

What are the Gifts of the Holy Spirit?

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The first gift we receive is the gift of 'sanctifying grace' which is a participation in the nature and life of God' [2 Peter 1:4 & CCC 1997 & 2009]. It is the gift by which we are inserted into the 'intimacy of the Trinitarian life' [CCC 1997]. It is a gift that is infused by the Holy Spirit into the soul to heal it of sin and to sanctify it [CCC 2023]. It raises us to a new supernatural level of being, which is capable of living an elevated supernatural life. It is the grace by which we are born again. 'It perfects the soul itself to enable it to live with God and to act by His love [CCC 2000]. It remains in us while we are in a state of grace and is lost by mortal sin. It is a permanent grace which is given for us to keep. Jesus calls us all to holiness [Matthew 5:48]. Sanctifying grace is therefore given to us for our personal sanctification or holiness. With it comes all the additional helps we need to co-operate with the Holy Spirit in the work of our own sanctification. These helps are known as the 'seven virtues' and the 'seven gifts of the Holy Spirit'.

The seven virtues are divided into two groups. The theological virtues are the virtues of faith hope and charity. They are called theological because they unite us to God. 'They enable us to believe in God, to hope in him and to love Him' [CCC 1266]. The second group are called the cardinal virtues. 'They allow [us] to grow in goodness' and lead virtuous lives [CCC 1266]. These are prudence, justice, temperance and fortitude.

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are known as the 'Isaiah 11 gifts,' to distinguish them from the 'charismatic gifts' that Paul spoke about in 1 Corinthians 12:7-10. These are the gifts that we were taught about in preparation for our confirmation and they are probably the gifts that we are most familiar with. Isaiah prophesied that when the promised Messiah came, the Spirit of the Lord would rest on Him and that he would demonstrate a number of attributes. They are: the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might [i.e. courage or fortitude], the spirit of knowledge and fear of the Lord' [Isaiah 11:2-3]. The final gift is that of piety [reverence] which the church fathers always included with them. This prophesy was fulfilled in Jesus.

The 'charismatic' gifts of the Holy Spirit refer to a second group of gifts. It is to this group I refer to primarily in this article. According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church 'grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with His work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth in the body of Christ, the Church' [CCC 2003]. The term 'charismatic' simply means 'free gift'. These are free gifts that the Holy Spirit gives to us to be given away to others. They are not given as permanent abilities but are given afresh on each occasion they are needed. They are given in order to help others to grow in holiness. They are given as actual graces. An actual grace refers simply to an intervention by God [CCC 2000]. The gifts most usually recognised are those in the group that Paul refers to in 1 Corinthians 12. However, there are others and it is important for us to know about them too.

The first group is given to us by Paul in Ephesians 4:1-12. In this list, he refers to the different leadership roles needed in the church. He outlines five. They are apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors and teachers, whose roles are given to equip the saints for ministry [and] for building up the body of Christ.

The second group of charismatic graces are given to us by Peter. He urges us to be good stewards of the manifold graces of God and to serve one another with whatever gift we have received. He singles out speech and service: 'Whoever speaks must do so as one speaking the words of God, whoever serves must do so with the strength that God supplies...' [1 Peter 4:10].

The third group are of seven charismatic graces that I like to define as 'everyday graces. These are: 'prophecy...ministry in ministering, the teacher in teaching, the exhorter in exhortation, the giver in generosity, the leader in diligence, and the compassionate, in cheerfulness' [Romans 12:6-8]. This group is less well known but it is important that we know about them.

Prophecy I will reflect on later. Ministry is service. It is the manifestation of the Holy Spirit's generosity in the giving of Himself in service to others. It is the ability to notice need anywhere, and looks for the means to help. It is the spirit enabled willingness to meet the need of others. This may be a simple practical thing like offering to clean the church, or it may mean helping in more difficult situation such as to minister to the needs of others as described in the spiritual and corporal works of mercy.

Exhortation is the spirit enabled ability, to bring God's word of encouragement, to someone experiencing a time of discouragement, who may be feeling down or dejected. With this gift my presence and encouraging word are empowered by the

presence and power of the Holy Spirit to break those feelings off the person experiencing them. It is the power to say the right thing, at the right time and in the right place.

