

## CHAPTER XIII

### *The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost as Possessed by Most Holy Mary.*

596. The seven gifts of the Holy Ghost (according to the light I have regarding them) seem to me to add something to the virtues to which they refer, and because they add to them they must also differ from them, though they pursue the same object. Every benefit conferred by the Lord can be called a gift flowing from his hand, though it may only be a natural benefit. But here we do not speak of the gifts of God included in this wide sense of the word, nor even of the infused virtues and gifts, for not all persons who possess one or more virtues have the gifts pertaining to those virtues, or at least they do not reach that degree of virtue that they can be called perfect gifts, such as those understood by the sacred Doctors in the words of Isaias, who says the Holy Ghost rested upon Christ our Lord, enumerating seven graces which commonly are called gifts of the Holy Ghost (Is. 11:2-3), namely the spirit of *wisdom* and *understanding*, the spirit of *counsel* and *fortitude*, the spirit of *knowledge* and *piety*, and the *fear of God*. These gifts were in the most holy soul of Christ, overflowing from the Divinity to whom He was hypostatically united, just as water is in the fountain, flowing from it and communicating itself to other places; for we all partake of the waters of the Savior (Is. 12:3), grace for grace (Jn. 1:16), gift for gift, and in Him are hidden the treasures of divine wisdom and science (Col. 2:3).

597. The gifts of the Holy Ghost correspond to the virtues to which they are related, and though the Doctors discourse about this correspondence with some differences between them, there can be no difference of opinion in regard to the end or purpose of these gifts, which is none other than to give a special kind of perfection to the faculties for the performance of exalted and heroic acts of virtue. The excellence of these gifts must principally include and consist of some specially strong inspiration or influence of the Holy Ghost which overcomes with greater efficacy the impediments and moves the free will with greater force, so man will not be remiss in his actions but may proceed with great fortitude and with all perfection in those things to which that particular gift pertains. All this the free will cannot attain without being illumined and sustained by a specially efficacious and powerful influence of the Holy Ghost which impels him sweetly and pleasingly (Wis. 8:1) to follow the enlightenment and freely to execute and accomplish what the will undertakes under the efficacious influence of the Holy Ghost (Rom. 8:14). Therefore this impulse is called instinct of the Holy Ghost, for though the will acts freely and without compulsion, yet in these operations it is much like a voluntary instrument, and seems to be one, because it acts less under the guidance of common prudence as in other virtues, though it does not act with less intelligence or liberty.

598. By way of comparison I will try to give some understanding of this impulse, taking notice that in order to move the will to acts of virtue two faculties concur. One is its own inclination or attraction toward the good, moving or stirring it in the same way as gravity causes the stone to fall or lightness makes the fire ascend toward its center. This inclination of the will is increased more or less by the custom or habits of virtue (and the same is to be said in their degree regarding the habits of vice), for being drawn by love the will moves freely and of its own accord. The other faculty is that of the intellect, which is an enlightenment in regard to virtue by which the will directs itself in determining its course of action, and this enlightenment is proportionate to the habits and the operations of the will. For the ordinary acts prudence and whatever deliberation it inspires are sufficient; but for the more exalted operations it requires a higher and superior enlightenment and incitement, that of the Holy Ghost, such as is given by the

seven gifts. Since charity is a supernatural habit which depends on the divine will in the same way as the ray depends upon the sun, therefore charity is accompanied by a particular influence of the Divinity by which it is moved to pursue the rest of the virtues and good habits of the will, and much more so when this charity is reinforced by the gifts of the Holy Ghost.

