortitude needs the support of the corresponding gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of Fortitude is a supernatural impulse which gives strength to the soul, not only on exceptional occasions such as that of martyrdom, but also in normal difficulties: in the struggle to remain consistent with one's principles: in putting up with insults and unjust attacks: in courageous perseverance on the path of truth and uprightness, in spite of lack of understanding and hostility.

When, like Jesus in Gethsemane, we experience "the weakness of the flesh" (cf. *Mt* 26:41; *Mk* 14:38), or rather, of human nature subject to physical and psychological infirmities, we should ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of Fortitude to remain firm and decisive on the path of goodness. Then we will be able to repeat with St Paul: "For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities; for when I am weak, then I am strong" (*1 Cor* 12:10).

4. There are many of Christ's followers - pastors and faithful, priests, religious, and laity, engaged in every area of apostolic and social work who in all times, including our own, have experienced and experience martyrdom of body and spirit, in intimate union with the Mother of Sorrows beside the Cross. All have been victorious thanks to this gift of the Spirit.

Let us ask Mary, whom we now greet as Queen of Heaven, to obtain for us the gift of Fortitude in all the vicissitudes of life and at the hour of death

ANGELUS

Sunday 28 May 1989

PIETY

1. Our reflection on the gifts of the Holy Spirit leads us today to speak of another important gift, piety. With it, the Spirit heals our hearts of every form of hardness, and opens them to tenderness towards God and our brothers and sisters.

Tenderness, as a truly filial attitude towards God, is expressed in prayer. The experience of one's own existential poverty, of the void which earthly things leave in the soul, gives rise to the need to have recourse to God in order to obtain grace, help and pardon. The gift of piety directs and nourishes such need, enriching it with sentiments of profound confidence in God; trusted as a good and generous Father. In this sense St Paul wrote: "God sent his Son,... that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a son,..." (*Gal* 4: 4-7; cf. *Rom* 8: 15).

2. Tenderness, an authentically fraternal openness towards one's neighbor, is manifested in meekness. With the gift of piety the Spirit infuses into the believer a new capacity for love of the brethren, making his heart participate in some manner in the very meekness of the Heart of Christ. The "pious" Christian always sees others as children of the same Father, called to be part of the family of God which is the Church. He feels urged to treat them with the kindness and friendliness which are proper to a frank and fraternal relationship.

The gift of piety further extinguishes in the heart those fires of tension and division which are bitterness, anger and impatience, and nourishes feelings of understanding, tolerance, and pardon. Such a gift is, therefore, at the root of that new human community which is based on the civilization of love.

3. Let us ask the Holy Spirit for a renewed outpouring of this gift, entrusting our prayer to the intercession of Mary, sublime model of fervent prayer and maternal tenderness. May she, whom the Church salutes in the Litany of Loreto as the "Singular vessel of devotion", teach us to adore God "in spirit and truth" (*Jn* 4: 23) and to open ourselves with meek and receptive hearts to all who are her children, and therefore our brothers and sisters. Let us ask her in the words of the "Salve Regina", "...O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!".

ANGELUS

Sunday 11 June 1989

FEAR OF THE LORD

Today I want to complete with you the reflection on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Among these gifts, listed last in the enumeration, is the gift of the "Fear of the Lord".

Sacred Scripture affirms that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (*Ps* 110 [111] :10; *Prov* 1: 7) . However, what kind of fear does it mean? It certainly is not that "fear of God" which causes people to flee from every thought and memory of him, as something or someone who disturbs and upsets. This was the state of mind which, according to the Bible, made our first parents, after their sin, hide "themselves from the Lord God among the trees of the garden" (*Gen* 3:8) . This was also the sentiment of that unfaithful and wicked servant of the gospel parable who hid in the earth the talent that he received (cf. *Mt* 25:28, 26).

However, this type of fear is not the true concept of the fear which is the gift of the Spirit. Here it is a matter of something much more noble and lofty; it is a sincere and reverential feeling that a person experiences before the tremendous majesty of God, especially when he reflects upon his own infidelity and the danger of being "found wanting" (*Dan* 5:27) at the eternal judgment which no one can escape. The believer goes and places himself before God with a "contrite spirit" and a "humbled heart" (cf. *Ps* 50 [51] :19), knowing well that he must await his own salvation "with fear and trembling" (*Phil* 2:12). Nonetheless, that does not mean an irrational fear, but a sense of responsibility and fidelity to the law.

2. All this is what the Holy Spirit takes up and elevates with the gift of the Fear of the Lord. It certainly does not exclude the trepidation that arises from an awareness of the faults committed and the prospect of divine chastisement, but mitigates it with faith in the divine mercy and with the certitude of the fatherly concern of God who wills the eternal salvation of each one. With this gift, however, the Holy Spirit instills in the soul most of all a filial love which is a sentiment rooted in love of God. The soul is now concerned not to displease God, whom he loves as a Father, not to offend him in anything, to "abide in him" and grow in charity (cf. *Jn* 15:4-7).

3. The practice of the Christian virtues and especially of humility, temperance, chastity and mortification of the senses, depends on this holy and just fear, united in the soul with love for God. Let us recall the exhortation of the Apostle Paul to his Christians: "Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God" (*2 Cor* 7:11) .

It is a warning for all of us who sometimes, so easily, transgress God's law, ignoring or defying his chastisements. Let us invoke the Holy Spirit, that he may generously pour out the gift of the holy fear of the Lord on the people of our day. Let us invoke him through the intercession of her who, at the message from the heavenly messenger, "was greatly troubled" (*Lk* 1:29) and, although perturbed by the unimagined responsibility that was being entrusted to her, was able to pronounce the "fiat" of faith, obedience and love.