



# Priestly People

SERVANTS OF THE PARACLETE

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## *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*

The *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* are “permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit” (CCC 1830).



**There are seven *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*:**

***Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety and Fear of the Lord.***

A *Gift of the Holy Spirit* is an ability of the soul to do something. What is it the Gifts help us to do? They help us respond with ease to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit. In other words, the Holy Spirit in his love for us wants to inspire us from time to time – perhaps continually. But that is not enough – we need to be open and respond to His inspirations.

The *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* are like spiritual vitamins that strengthen us to listen and respond to His inspirations. Another example would be the hearing aids that some people use to hear and understand better what is being said. The Gifts are like hearing aids attached to the “ears” of the heart.

The prophet Isaiah lists the seven *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* (11:3). There are many more gifts but these seven are traditionally listed as the *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*.

In the Bible the number seven signifies a fullness. By referring to “seven” Gifts, the Bible is telling us that the *Gifts of the Holy Spirit* add a certain fullness to our lives as Christians.

Part of the “fullness” of our Christian life is sharing in the Priesthood of Christ – whether in the form of being an ordained priest and/or as a member of Christ’s Priestly People. A *Gift of the Holy Spirit* helps us to respond with ease to the Holy Spirit’s inspirations!

# *Gifts of the Holy Spirit*

## **UNDERSTANDING**

*St. Thomas Aquinas referred to the Gift of Understanding as a supernatural light whereby we are enabled to penetrate the heart of things. The “things” he was referring to are both spiritual and material. As we go about our daily lives, the Gift of Understanding helps us penetrate more deeply into the meaning of life and the truths of Faith.*

*This can be illustrated by the Gospel story of the two disciples on their way to Emmaus. The two disciples had believed in Christ, but they were very dejected as they went on their way to Emmaus because they thought that it was all over after the death of Christ. Jesus Himself, unrecognized, joined and walked along with them, speaking with them about the sufferings the Messiah had to undergo.*

*Gradually He led them to understand the plan of God in His regard. After Christ disappears from their midst, they exclaim (Luke 24:32): “Did not your hearts burn within us while he talked to us on the road, while he opened to us the scriptures?” They came to understand something of the mystery of the Cross.*

The last of the seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit to be contemplated is the Gift of Understanding.

The Gift of Understanding can be compared to spiritual x-ray whereby the Holy Spirit helps us penetrate more deeply into the hidden meaning of things.

This is the same way that it is with us. We have faith. We may believe in God and in all the truths of our Faith, but when a trial comes our way, inevitably, we have a difficult time. Our human minds by themselves are often unable to understand why we must suffer.

**HOW CAN THIS BE HAPPENING TO ME?**

Perhaps for hours, days or even years we struggle with something that has gone wrong. We feel worse as we consider what has happened, how unfair it all is, how impossible it is now to straighten things out, etc.

The Gift of Understanding does not necessarily alleviate all the pain and suffering of life. With the Gift of Understanding, however, we come to understand the inner meaning and value of each cross, as well as everything else in life – joys, blessings, successes, sorrows, failures, etc.

Look at Mary, Mother of Sorrows. Certainly, she looked at her Son’s Passion and Death through the eyes of faith, yet her suffering was great indeed. It is true that her understanding of God’s plan did not take away the pain and grief she so deeply felt, but it did help her to accept her Son’s Cross as part of the mystery which reached its climax in the Resurrection. Her example can help all of us in our own struggles with grief and sorrow.

The Gift of Understanding is important for the Priest. The Priest’s mission is to help lead people to God. As the Priest comes to understand how everything can lead to God, he becomes better able to communicate this to the People of God and guide them on their way to God. What is said of Priests also applies to Religious Brothers and Sisters in so far as they dedicate their lives to following Christ by leaving all that they have.

The Gift of Understanding is important for the Priestly People. The Priestly People’s mission is to grow closer to God with the assistance of the Church and its pastors. The Priestly People also have a

reciprocal effect on the Church and its pastors.

One of the ways this is accomplished – and this is very needed today – is helping Priests come closer to God through their prayer, concern, love, and support. As Priestly People come to understand better how everything in their lives is meant for their sanctification, they help create a growing conviction in the Church that everything that happens takes on meaning in God’s plan. This type of environment heartens and strengthens the vocation of the Priest and all who are consecrated to God.

As a Priestly People, what can we do to help nourish the Gift of Understanding within ourselves? First, it is good to keep in mind that everyone who is in the state of Grace already has this Gift within him or herself. But it is important to exercise this gift.

A good time to exercise this gift is when we are experiencing a trial of some sort, particularly when the trial involves something we cannot understand about faith and life. This is the time to stop trying by our own natural power of intelligence to understand what is happening, especially if it is not getting us anywhere or only making us more miserable.

When we are feeling desolation, according to St. Ignatius of Loyola, we do well to refrain from making any judgments. We only need to be and let the waves of the trial pass over us – in this inner emptiness and waiting we become disposed to the movement of the Holy Spirit and His Gift of Understanding.

It is also important for us to pray in whatever way we are able. Inevitably some whisper of understanding of intuition will cross our minds. We will know when such an intuition or understanding is of the Spirit by its fruits: peace, good results, the sense that this new insight pertains to the things of God.

Let us hold on to every whisper of Understanding no matter how light it may seem – it may well be the seed of all we need to know to understand our current situation in life. From this we will experience peace returning to our hearts, as well as practical guidance about how to act.

But the Gift of Understanding is not just for times of trial. It is meant to help our intellect understand everything in our Faith and life. The human intellect is one of God’s greatest gifts. It is a masterpiece of creation and reflects God’s infinite intelligence.

God delights in an intellect that is coming to know the truth, free from distortion. We read how Christ rejoiced because the Father revealed the hidden mysteries of the Kingdom of God to the “little ones”.

On the other hand, when our intellect is misused and distorts the truth, this is like a painful wrenching of the beauty, wisdom, and purpose of creation. The Gift to Understanding helps our intellect to attain the truth, without, however, dominating or overpowering our natural way of knowing. Like every grace from the Holy Spirit, it works in harmony with our human nature.

The Gift of Understanding is strengthened by detachment – by preferring nothing to God. Appropriate detachment from created things, attachment to God, and consequent appreciation of creation will help purify our spiritual vision and understanding.

St. Thomas Aquinas noted that the Beatitude “Blessed are the pure of heart, for they shall see God” is particularly akin to the Gift of Understanding.

Last but not least, reading and reflection on the words of Scripture will provide us the material that will enable us to understand the hidden mysteries of creation and the life of faith.

The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit stand for all of the necessary help – in any form – that the Holy Spirit brings to our minds and hearts to make us perfect children of our heavenly Father, in union with and through His Son, Jesus Christ.

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This concludes the *Priestly People* articles devoted to reflections on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit. The 2020 *Priestly People* newsletters are posted on the Servants of the Paraclete website should you desire to collect the series on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit.



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