599. Therefore it seems to me I perceive in the gifts of the Holy Ghost a certain special enlightenment in which the intellect remains to a large extent merely passive as far as moving the will is concerned. In the will at the same time there is a certain perfection of its habits which inclines it in a manner far above the ordinary force of the virtues to most heroic works. As the movements of a stone, if another impulse besides gravity is added, are much accelerated, so the impulse of the will toward virtue is stronger and more excellent if it is acted upon by the gifts. The gift of *wisdom* communicates to the soul a certain kind of taste by which it can distinguish the divine from the human without error, focusing its valor and effort against those likings born of human ignorance and stupidity; this gift is related to charity. The gift of *understanding* clarifies the intellect in order to penetrate into divine things and know them, opposing the rudeness and slowness of our natural understanding. The gift of *knowledge* searches the most obscure mysteries and creates perfect teachers to oppose human ignorance; these two gifts are related to faith. The gift of *counsel* guides, directs and restrains human impulses contrary to prudence; it pertains to the virtue of that name. That of *fortitude* expels disorderly fear and comforts the weak, and pertains to the same virtue. *Piety* makes the heart kind, takes away its hardness, and softens it against its own impiety and stubbornness; it is related to religion. The *fear of God* lovingly humiliates the soul in opposition to pride, and is related to humility.

600. In most holy Mary were all the gifts of the Holy Ghost as in one who was undoubtedly capable of and entitled to them, for She was the Mother of the divine Word, from whom proceeds the Holy Ghost, to whom the gifts are attributed. And regulating these gifts for the special dignity of Mother of God, it follows that they were in Her in due proportion and with such a great difference from all the rest of creatures insofar as She was to be called Mother of God and the rest only creatures; also because the great Queen was so close to the Holy Ghost by this dignity, together with her impeccability, while all the rest of creatures are so far away, not only because of sin but due to their common place in creation, having no such proximity to the divine Spirit. If these gifts existed in Christ our Redeemer and Lord as in their fountainhead, they were also in Mary, his worthy Mother, as in a lake or ocean from whence they are distributed over all creation, for from her superabundance they overflow onto the whole Church.\* By another metaphor the same is said by Solomon in the book of Proverbs (9:1) when he says *Wisdom<sup>†</sup> hath built Herself a house on seven pillars*, etc., and in it She hath *set forth her table, mingled her wine* (Ib. 2), and invites the little ones and the uninstructed ones, drawing and raising them up from their childhood to teach them prudence (Ib. 3-6). I will not stop to expatiate upon this since no Catholic may ignore the fact that most holy Mary was this magnificent habitation of the Most High, built up in strength and beauty on these seven pillars of the gifts so in this mystical palace could be held the banquet of the whole Church, because in Mary was prepared the table at which all we uninstructed little ones, children of Adam, may become satiated with the influence and gifts of the Holy Ghost.

601. When speaking of these gifts as acquired by discipline in the exercise of virtue and the conquest of the contrary vices, the first place must be assigned to the *fear of God*. But in regard

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\* cf. Eccclus. 24:41-43 [Ed.]

† cf. Eccclus. 24:40 [Ed.]

to Christ, Isaias begins by mentioning the gift of *wisdom*, the highest one, because Christ received them as the Master and Head, and not as a disciple. In the same order are we to consider them in most holy Mary, for in gifts She was made more similar to her most holy Son than other creatures. The gift of *wisdom* confers a delicious illumination by which the intellect knows the truth of things by their intimate and supreme causes, and the will, by the taste of the truth of the true good, discerns and divides it from the apparent and false good; for he is truly wise who knows without error the true good in order to taste of it, and who tastes it in knowing it. This taste of wisdom consists in rejoicing in the highest Good by an intimate union of love, upon which follows the savoring and relishing of the particular good gained and realized by the exercise of the virtues inferior to love. Therefore he is not called wise who merely perceives truth in a speculative manner, though he may find his delight in that pursuit; nor is he called wise who practices virtue merely for the sake of obtaining a knowledge of it, and still less he who practices it for other reasons. But he who tastes the highest and true Good, and who knows Him without error, and in Him and for Him all the lesser truths, and acts with an intimate and unitive love of that Good, is the one who will be truly wise. This knowledge is supplied to wisdom by the gift of *understanding*, which precedes and accompanies it, and which consists in an intimate penetration into the divine truths and of that which can be reduced and directed to this order, for *the Spirit searches the deep things of God*, as the Apostle says (I Cor. 2:10).

