

The Spark to Ignite ALL the Gifts of the Holy Spirit

By Christina Semmens

With the return of the academic year, my parish recently celebrated the Sacrament of Confirmation, and the celebration caused me to reflect upon the Gifts of the Holy Spirit and how they work in helping us our spiritual journey.

Pope St. Gregory the Great, wanting to capture the spiritual interconnectedness of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, posited the following order:

"Through the fear of the Lord, we rise to piety, from piety then to knowledge, from knowledge we derive strength, from strength counsel, with counsel we move toward understanding, and with intelligence toward wisdom and thus, by the sevenfold grace of the Spirit, there opens to us at the end of the ascent the entrance to the life of Heaven" ("Homiliae in Hiezechihalem Prophetam," II 7,7).

So, the beginning of the effectively integrating the Gifts of the Holy Spirit into our lives is "*Fear of the Lord.*" But what exactly is that gift? Servant of God Fr. John Hardon, writes:

"Fear of the Lord inspires a person with profound respect for the majesty of God. Its corresponding effects are protection from sin through dread of offending the Lord, and a strong confidence in the power of His help. The fear of the Lord is not servile but filial. It is based on the selfless love of God, whom it shrinks from offending. Whereas in servile fear the evil dreaded is punishment; in filial fear it is the fear of doing anything contrary to the will of God. The gift of fear comprises three principal elements: a vivid sense of God's greatness, a lively sorrow for the least faults committed, and a vigilant care in avoiding occasions of sin."

St. Francis de Sales builds on this idea when he tells us, "*We must fear God out of love, not love him out of fear.*" In other words, Fear of the Lord is a healthy desire to never offend the One who loves us and in whom we live and move and have our being. Fear of the Lord is the entry point in the life of supernatural grace, it is the "*spark*" that ignites all of the other Gifts of the Holy Spirit.

The essence of the Sacrament of Confirmation is to receive all the Gifts of the Spirit, but far too often, we don't know how to unwrap, or access, those Gifts in our daily lives. The result is that we then go through life without the supernatural help God intended for us to have, and we then begin to doubt whether the sacrament had any "effect" at all, rather than realizing that we have work to do in our hearts and minds.

Remember, God *always* does His part, and with Fear of the Lord on our part, we will be given the graces we need to be able to unwrap *all* the Gifts that He has given us, and then continue on the journey to become the saints He made us to be!

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