The gift of compassion is so important for the spiritual life. Our God is a God of compassion [James 5:11, Hebrews 13-14 & Matthew 20:34]. Compassion is an attribute of God. Compassion is the God given ability to 'feel with' the pain or distress of another. It is God's compassion flowing through me to the one in need. There are four stages in the ministry of compassion. First is the ability to notice the need. The second is to feel empathy [feel with] the other as if the pain and distress were my own. The third is a compulsion to act in some way to relieve the pain or distress. The fourth is to act on the compulsion. The recognition of compulsion, is the spirit enabled authority of God for us to act in His name in a particular situation. This may mean simply to offer a prayer or to take action against an unjust system.

The fourth group of charismatic graces of the Holy Spirit are those outlined by Paul in 1 Corinthians 12:7-11. There are nine of them. It is helpful to explore them in groups of three. The 'word gifts' are prophesy, tongues and the interpretation of tongues. The 'revelation' gifts are the utterance of a word of knowledge, the utterance of a word of wisdom and discernment of spirits. The third group are the 'manifestation' gifts. They are called manifestation gifts because they manifest the power of God and are often accompanied by 'signs and wonders'. They are faith, healing and miracles. I will give a brief explanation of each.

When speaking of the word gifts, the word 'utterance' is significant because the Spirit is at work in both the one who speaks and in the one who hears.

Prophecy can mean two things. It can mean foretelling something in the future. More usually it means 'forth telling' a word from God. Paul explains: 'those who prophesy speak to other people for their building up and encouragement and consolation...and those who prophesy build up the church' [1 Corinthians 14:3].

The gift of tongues has a number of possible explanations. It can be a private prayer language given for one's personal use. It can be a gift that when used in public, expresses a word from God for the congregation. When this happens the gift of interpretation accompanies its giving, usually by another person. Two types of tongues are recognised. Xenoglossi is the type of tongues which was experienced at Pentecost when Paul tells us that the 'disciples were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other languages, as the Spirit gave them ability' [Acts 2:4]. The people were amazed and they said: 'are not all these who are speaking to us Galileans? And how is it that we hear, each of us, in our own native language? [Acts

2: 7-8]'. There is some evidence from the lives of the saints that xenoglossi could also mean that the listeners heard the evangelist in their own native language even though the speaker spoke in his own language. Glossolalia was what Paul referred to in 1 Corinthians 14:2 & 4 'for those who speak in a tongues do not speak to other people but to God: for nobody understands them, since they are speaking mysteries in the Spirit...Those who speak in a tongue build up themselves'. Lastly, it can be a gift that manifests to others the presence of the Holy Spirit which Paul declares to be 'a sign for unbelievers' [1Corinthians 14:22].

The utterance of a Word of knowledge is a supernatural revelation of an unknown fact. In ministry, its effect can be powerful as Paul relates to us in 1 Corinthians 14:25: 'after the secrets of the believer's heart are disclosed, the person will bow down before God and worship Him, declaring "God is really among you". People with a healing ministry find this gift extremely useful. It can be given as a word seen on one's spiritual screen, or as a picture or felt as a pain on the body. When declared, it helps us to know speedily and correctly how to minister to the person it has been revealed to.

The utterance of a word of wisdom is a supernatural revelation which gives God's insight into a difficult situation and His guidance as to how to resolve it.

Discernment of spirits is the supernatural ability to know whether a person, thing or event is from my own spirit, from God's Spirit or from an evil spirit. It is particularly useful for knowing when to pray for deliverance. In Mark 16:17, in his final discourse to his believers Jesus said that one of the signs that will accompany believers would be that they would cast out demons using His name.

The gift of faith is the gift that gives us a supernatural certainty that God is going to act powerfully in the moment. It is the kind of faith 'that can move mountains' and is often associated with healing or miracles. It is given with boldness to step out in faith. The gift is given to meet a specific need.

