

## Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

### John Paul II. Regina Coeli and Angelus addresses 1989

This is our translation of the Pope's catechesis, non-official.

Original text: <http://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/it/angelus/1989.index.3.html>

The Biblical quotes are taken from the USCCB website: <http://www.usccb.org/bible/books-of-the-bible/index.cfm>

Regina Coeli. April 9<sup>th</sup> 1989

1. In the perspective of the solemnity of Pentecost, towards which the Easter season is beginning, let us reflect together on the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, which the Tradition of the Church has constantly proposed on the basis of the famous text of Isaiah concerning the “Spirit of the Lord” (cf. Is 11:1-2).

The first and highest of these gifts is wisdom, which is a light received from on high: it is a special participation in that mysterious and supreme knowledge which is proper to God. For we read in the Holy Scripture: “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” (Wisdom 7:7-8).

This superior wisdom is the root of a new knowledge, a knowledge permeated with charity, thanks to which the soul acquires, so to speak, familiarity with divine things and tastes them. St. Thomas speaks precisely of “a certain taste of God” (Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 45, a. 2, ad 1), so that the true sage is not simply the one who knows the things of God, but the one who experiences them and lives them.

2. Furthermore, this kind of knowledge gives us a special capacity to judge human things according to the measure of God, in the light of God. Illuminated by this gift, the Christian knows how to see inside the realities of the world: no one better than he is able to appreciate the authentic values of creation, looking at them with the very eyes of God.

We find a fascinating example of this superior perception of the “language of creation” in the “Canticle of Creatures” by Saint Francis of Assisi.

3. Thanks to this gift, the whole life of the Christian with its events, its aspirations, its projects, its achievements, is reached by the breath of the Spirit, which permeates it with the light “coming down from above”, as is attested by many souls elected even today and, I would say, today by St. Clelia Barbieri and her shining example of a woman rich in this wisdom, even in her young age.

In all these souls the “great things” done in Mary by the Spirit are repeated. She, whom traditional piety venerates as “Sedes Sapientiae”, leads each one of us to interiorly taste heavenly things.

Regina Coeli. April 16<sup>th</sup> 1989

1. In this Sunday reflection today I wish to dwell on the second gift of the Holy Spirit: knowledge. We know well that faith is adherence to God in the lights and shades of the mystery; but it is also a quest in the desire to know more and better the revealed truth. Now, this inner drive comes to us from the Spirit, who through faith grants us this special gift of intelligence and almost intuition of divine truth.

The word “intellect” comes from the Latin “*intus legere*”, which means “to read inside”, to penetrate, to understand in depth. Through this gift the Holy Spirit, who “scrutinizes everything, even the depths of God” (1 Cor 2:10), communicates to the believer a spark of such penetrative capacity, opening his heart to the joyful perception of God's loving plan. The experience of the disciples of Emmaus is then renewed, who, after recognizing the Risen One in the breaking of the bread, 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 the individual, but also to the community: to Shepherds 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 faith” (*sensus fidei*) which guides them in their concrete choices.

The light of the Spirit, in fact, as it sharpens the intelligence of divine things, also makes their gaze on human things clearer and more penetrating. Thanks to it one can better see the many signs of God that are inscribed in creation. Thus, one discovers the not purely earthly dimension of events, of which human history is woven. And one can even go so far as to prophetically decipher 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, from your celestial home shed a ray of light divine!” (Sequence of Pentecost).

Let us invoke him through the intercession of the Most Holy Mary, the Virgin of listening, who in the light of the Spirit was able to scrutinize without tiring the profound meaning of the mysteries worked in her by the Almighty (cf. Lk 2:19 and 51). Contemplation of God's wonders will also be a source of inexhaustible joy in us: “My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord; my spirit rejoices in God my savior” (Lk 1:46-47).

Regina Coeli. April 23<sup>rd</sup> 1989

1. The reflection, already begun on previous Sundays, on the gifts of the Holy Spirit leads us today to speak of another gift: that of science, thanks to which we are given to know the true value of creatures in their relationship with their Creator.

We know that contemporary man, precisely by virtue of the development of the sciences, is particularly exposed to the temptation to give a naturalistic interpretation of the world: faced with the multiform richness of things, their complexity, variety and beauty, he runs the risk of absolutizing them and almost divinizing them to the point of making them the supreme goal of his life itself. This happens especially when it comes to the riches, pleasure and power that can

be drawn from material things. These are the main idols, before which the world too often prostrates itself.

2. In order to resist this subtle temptation and to remedy the harmful consequences to which it can lead, the Holy Spirit helps man with the gift of science. It is this which helps him to correctly evaluate things in their essential dependence on the Creator. Thanks to it - as Saint Thomas writes - man does not esteem creatures more than they are worth and does not place in them, but in God, the purpose of his own life (cf. Summa Theologiae, II-II, q. 9, a. 4).