602. This same Spirit shall be necessary in order to understand and explain to a certain extent the gifts of wisdom and understanding possessed by Mary, the Empress of heaven. The impetus of the river which was withheld by the highest Good for so many eternal ages rejoiced this City of God by its flow (Ps. 45:5), which by means of the indwelling of the Onlybegotten of the Father and of Mary completely filled her most holy soul, so it seemed (according to our way of speaking) as if the infinite oceans of the Divinity were drained into this sea of wisdom as soon as She was capable of invoking the Spirit of wisdom. And so She could invoke Him He came to Her, so She could learn wisdom without guile and communicate it without envy (Wis. 7:13). This She also did, for by means of her wisdom the light of the world, the eternal incarnate Word, manifested Himself to the world. This most wise Virgin knew in her wisdom the arrangement of the whole world and the powers of the elements (Ib. 17), the beginning, the middle, and the end of time with its changes, the course of the stars, the natures of the animals, the fury of the wild beasts, the powers of the winds, the dispositions and thoughts of men, the virtues of plants, herbs, trees, fruits and roots, that which is hidden and concealed beyond all thoughts of men, and the mysterious ways of the Most High; all this Mary our Queen knew, and She delighted in it through the wisdom which She drew from its original fountain and which was embodied in all of her thoughts.

603. From this She received that vapor of the power of God (Ib. 25) and the bright emanation of his pure charity which made Her immaculate and preserved Her from the pollution which stains the soul, and for this reason She remained a mirror without spot reflecting the majesty of God. Thence did She draw the spirit of intelligence belonging to wisdom, a spirit *holy, one, manifold, subtle, eloquent, active, undefiled, sure, sweet, loving that which is good, which nothing hindereth, beneficent, gentle, kind, steadfast, assured, secure, having all power, overseeing all things* (Ib. 22-23), and understanding all things with clearness and with a most pure subtlety reaching from one end to the other. All these qualities which the Wise Man mentions as belonging to the Spirit of wisdom existed uniquely and perfectly in most holy Mary after her onlybegotten Son. Together with wisdom came to Her all good (Ib. 11), and in all her works She was led on by these exalted gifts of *wisdom* and *understanding*; by them She was

governed in the exercise of all the rest of her virtues, being as it were saturated with this incomparable wisdom.

604. Something has already been said of her other gifts when speaking of the gifts in general; but since all that we can understand and say is so far beneath that which is really to be found in this Mystical City of Mary there always remains much to add. The gift of *counsel*, in the order given by Isaias, follows that of understanding. It consists of a supernatural illumination by which the Holy Ghost touches the interior, enlightening it beyond all human and ordinary intelligence, and thereby inclining the soul to choose all that is most profitable, most decent and just, and to reject all that is of the contrary kind. It leads the will by the immaculate and eternal laws of God back to the standard of one single love, conforming it to the perfect desire of the highest Good. Thus divinely instructed the creature lays aside the multitude of diverse inclinations and the foreign and inferior affections and movements which may retard or hinder the human heart from listening to or following the divine impulses and counsels, or which may prevent man from conforming to the living example of Christ our Lord, who in highest counsel has said to the eternal Father: *Not as I will, but as Thou wilt* (Mt. 26:39).

605. The gift of *fortitude* is a participation or influence of the divine virtue which the Holy Ghost communicates to the created will so it may be happily encouraged to raise itself above all that is passing and all that is accustomed to inspire human weakness with fear in temptations, sorrows, tribulations and adversities. Overcoming and vanquishing them all, the will acquires and maintains in itself all that is most arduous and excellent in virtue; it transcends and surpasses all the virtues, graces, spiritual and interior exaltations, revelations, and sensible ecstasies of love; no matter of what degree and excellence, it leaves all behind and soars upward in divine flight, until it reaches the highest and most intimate union with the supreme Good after whom it longed with the most ardent desire. Then in truth *out of the strong comes forth sweetness* (Judges 14:14), having conquered all things in Him that strengthened it (Philip. 4:13). The gift of *knowledge* is an intelligent and unerring knowledge of what must be believed and done in regard to the virtues, and it differs from counsel insofar as knowledge selects while counsel decides; knowledge forms a correct judgment and counsel makes the wise choice. Knowledge differs also from understanding, because understanding penetrates into the divine truths of faith and virtues by means of a simple intuition, while knowledge knows authoritatively all that can be deduced from the principles of faith, conforming the outward operations of the faculties to the perfection of the virtues, and being as it were the mother and root of discretion.

