For Personal Reflection

?

1. What might Francis de Sales have added to my appreciation or understanding of the gifts of the Spirit?
2. Of the seven gifts, to which one can I most relate at this point in my life?
3. Of the seven gifts, which one might I be most uncomfortable at this time in my life?
4. What do I find most helpful about Francis de Sales treatment of the Spirit's gifts?
5. At this point in my life, are there other gifts, fruits or virtues that I would add to this list that would help me in making progress on the ladder of devotion?

Further Reading

Pulpit and Pew. A Study in Salesian Preaching. Arthur Kerns, MSFS: 1976. pp 256—258.

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The Seven Gifts...

SALESIAN PERSPECTIVES

Of the Holy Spirit

Much has been written of the Holy Spirit and the gifts of the Holy Spirit. "Some people speak of them as fruits," wrote St. Francis de Sales. "The description that St. Paul gives them in his letter to the Galatians is: a harvest of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, forbearance, gentleness, faith, courtesy, temperateness, purity." Other people think of them as gifts, dividing them into wisdom knowledge, and the like, as St. Paul does in his first Letter to the Corinthians. For my purpose here, I shall simply group them together under the seven gifts mentioned by Isaiah." (Pulpit and Pew, p. 145)

"Piety is not about doing extra. Piety is about being just: giving others their due."

Speaking of gifts, the gift that Francis de Sales gives us is an appreciation of how the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit work together in helping us to climb the ladder of devotion. No mere intellectual appreciation here; no, Francis offers us a sure path for growing in holiness.

"The first of the Holy Spirit's gifts, the first rung as we begin to work our way up the ladder, is the gift of *fear*. This fear is of two kinds: a lower sort and a higher one, as I call them. In this, we fear God in two ways: as the one who punishes evildoers, or as the one who rewards the virtuous. This gift of fear goes straight to the heart, and incites it to yield the fruit of repentance." (*Ibid*)

Fear is the beginning of wisdom. But there are five more steps in between.

"The second gift of the Holy Spirit is *piety*. The gift of piety is a specific virtue connected with justice. It comes down to a simple matter of doing justice: of giving due honor, reverence and love, not only to God as our supreme creator and loving Father, but to our brothers and sisters as well." (*Ibid*)

"The gift that Francis de Sales gives us is an appreciation of how the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit work together in helping us to climb the ladder of devotion."

Piety is not about doing extra. Piety is about being just: giving others their due.

"The Holy Spirit's third gift — still working our way upwards — is the gift of *knowledge*." This gift surpasses rhetorical knowledge. "This knowledge is essential if we are to make full use of the first two gifts: we need to know how to behave towards the God we mean to fear and love. We need to know how to avoid evil; we need to know how to accomplish good." (*Ibid*)

This knowledge enables us to recognize those things that lead to death, as well as those things that give life.

"After the gift of knowledge comes *fortitude*, the fourth gift. This is absolutely essential to us. The ability to tell good from evil is of little use if we lack the strength to engage the one and avoid the other." (*Ibid*)

The next gift, as we continue to climb, is the gift of *counsel*: fortitude, without counsel, would be rashness. While fear causes us to break away from sinful habits and knowledge helps us to see what is wrong, we still need the assistance of counsel if we are to tackle what knowledge has taught us." (*Ibid*)

Five down (or up)! Two to go.

"What follows is the gift of understanding. This gift enables us to see and penetrate the beauty and the perfection of the mysteries of faith. While we might listen to sermons and read very widely, we can easily remain ignorant of divine mysteries if we lack the gift of understanding."

"This knowledge enables us recognize those things that lead to death, as well as those things that give life."

"Following the gift of understanding is the gift of *wisdom*, which gratifies the soul with every blessing. This gift helps us to see deeply the excellence of God's law: not to talk or to preach about it, but to practice it." (*Ibid*)

Of course, these gifts are not given to us that we might enrich ourselves alone. In his Treatise on the Love of God, Francis wrote that these seven gifts must ultimately benefit others through our practice of the twelve fruits of the Spirit; and by living a life of Beatitude.

On which rung on the ladder of devotion do you find yourself today?