

Gifts of the Holy Spirit

Wisdom is the ability to know with the heart; to be able to make complex things simple enough for a child to understand. Wisdom most accurately describes the way God knows everything. Only God is all-seeing, able to penetrate the innermost secrets of all creation. God shares that way of knowing with us through the Holy Spirit, who inspires humans to see things through the eyes of faith. The prophets and authors of Scripture are an example of this kind of knowing. For a beautiful and poetic description of wisdom, read the seventh chapter in the Book of Wisdom, verses 22—30.

Understanding is closely related to wisdom. It, too, is a way of seeing reality and knowing with the heart, but its focus is on seeing the relationship between things. Understanding helps us make sense of reality by helping us grasp how things are connected. When we understand something, we see what lies behind it, beneath it, around it. When we use the gift of understanding, we are able to make connections. Both wisdom and understanding are essential in helping us to make good decisions.

Knowledge is the gift that helps us distinguish between truth and falsehood, fact and fiction, the real and the imagined. This kind of awareness, though not as profound as wisdom, helps us sort through what we learn in our education and from experience in order that we may come to recognize what is true. Without the facts it is easy to get confused and make very poor judgments~ All three gifts—wisdom, understanding, and knowledge—are necessary to help us see with the eyes of faith.

Courage or fortitude combines bravery and endurance. This gift helps us face danger, stand up for what we know is right, and act accordingly. For a Christian, courage comes from knowing we can trust God to be with us always. Courage is the backbone of moral strength. Knowing what to do in a given situation is not always enough to empower us to act morally. Courage demands an inner strength. Saint Paul put it this way in his second letter to Timothy, “.....*stir into flame the gift of God bestowed on you when my hands were laid upon you. The Spirit God has given us is no cowardly spirit, but rather one that makes us strong, loving, and wise*” (2 Timothy 1:6—7). There are many examples of courage at work in the Church. The most obvious are the martyrs, those men and women who were and are willing to endure suffering and even death in order to put their faith into practice.

Right judgment or Counsel refers to the ability to look at a situation, discern what is the correct thing to do, and have the courage to do it. As you can see, the gift of right judgment relies on the gifts of wisdom, understanding, knowledge, and courage. This gift allows us to give ourselves and others good advice. We are able to do this if we pray, seek out the guidance of the Holy Spirit in Scripture and the teachings of the Church, and consult with others in the faith community.

Reverence or piety is a deep sense of love that leads us to deliberately seek out ways to please God: If we are reverent, we want to give honor and praise. This is the gift that helps us place God as the number-one priority in our lives. Reverence helps us make the prophet Micah's call "to live justly, love tenderly, and walk humbly with our God" .a reality in our lives. The gift of reverence also encompasses everything that comes from God, so we are called as Christians to lovingly embrace all of God's creation, to love God by loving all that comes from God.

Wonder and awe in God's presence or fear of the Lord is the ability to perceive just how holy, powerful, wise, beautiful, and almighty God is. We experience this gift when we are caught speechless before the power of a storm, the vastness of the universe, or the beauty of a sunset. Sometimes being aware of just how awesome GOD really is, we are a bit overwhelmed. Scripture sometimes says people were terrified in God's presence; hence they named the gift fear of the Lord. One such example is the story of the making of the covenant between God and the Israelites at Mount Sinai. Read the story in chapters 19 and 20 in the book of Exodus.