606. The gift of *piety* is a divine virtue or influence by which the Holy Ghost softens or as it were melts and liquefies the human will, moving it to embrace all that pertains to the service of the Most High and to the welfare of one's neighbor. By means of this softening and sweet mildness of the mind our will is ever ready and our memory always attentive so in all times, places and circumstances we are ready to praise, bless, thank and honor the highest Good; and likewise we are moved to act with a tender and loving compassion toward creatures, without failing them in their troubles and necessities. This gift is not hindered when it meets envy, it overlooks hate and avarice, and spurns weakness or littleness of mind, for it causes in man a strong and delightful inclination by which it proceeds sweetly and lovingly to fulfill all the works of the love of God and neighbor, making him benevolent, ready to do a service, kind and diligent. On that account the Apostle says that the exercise of piety is useful for all things (I Tim. 4:8), and that it has the promise of eternal life, being a most noble instrument of charity.

607. In the last place comes the gift of the *fear of God*, so highly praised, exalted and recommended in many places in divine Scriptures\* and by the holy Doctors as the foundation of Christian perfection and the beginning of true wisdom, for the fear of God is the primary disposition which resists the arrogant stupidity of men, destroying and dispelling it with great force. This important gift consists in a loving heedfulness and a most noble modesty and restraint by which the soul withdraws within itself, making it conscious of its own lowly condition, comparing its lowliness with the supreme majesty and greatness of God; and not wanting to feel sorry for itself, nor mind high things, the soul fears as the Apostle teaches (Rom. 11:20). This holy fear has its different degrees, for in the beginning it is called initial, and afterwards it becomes filial fear; first the soul begins to flee from guilt as contrary to the highest Good, and then it proceeds still farther in its self-abasement and self-contempt, comparing its own littleness with the majesty of God, its ignorance with his wisdom, and its poverty with his infinite riches. Thus finding itself in all things dependent upon the will of God, it humiliates and subjects itself beneath all creatures for the sake of God, acting towards Him and towards them with a sincere love. It finally reaches the perfection of the sons of God and arrives at the intimate union of its powers with the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost.

608. If I would dilate still more in the explanation of the gifts of the Holy Ghost I would far exceed the limits which I have set, and I would have to extend disproportionately this discourse. That which I have said of these gifts seems to me sufficient for the understanding of their nature and qualities. This understanding will enable us properly to consider how these gifts of the Holy Ghost were possessed by the sovereign Queen of heaven not only in the common and sufficient degree which is possible and common to other saints, but were in this Lady by a special excellence and privilege which is not possible to any other saint, nor be proper to anyone inferior to Her. Having then understood in what holy fear, piety, fortitude, knowledge and counsel consist, insofar as they are gifts of the Holy Ghost, let human estimation and angelic understanding dilate, let them soar in thought to the noblest, the most excellent, the most perfect, and the most divine; greater than all this, and above whatever else creatures in their entirety can conceive, will be the gifts of Mary, and the lowest of her perfections will scarcely be within reach of the highest that can enter the thoughts of man, just as in the same manner the highest perfections of our Lady and Queen attain only in a certain sense the lowest of Christ and of the Divinity.