He thus succeeds in discovering the theological meaning of creation, seeing things as true and real manifestations, even if limited, of the truth, of beauty, of the infinite love that is God, and consequently he feels impelled to translate this discovery into praise, song, prayer and thanksgiving. This is what is suggested to us so many times and in so many ways by the book of Psalms. Who does not remember any of these elevations? “The heavens declare the glory of God; the firmament proclaims the works of his hands.” (Ps 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 shining stars.” (Ps 148:1.3).

3. Enlightened by the gift of science, man discovers at the same time the infinite distance that separates things from the Creator, their intrinsic limitations, the insidiousness that they can constitute, when, by sinning, they are misused. It is a discovery that leads him to feel with regret his misery and impels him to turn with greater impulse and confidence to the One who alone can fully satisfy the need for the infinite that nags him.

This was the experience of the saints; it was also - we can say - the experience of the five blessed, whom today I had the joy of raising to the honors of the altars. But in a completely unique way this experience was lived by Our Lady, who with the example of her personal journey of faith teaches us to walk “amid the uncertainties of this world, our hearts may be fixed on that place where true gladness is found.” (Collect Prayer 21<sup>st</sup> Sunday Ordinary Time)

Regina Coeli. May 7<sup>th</sup> 1989

2. As we continue to reflect on the gifts of the Holy Spirit, today we consider the gift of counsel. It is given to the Christian to enlighten his conscience in the moral choices that everyday life imposes on him.

A much felt need in our time, troubled by many reasons for crisis and widespread uncertainty about true values, is what goes under the name of “reconstruction of consciences”. In other words, there is a need to neutralize certain destructive factors, which easily creep into the human spirit when it is agitated by passions, and to introduce healthy and positive elements into it.

In this commitment to moral recovery the Church must be and is in the front line: hence the invocation that springs from the hearts of her members - of all of us - to obtain first of all the help of a light from above. The Spirit of God comes to meet this supplication through the gift of

counsel, by which he enriches and perfects the virtue of prudence and guides the soul from within, enlightening it on what to do, especially when it comes to important choices (for example, to respond to one's vocation), or to a journey through difficulties and obstacles. And in reality experience confirms how “the deliberations of mortals are timid, and uncertain our plans”, as the book of Wisdom says (Wis 9:14).

3. The gift of counsel acts as a new breath in the conscience, suggesting to it what is lawful, what befits it, what best suits the soul (cf. St. Bonaventure, *Collationes de septem donis Spiritus Sancti*, VII, 5). Conscience then becomes like the “sound eye” of which the Gospel speaks (Mt 6:22), and acquires a sort of new pupil, thanks to which it is possible to see better what to do in a given circumstance, even the most intricate and difficult. Aided by this gift, the Christian penetrates into the true sense of Gospel values, especially those expressed in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. Mt 5-7).

Let us therefore ask for the gift of counsel! Let us ask it for ourselves and, in particular, for the shepherds of the Church, so often called, by virtue of their duty, to make difficult and painful decisions.

Let us ask it through the intercession of her, who in the litanies is hailed as “Mater Boni Consilii”, Our Lady of Good Counsel.

Regina Coeli. May 14<sup>th</sup> 1989

1. "Veni, Sancte Spiritus!".

This, dear brothers and sisters, is the invocation which today, the Solemnity of Pentecost, rises insistent and trustingly from the whole Church: Come, Holy Spirit, come and “On the faithful, who adore and confess you, evermore in your sevenfold gift descend” (Sequence of Pentecost).

Among these gifts of the Spirit there is one I wish to dwell on this morning: the gift of fortitude. In our time, many people exalt physical strength, even approving the extreme manifestations of violence. In reality, man experiences his own weakness every day, especially in the spiritual and moral field, yielding to the impulses of internal passions and to the pressures exerted on him by his surroundings.

2. Precisely in order to resist these multiple urges is necessary the virtue of fortitude, which is one of the four cardinal virtues on which the whole edifice of moral life rests: fortitude is the virtue of those who do not compromise in the fulfillment of their duty.

This virtue finds little room in a society in which the practice of both yielding and accommodating and of oppression and harshness in economic, social and political relations is widespread. Cowardice and aggressiveness are two forms of lack of strength that are often found in human behavior, with the consequent repetition of the sad spectacle of those who are weak and cowardly with the powerful, swaggering and overbearing with the defenseless.

3. Perhaps never before has the moral virtue of fortitude needed to be sustained by the homonymous gift of the Holy Spirit. The gift of fortitude is a supernatural impulse, which gives

strength to the soul not only in dramatic moments such as martyrdom, but also in the habitual conditions of difficulty: in the struggle to remain consistent with one's principles; in enduring offenses and unjust attacks; in courageous perseverance, even amid misunderstandings and hostility, on the path of truth and honesty.

When we experience, as Jesus did in Gethsemane, “the weakness of the flesh” (cf. Mt 26:41; Mk 14:38), that is, human nature subject to physical and mental infirmity, we must invoke from the Spirit the gift of fortitude in order to remain firm and determined on the path of good. Then we can repeat with Saint Paul: “I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor 12:10).

