

Dear Brothers and Sisters



Today we celebrate The Feast of Pentecost. Pentecost literally means 50 days, occurring, as it does, exactly 50 days after Easter. It was on this day that the Holy Spirit descended upon the Virgin Mary and the disciples as they were gathered in the Upper Room 50 days after the Resurrection. They were celebrating the feast of Shavuot, otherwise known as the Feast of Weeks in the Jewish Calendar. Shavuot was, and still is for our Jewish brethren, a feast commemorating the fact that 7 weeks after being freed from the slavery of Egypt, Moses received the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai. The Commandments were written in stone, carved by fire which came down from heaven.

7 weeks equals 50 days. Pentecost is the fulfillment of Shavuot: tongues of fire descend upon the disciples, and the new law of life is written in the stony hearts of men and women. The disciples are pierced by this love, as they receive the gift of God's Spirit.

There are seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Can you name them? They are not special gifts given to some very special people. No.

They are "ordinary" gifts that are given to every Christian, to you and to me.

The Church believes that these seven gifts were "infused" into each one of us when we were baptized. They are not "special" because they are essential if we are to live a true Christian life.

Of course, what was "infused" or sown as a tiny seed at our baptism, has to be nurtured and tended, otherwise it will never bear fruit. Today, the Feast of Pentecost, these gifts want to grow within us.

Have they grown in you? Have they grown in me? Are these gifts bearing rich fruit in our lives?

WISDOM: is linked to Fear of the Lord, this gift helps us to know what comes from God, and what does not come from God. We need this gift of wisdom to understand our lives, and to evaluate our thoughts and desires and feelings. Without wisdom we can get into a fine mess. Wisdom allows us to discern a vocation, to choose a career, to choose who to marry, to know what to do in our retirement. Without wisdom we will certainly make the wrong decisions.

UNDERSTANDING: this gives an intuitive grasp of the truths revealed by God. Without this gift many dogmas of the Church, such as the Trinity, the Virgin Birth, the Real Presence of Christ in the Mass, may just baffle us. But with this gift, you don't need to be a theologian to understand what we believe.

KNOWLEDGE: helps us to grasp quickly the true value of created things, and their relationship to God. Without this kind of knowledge, we can easily turn things like money, possessions, career, power, sex, health, into "idols" and false gods. And this can create havoc in our lives.

COUNSEL: enables us to bring the gift of knowledge to bear on all the concrete and personal decisions we have to make; decisions about how we conduct our relationships, use our sexuality, live our marriage; how many children we should have, how to bring them up, what to do with our money. ...etc.

PIETY: this gift perfects justice, because it moves us to help people out of love and reverence for God. Without Piety we are in danger of loving for selfish reasons, and helping others just to quieten our conscience, or to give money to the poor just to get them off our doorstep.

FORTITUDE: produces supernatural strength in us, so that facing dangers, problems, temptations, difficult responsibilities, we stand firm, when by nature we would give in, or run away, or quit our marriage, or abandon our priesthood, or pack-in our job...

FEAR OF THE LORD: does not mean being afraid of God, but fearing that he lifts his hand from our head, that he abandons us to our own desires and fancies. This gift produces in us such a love, reverence and respect for God, that it curbs our desire for an easy life, our thirst for fame, power and success, our lust for pleasure, and helps to free us from selfish and lazy ways, from addictions and bad habits. Fear of the Lord comes from knowing one's own weakness, and experiencing God's mercy there. These seven gifts are not special graces given to special people. They are the ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit, because without them, it is impossible to live a true Christian life: whatever our vocation.

Imagine a parent or a grand-parent today, without WISDOM. What a disaster! Or a Catholic trying to live their faith, or explain it to others, or to catechize or evangelize, without UNDERSTANDING!

Imagine high school or college students, living in the fast lane, without KNOWLEDGE. Where will they end up morally or sexually? Or imagine married couples trying to raise a family without the gift of COUNSEL. God help them, and God help their children!

Imagine a priest in a busy parish, without PIETY. Pity his parishioners. Pity the poor people who call at his door! And can any school teacher today survive without FORTITUDE? I doubt it.

And imagine you or me trying to live generous and loving lives without FEAR OF THE LORD! Impossible! That is why the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are not important. They are essential. May they grow within each one of us through the grace of the Holy Spirit.

Happy Pentecost, Fr. Sean