#### *INSTRUCTION OF MARY, THE MOST HOLY QUEEN.*

609. My daughter, these most noble and excellent gifts of the Holy Ghost, which thou hast come to understand, are the emanations of the Divinity communicating themselves to and transforming holy souls. On their own part they do not admit of any limitation, but only on the part of the subject upon which they act. If creatures would empty their hearts of earthly love and affections (although their hearts are limited) they would participate without measure in the torrent of the infinite Divinity through the inestimable gifts of the Holy Ghost. The virtues purify the creature from the ugliness and guilt of his vices, and thereby they begin to restore the harmonious order of his faculties which was first lost by original sin and afterwards increased by actual sins; they add beauty to the soul, strength and joy in doing good. But the gifts of the Holy Ghost raise these same virtues to a sublime perfection, adornment and beauty, by which they

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\* For ex., Ps. 2:8; 18:10; 33:10; 110:10; 118:120; Prov. 9:10; 14:26, 27; 15:16, 33.

dispose, beautify and fill the soul with graces and introduce it into the chamber of its Spouse, where it remains united with the Divinity in a spiritual bond of eternal peace. And from that most happy state the soul proceeds most faithfully and securely to the practice of heroic virtues, and laden with them it returns to the same source from which it issued forth, namely God himself. In his shadow it rests and is satiated, freed from the impetuous fury of the passions and their disorderly appetites. Such a happiness, however, is the lot of few, and only by experience can it actually be known who does attain it.

610. Take heed therefore, my dearest, and study profoundly how thou canst ascend to the height of these gifts, for it is the will of the Lord and mine for thee to ascend higher up as a guest in the feast (Lk. 14:10) which is prepared for thee in all the sweetness of his blessed gifts (Ps. 20:4), and to which thou hast been invited for this very purpose by this excess of liberality. Remember there are only two paths to eternity: One leads to eternal death by contempt of virtue and ignorance of the Divinity, and the other leads to eternal life by the profitable knowledge of the Most High. For this is eternal life, that men know the way to Him and to his Onlybegotten whom He sent into the world (Jn. 17:3). The way of death is trodden by innumerable fools (Eccles. 1:15) who with formidable dullness disregard their own ignorance, presumption and pride. To those whom his mercy calls to his admirable light (I Peter 2:9), and whom He engenders anew as children of light,\* God gives by this regeneration a new being in faith, hope and charity, making them his own and heirs of the divine and eternal fruition. Having been made his children they are endowed with the virtues which accompany the first justification, so as children of light they may perform corresponding works of light, and over and above they receive the gifts of the Holy Ghost. And just as the material sun denies its light and warmth to nothing that is capable and fit for its influence, so also the divine Wisdom, emitting his voice on the high mountains (Prov. 8:1), on the royal highway, and in the most hidden paths, invites and calls out to all, and neither hides nor denies Himself to anyone. But the foolishness of men makes them deaf, their impious malice makes them scoffers, and their unbelieving perversity turns them away from God, whose Wisdom finds no place in a malevolent heart, nor in a body subject to sin (Wis. 1:4).

611. Thou however, my daughter, remember thy promises, thy vocation, and thy aspirations, for the tongue which lies to God is an abominable murderer of the soul (Ib. 11). Make sure not to pursue death in the error of this life, nor draw upon thyself ruin by the works of thy hands (Ib. 12), as by divine light thou hast seen the children of darkness do. Fear the powerful God and Lord with holy fear, humble and well ordered, and in all thy works be governed by that Master. Offer thy heart yielding, simple and docile to discipline and works of piety. Judge according to the true value of virtue and vice. Animate thyself with an invincible fortitude to strive after the most arduous and exalted, and to endure the most adverse and exacting labors. By discretion choose the means for attaining these results. Give way to the force of the divine light by which thou canst transcend all sensible things; rise to the highest knowledge of the hidden secrets of divine wisdom, and distinguish between the things of the new and the old man. Then shalt thou be made capable of partaking of this wisdom, for then thou shalt enter into the wine cellar of thy Spouse (Cant. 2:4) and be inebriated with his love, and his eternal charity will be well ordered in thee.

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\* cf. Jn. 12:36 [Ed.]