



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

COUNSEL

Have you ever found yourself thinking: I would like to do God's will, but I just do not know what it is?

When we are faced with a difficult decision in life, there is a Gift of the Holy Spirit which helps us to know, in a quick and certain way, what would be pleasing to God. This may sound too simple to be true, but that is what the Gift of Counsel does. It can be defined as:

A certain quality infused into human reason by the grace of the Holy Spirit, whereby our reason is endowed with the capacity to discern what is pleasing in the sight of God.

Making decisions in life with the help of Counsel is like looking at our life's journey while standing on the top of a mountain. This Gift helps us see where we are coming from and where our journey is likely to go. It does more than that, however. It enables us to comprehend what God --- as the Author of all that is good, true, and reasonable -- loves and desires. Sometime, of course, the Lord leads us on a long and winding journey in our reach for what he wants for us.

I think the life of Edith Stein -- now Saint Edith Stein -- provides a good illustration of the Gift of Counsel. The example of her life is extraordinary -- but I believe it is applicable in the ordinary decisions of our life. People are usually declared saints so that they can provide clear and inspiring examples of virtues that the rest of us can practice in little ways.

In her life Edith had to make a number of difficult decisions. One of the first was her decision to embrace the Catholic Faith. Although born a Jew, she became an atheist in her early teens. The human suffering that she witnessed during and after World War I in Germany, and the skepticism in vogue in academic circles at that time made it difficult for her to believe in a good and loving God. Edith was, in fact, a precocious child, and as a young adult she was on her way to becoming a prominent philosopher in the school of Husserl's phenomenology. Deep within,

however, she struggled with uncertainty about truth, especially the truth by which to lead her life.

All this changed when she happened upon a copy of the writings of St. Theresa of Avila. She read the book in one night. The next day she purchased a catechism and within a few weeks was baptized a Catholic.

What led to this dramatic change in her belief system? In coming in contact with the life and faith of St. Theresa, Edith experienced a desire for God. As happens with the Saints, and with us when we experience a desire for God, one's life is enlightened, as it were, by this desire. In this context, the Gift of Counsel is able to work easily and quickly in revealing what God desires for us.

Some years later Edith entered a Carmelite Monastery. This had also been a difficult decision. But probably the most difficult in her life came when the Nazi's came into power in Germany. At the time she was in the Carmelite Monastery in Cologne Germany. On December 31, 1938, she left Germany for Holland. Prudence indicated it as better to leave lest the monastery and its sisters be persecuted because of her Jewish origin. Her love for others made it clear to her what to do.

Then the Nazi's invaded Holland. The Dutch bishops issued a pastoral letter protesting the expulsion of Jewish children from the Catholic school system. This could be considered by some to have been an "imprudent" move on the part of the Bishops because in retaliation the Nazi's arrested all Catholics of Jewish extraction in Holland. It was not an easy thing to know what to do in dealing with people like Hitler. For many, Jews and Christians alike, in those troubled times, the question must have to come to mind more than once: what is God asking of us?

Edith could have attempted to escape Holland, but this time she decided against escape. From her writings it seems clear that she made this decision with a clear awareness that she was to become more

like Christ in both her life and death – in particular in suffering with and for fellow Jews. In time she and her sister were arrested, and along with many other Jews, were loaded into cattle cars on a train. A man in a small town on the rail line to Auschwitz saw Edith Stein when the rail car she was on stopped briefly. He reported that the people on the train were suffering from overcrowding, the neglect of their most basic need, and a frightening sense of pending doom. In the midst of all, Edith appeared calm and serene. Within a few days Edith was put to death in the gas chambers at Auschwitz. Because of the way she lived and died, Edith Stein, in religion Sister Benedicta of the Cross, was declared a Saint on October 11th, 1998.

While Edith Stein's life helps illustrate several Gifts of the Holy Spirit, I believe she provides a particularly apt example of the Gift of Counsel. It was this Gift that enabled her to follow the Holy Spirit's guidance in making difficult life decisions. With Edith in mind it is worth reflecting on the following description of the Gift of Counsel.

The safest guidance we can pursue in life is that which the Holy Spirit imparts to us through the Gift of Counsel. Following it, we are certain to be walking in the way of God and His divine Providence. This dependence on the guidance of the Holy Spirit empowers us to live in great peace, free from conflict and care. Together with this peace, the soul acquires a certain promptness and facility in executing the Will of God.

How do we receive the Gift of Counsel? Along with the other Gifts of the Holy Spirit, the Gift of Counsel is given to us when we receive the sacrament of Baptism. It is later strengthened by confirmation. The Gift of Counsel is developed by a life lived out of Faith, Hope and Charity.

Faith and Hope: To be sure that the Gift of Counsel will be operative in us when we need it, is necessary to live in Faith and Hope. If we believe God, He will give us the inspiration we need to understand what it is that we need to do today. The Gift of Counsel could be compared to "our daily bread". God gives us sufficient guidance for what we need to do today, and he does this at just the right time.

In this spirit, Edith Stein wrote: God is there in these moments Can give us in a single instant exactly what we need. Then the rest of the day can take its course, under the same efforts and strain, perhaps, but in peace.

Keeping this in mind, it could be said that The OUR FATHER with its petition "Thy will be done "and "give us this day our daily bread" is an ideal prayer for the Gift of Counsel.

Love: as with Edith in her conversion, a yearning for God sets us up for the ability to choose things in a way that enable us to "walk" with God. Edith prayed thus: "O my God, enkindle Your love in me and then walk with me along the next stretch of road before me. I do not see very far ahead, but when I have arrived the horizon closes down, a new prospect will open before me, and I shall meet it with peace.

How can we be sure when it is the Gift of Counsel that is guiding us?

How can we be sure that we are being guided by the Holy Spirit's Counsel when we seem to feel inspired to make a certain decision? At times, a seemingly holy action may only be the result of pride or self-deception.

I believe that the Gift of Counsel is present when we have a desire to do the will of God, when we typically do the will of God in small things and when we feel disappointment upon realizing we have not been doing the will of God.

Humility of heart accompanies the Gift of Counsel. Individuals who claim that they are acting under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, but do not evidence humility are likely not being led by the Gift. A certain spiritual arrogance is a sign that pride is at work rather than the Holy Spirit.

The presence of the Gift of Counsel is also evident when the Fruits of the Holy Spirit are experienced: charity, peace, joy, patience, kindness, humility, long suffering, mildness, and modesty.

As for now, let us pray for one another that we may live more by the guidance of the Gift of Counsel and that all priests may have this Gift stirred up within their hearts in new and profound ways.

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