The gift of healing can be physical, emotional or spiritual. It is a gift that is much needed today. Life is so complex and so difficult for so many people. In his final discourse to his disciples Jesus promised that they would lay hands on the sick and they would recover [Mark 16:18]. In the early church, healing was practiced by all Christians and healing played an important part in the rapid spread of Christianity through the Roman Empire.

The word miracle means 'a wonder'. Jesus performed 'signs' which revealed the presence of God through His gifts, and 'wonders' which revealed the power of God

through His miracles. A miracle is a supernatural power to perform a deed that is above nature. Jesus performed many miracles such as raising the dead, calming a storm, walking on water, changing water into wine etc. In Galatians 3:5, Paul declared to the disciples that God 'worked miracles among you' also.

Who gives us the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

Jesus gives this life to 'whomever He wishes' [John 5:21]. Jesus is the one who asks the Father to send the Gift of the Holy Spirit to us.

How do we receive the baptism in the Holy Spirit?

We receive the gift by asking for it. We can do this ourselves in private prayer. Someone else may pray for the gift to be released in us. They may also lay hands on us while doing this. The gift may be given during a 'Life in the Spirit Seminar' or during an 'Alpha Course'. The gift is given in one of two ways, both of which are life changing. Sometimes nothing is experienced at the time of the prayer, but slowly and gently, you may notice significant changes taking place in your life. For others, the experience is an immediate 'Damascus' type overwhelming experience.

What are the effects of the Gift of the Holy spirit?

The person feels full of the love of God flowing through him or her. God is real and really present and it is this presence that fills him or her with joy.

There is a deep joy, a jubilant joy like that experienced by Mary when she visited Elizabeth. It is a joy that exults in God our saviour. It is accompanied by a deep peace. The person experiencing this joy can't help but want to share what has happened with other people. Peter expressed it this way: 'we cannot keep from speaking about what we have seen and heard' [Acts 4:13 & 20]. Peter described the boldness that accompanied their witness for 'they spoke the word of God with boldness' [Acts 4:23, 25, 29-31].

This joy explodes in the desire to praise and worship God. The person feels drawn to prayer both private and sacramental just to be in the presence of the one who loves him or her. Jesus becomes real to us and uses us as willing vessels through whom He can continue His work of bringing the kingdom to birth on the earth.

The person is drawn to read the bible, which comes alive for them and they find there that God is speaking a personal word for them.

The person sees the presence of God in his or her neighbour and is moved to reach out and help those in need. The person notices the power of the Holy Spirit working within and begins to recognise the charismatic gifts and how to use them in ministry. These usually relate in some way to the purpose God has for his or her life. The person begins to discern the specific calling of God for them. Life has meaning and purpose.

Who wouldn't want this beautiful gift?

Is there more?

We have explored here the sanctifying gifts and the evangelising gifts of the Holy Spirit. They have been treated as two separate groups and in this article I have emphasised the evangelising charismatic gifts. But they are meant to be united together in the Christian's spiritual journey. We need both for a balance Christian life. In the Catholic tradition, we have a rich source of teaching on the means to grow to Christian maturity, particularly through the stages of prayer. Through them we grow through stages towards contemplative prayer in which union with God is experienced. Our charismatic experience has a similarity with stage four of St Teresa of Avila's 'mansions'. This is the stage of prayer where we experience the presence of God for the first time in prayer. This is the beginning of 'contemplative' prayer and this union continues to grow deeper through the remaining stages. St Teresa teaches that we are all meant to grow to spiritual maturity and reach these later stages. This begs the question for us: are we meant to become contemplative charismatics? This contemplative tradition was once confined to the 'spiritual elite'. It has largely disappeared from the life of the Church today but has been rediscovered recently especially by the laity and by Pope Francis who has encouraged it. People need to know about the spiritual gifts, and the life of prayer. This poses a real challenge to the laity. There is always more for us to explore. Knowing and using our spiritual gifts is an important beginning. Is this the next step? Is this the 'something more' we need to move on towards as we continue on our spiritual journey?

Bibliography

All bible quotes are from the New Revised Standard Catholic Edition, 2005.

All quotes from the Catechism of the Catholic Church are taken from the Catholic Truth Society, revised edition 2016.

