



# 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*

## **FEAR OF THE LORD**

The first Gift of the Holy Spirit is Fear of the Lord. I have ministered to individuals near death who told me they were afraid to die because of facing God with sins on their soul. Was this the Gift of Fear of the God? I have spoken to individuals who were contemplating suicide but were afraid to do this because of the consequences after death. At least this stopped them from taking their own lives. Was this Fear of the Lord? In a less dramatic way individuals have felt fear of not going to Mass on Sunday, of telling a lie, or of committing almost any sin that can be imagined. And, after most sins, many individuals feel fear of punishment.

In each of these examples fear is present, but whether it is the Gift of Fear of the Lord is another question.

Sharing a story to illustrate what might and might not be Fear of the Lord.

Ed is a rather bright student who studies at a medical college. In his final year, specializing in surgical procedures, Ed spends too much time partying and does not sufficiently learn certain techniques. Because of lack of study, he knows he is not sufficiently prepared to pass his final comprehensive medical exam. He bribes a secretary to let him have material pertaining to the final qualifying exam.

After Ed is licensed as a physician, the secretary occasionally asks him for money under the threat that otherwise she will turn him in. Ed lives with the fear that some day he may be found out and his license revoked, resulting in a loss of reputation and financial ruin. He prays to God to spare him from that. Ed's fear for his own material welfare is obviously not the Fear of the Lord; it relates rather to survival and human esteem.

Then one day while carrying out a minor surgical procedure Ed makes a serious mistake and the patient



nearly dies. He comes to appreciate the fact the deeper issue with dishonesty in the exam had to do with lack of preparation and the damage he might cause to people.

He still fears the loss of his reputation as a doctor and fears also that harming one of his patients because of lack of preparation in medical school might be unethical and immoral, for which he would have to answer to God.

Ed's fear is becoming more appropriate and closer to virtue, but it is not yet the Gift of Fear of the Lord. Ed brings his concerns to God and seeks guidance from a trusted friend. He goes for advanced studies in surgery, passes the necessary course and becomes genuinely qualified in a field of surgery he has specialized in.

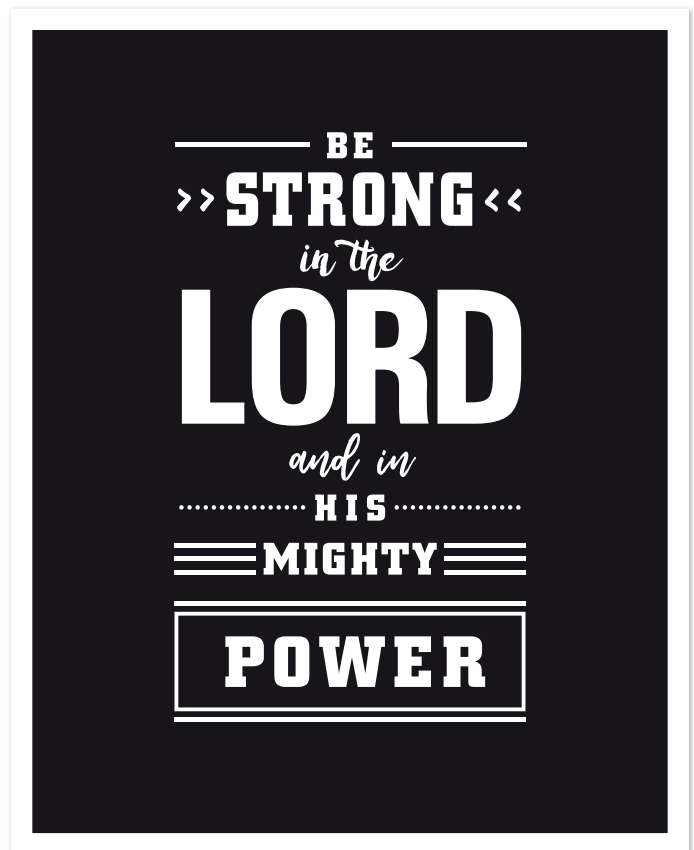
Then one day the secretary he had bribed visits him in his office – she not only wants money, this time she wants him to perform an illegal and dangerous abortion – otherwise she will expose him.

All of Ed's old fears and many new ones come over him: fear of being exposed for cheating, fear of losing his license for an illegal operation, fear of harming someone, fear of punishment from God, etc. Ed is racked by uncertainty. He prays – then is a way he had not expected he sees things differently: his profession is secondary to life and health, all decisions must be made on that basis, come what may. In addition he realizes in a way he never thought of before that all life comes from God as a gift, that God loves life and gives it to us because of His love for us; even more, God is asking Ed to work with Him in assisting, saving and maintaining life.

In some mysterious way this is an image of the eternal life of the God who is Love itself. Ed now experiences a new reverence and awe for life and the God of life. He fears doing anything that would adversely affect all this. Now it seems Ed is open to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, and the gift of the Fear of the Lord enables him to respond quickly and readily to those inspirations.

Ed is ready now to do what he feels is the right thing and tells the secretary he is no longer going to be influenced by her threats. If she reports him, he is prepared to face the consequences. In addition, Ed finds the words to counsel the secretary to the point where she decides to give birth to the child she is carrying. In giving birth to the child, the secretary experiences a sense of deep peace and joy, as does Ed. These are the Fruits of the Holy Spirit.

Perhaps few of us go through the exact type of situation Ed and the secretary went through but in some way, each of us can find various forms of fear in our lives – leading up to the point of genuine Fear of the Lord. The Fear of the Lord is not a craven fear, but one of reverence and a desire not to offend or lose God who is all good. It is also combined with the virtue of hope and trust. All of this is almost impossible for human nature alone.



Even if we were saints, it would take the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and one or other of His Gifts to enable us to readily respond to His inspiration. If we are not saints – we still receive inspirations of the Holy Spirit – and need His Gifts to be receptive to them. The amazing thing is that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit and the Gifts which makes us respond readily to His inspirations are not rare, infrequent or unusual in the spiritual life.

They are given to all of us at Baptism and strengthened at Confirmation. We need to trust they are there and with all gifts and talents we need to cooperate with their growth by exercising them. How do we exercise them? I hope this and subsequent writings will help provide examples of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

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