4. There are many followers of Christ - shepherds and faithful, priests, religious and laity, engaged in every field of the apostolate and social life - who, in all times and also in our time, have known and know the martyrdom of body and soul, in intimate union with the “Sorrowful Mother” beside the Cross. All of them have overcome thanks to this gift of the Spirit!

Let us ask Mary, whom we now greet as “Regina Coeli” [Queen of Heaven], to obtain for us the gift of fortitude in every affair of life and at the hour of death.

Angelus. May 28<sup>th</sup> 1989

1. The reflection on the gifts of the Holy Spirit leads us today to speak of another distinguished gift: piety. With it, the Spirit heals our hearts from all forms of harshness and opens them to tenderness towards God and towards our brothers and sisters.

Tenderness, as a sincerely filial attitude towards God, is expressed in prayer. The experience of one's own existential poverty, of the emptiness that earthly things leave in the soul, arouses in man the need to turn to God for grace, help, forgiveness. The gift of piety directs and nourishes this need, enriching it with feelings of deep trust in God, felt as a provident and good Father. In this sense Saint Paul wrote: “God sent his Son... so 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 child...” (Gal 4:4-7; cf. Rom 8:15).

2. Tenderness, as an authentically fraternal openness to one's neighbor, is manifested in meekness. Through the gift of piety the Spirit instills in the believer a new capacity for love towards his brothers and sisters, making his heart in some way share in the very meekness of the Heart of Christ. The “pious” Christian always sees in others as many children of the same Father, called to be part of the family of God which is the Church. He therefore feels impelled to treat them with the care and kindness proper to a sincere fraternal relationship.

The gift of piety, moreover, extinguishes in the heart those sources of tension and division which are bitterness, anger and impatience, and nourishes feelings of understanding, tolerance and forgiveness. This gift is, therefore, at the root of that new human community, which is based on the civilization of love.

We invoke from the Holy Spirit a renewed outpouring of this gift, entrusting our supplication to the intercession of Mary, sublime model of fervent prayer and motherly gentleness. May she,

whom the Church in the Laurentian litany greets as “Vas insignae devotionis” [Singular vessel of devotion], teach us to adore God “in spirit and truth” (Jn 4:23) and to open ourselves with a gentle and welcoming heart to those who are her children and therefore our brothers and sisters. We ask this in the words of “Salve Regina”: “. . . O clemens, o pia, o dulcis Virgo Maria!” [O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!].

Angelus. June 11<sup>th</sup> 1989

1. [...] Today I wish to complete with you the reflection on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. Among these gifts, last in order of enumeration, is the gift of the fear of God.

Sacred Scripture states that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Ps 111:10; Pr 1:7). But what fear is this? Certainly not that “fear of God” which leads one to flee from thinking and remembering him, as if from something or someone who is disturbing and restless. This was the state of mind which, according to the Bible, led our forefathers, after sin, to “hide themselves from the LORD God among the trees of the garden” (Gen 3:8); this was also the feeling of the unfaithful and evil servant of the Gospel parable, who hid the talent he received (cf. Mt 25:18,26).

But this fear-dread is not the true concept of the fear-gift of the Spirit. Here we are dealing with something much nobler and higher: it is the sincere and trepid feeling that man experiences in the face of God's “tremenda maiestas” [tremendous majesty], especially when he reflects on his own infidelities and the danger of being “found wanting” (Dn 5:27) in eternal judgment, from which no one can escape. The believer presents himself and stands before God with a “contrite spirit” and a “broken heart” (cf. Ps 51:19), knowing that he must wait for his own salvation “with fear and trembling” (Phil 2:12). This, however, does not mean irrational fear, but a sense of responsibility and fidelity to his law.

2. It is all this together that the Holy Spirit takes on and lifts up with the gift of the fear of God. He does not, of course, exclude the trepidation which flows from the awareness of the sins committed and from the perspective of divine punishment, he softens it with faith in divine mercy and with the certainty of God's paternal concern for the eternal salvation of each one. With this gift, however, the Holy Spirit infuses the soul above all with filial fear, which is a sentiment rooted in love for God: the soul is concerned then not to displease God, loved as Father, not to offend him in anything, to “remain” and to grow in charity (cf. Jn 15:4-7).

3. On this holy and just fear, conjugated in the soul with the love of God, depends all the practice of the Christian virtues, and especially humility, temperance, chastity and mortification of the senses. Let us remember the Apostle Paul's exhortation to his Christians: “Beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of flesh and spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God” (2 Cor 7:1).

It is a warning to all of us that sometimes, with such ease, we transgress God's law, ignoring or defying his chastisements. We invoke the Holy Spirit, so that He may pour out the gift of the holy fear of God in the people of our time. Let us invoke him through the intercession of her who, at the proclamation of the heavenly message, “was greatly troubled” (Lk 1:29) and, though

trembling at the unprecedented responsibility entrusted to her, was able to pronounce the “fiat” [may it be done] of faith, obedience and love.