

One hopes, amongst my ramblings in my articles and homilies of last Sunday celebrating the Feast of Our Lord's Ascension, that we grasped an essential point. And that point is as follows: since Ash Wednesday, we really have been preparing to celebrate, and have, indeed, been celebrating the Paschal Mystery of Jesus Christ, which encompasses His entire earthly life and ministry, beginning with His divine Incarnation (enfleshment), or, His taking flesh in the spotless womb of Our Mother, Mary, at the Annunciation, to His birth at Christmas, to His death and Resurrection from the tomb, and, finally, to the feast we celebrated last Sunday, to His glorious Ascension. I also tried to reinforce the fact that we must be an 'alleluia people,' celebrating the whole of Christ's life, which includes our lives, as well.

Why does the celebration of Christ's 'whole life' include our lives? Because our faith teaches us that we are part of Christ's Mystical Body, the Church. St. Paul teaches us in the second reading from 1 Corinthians (from the Mass of the day):

As a body is one though it has many parts, and all the parts of the body, though many, are one body, so also Christ. For in one Spirit we were all baptized into one body, whether Jews or Greeks, slaves or free, and we were all given to drink of the one Spirit. (1 Corinthians 12. 12-13)

St. Paul explains in another place: "He has put all things under Christ's feet and has made Him, thus exalted, head of the Church, which is His body: the fullness of Him Who fills the universe in all its parts." (Ephesians 1. 22-23) Ultimately, in the sacraments, we live out Christ's life, death, resurrection and ascension in the Church where Christ's life is re-presented in us, if we but allow it. Of course, this demands prayer and surrender. That is why St. Paul demands: "All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. You did not receive a spirit of slavery leading you back into fear, but a spirit of adoption, through which we cry out: 'Abba!' 'Father!'" (Romans 8. 15) And, as I have continuously pointed out, our translation of the word 'Abba' is faulty – 'Abba' cannot be translated as 'Father.' The closest translation we can come to is, perhaps, 'Daddy,' or 'Pappa.' I've often wondered what has kept our translators from translating the Name of the Father correctly? Could it be fear?

Now, if the sacramental life 'conforms us' or moulds us, into an image of Christ, what is the work of the Holy Spirit? The short answer is, as St. Paul tells us in the second reading on Sunday: the Spirit enables us to proclaim Jesus as Lord: "No one can say 'Jesus is Lord,' except by the Holy Spirit." (1 Corinthians 12. 3) But, what does that mean, especially in our daily lives? Unfortunately, I know lots of people who have cried out 'Jesus is Lord!', and I'm not certain I want to take them as my role-model. In fact, Jesus warned us that:

"You can tell a tree by its fruit. Not all of those who cry out 'Lord, Lord!' will enter the Kingdom of God, but only the one who does the will of My Father in Heaven. When that day comes, many will plead with Me, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy Name? ...Did we not do many miracles as well?' Then I shall declare to them solemnly: 'I never knew you. Out of My sight, you evildoers!'" (St. Matthew 7. 20-23)

So, what is it that the Spirit is to do in us? The *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church* can get us started in a proper direction to an answer. The *Compendium* states:

146. How do Christ and His Spirit act in the hearts of the faithful? Christ communicates His Spirit and the grace of God through the sacraments to all members of the Church, who thus bear the

fruits of the *new life* of the Spirit. The Holy Spirit is also the Master of prayer. (1)

We have discussed the role of the sacraments in our lives as members of Christ's body, the Church, which conform us and make us into an image of Christ. Now we need to talk about this 'new life' which the Holy Spirit, as the 'Master of prayer' teaches us.

We might first ask ourselves the question: what are the gifts which the Holy Spirit gives us? The Church teaches us that there are seven gifts, namely: the gifts of wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord. These gifts, enumerated in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah, "are specially intended for the sanctification of the person who receives them." (2) Who receives these gifts? We receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Baptism, and most especially in the sacrament of Confirmation. If we lose the gift of sanctifying grace by the committing of mortal sin, the seven gifts of the Spirit are restored to us by making a good confession. Further, and we so often forget this, when we are in the state of grace, and trying to live a good life of prayer and love of God and neighbour, every time we receive Our Lord in Holy Communion, these seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are strengthened!

Can we explain these gifts to make them more understandable? Indeed, yes! Let's let our old friend, the *Catholic Encyclopedia* do the work, rather than 're-inventing the wheel,' as it were.

The gift of wisdom, by detaching us from the world, makes us relish and love ... the things of Heaven.

The gift of understanding helps us to grasp the truths of religion as far as is necessary.

The gift of counsel springs from supernatural prudence, and enables us to see and choose correctly what will help most to the glory of God and our own salvation.

By *the gift of fortitude* we receive courage to overcome the obstacles and difficulties that arise in the practice of our religious duties.

The gift of knowledge points out to us the path to follow and the dangers to avoid in order to reach Heaven.

The gift of piety, by inspiring us with a tender and filial confidence in God, makes us joyfully embrace all that pertains to His service.

Lastly, *the gift of fear* fills us with a sovereign respect for God, and makes us dread, above all things, to offend Him. (3)

A simple point... these seven gifts are *gifts that are given!* They can be lost. (But if the gifts are lost they can also be restored by making a good confession!) The gifts must be used and practised. And, in prayer, we need to examine ourselves to see which gifts we are 'strong in,' and in which gifts we are *lacking*. If you are unsure, *ask!* Remember what the *Compendium* said above? The Holy Spirit is the "Master of prayer." The best approach one can take, is to go to Our Lady, the Spouse of the Spirit, ("Wherever two or three are gathered in My Name, there AM I in the midst of them..." [St. Matthew 18. 20]), and simply, with the confidence of a child, *ask!*

There are also the fruits of the Holy Spirit that are ours by adoption (cf. Romans 8. 15). What are the fruits of the Holy Spirit and from where do they come? Fr. Lovasik points out:

"... the Gifts give rise to virtuous acts – good works, desires, and sentiments inspired in us by the Holy Spirit. In Galatians 5. 22, St. Paul enumerates twelve such Fruits: Love, Joy, Peace, Patience, Longanimity, Goodness, Benignity, Mildness, Fidelity, Modesty, Contenance, and Chastity." (4)

Let's let Fr. Lovasik explain what these Fruits of the Holy Spirit can do within us, if we surrender to the Spirit.

"When the soul is docile to the inspirations of the Holy Spirit, it becomes a good tree that is known by its Fruits: *As Jesus said: "You can tell a tree by its fruit..." (St. Matthew 7. 20)*

1. Love (Charity) means the Fruit found in those who are *wholly* committed and entirely delivered to the Holy Spirit's action. It consists in perfect love of God and neighbour.
2. Joy means the *intense* and intimate satisfaction that persons experience when they realize they are in possession of their Sovereign Good. They realize they are infinitely loved by the God of Love and, in turn, they love God with the power of their free will.
3. Peace is the quiet, *perfect* repose persons experience when they are wholly and perfectly submissive to the Divine Will.
4. Patience means lovingly and fully accepting the trials that the Divine Goodness sees fit to let a person undergo.
5. Longanimity consists in knowing how to wait, *feeling certain*, during trials, that God's moment will come, when He will fully aid the suffering person.
6. Goodness here means truly desiring the good of all our brothers and sisters in Christ and also that of all our friends and our enemies, making no exception of any kind. This is the love of *perfect goodwill*.
7. Benignity means to procure for your brothers and sisters in Christ, without any distinction of persons, *all the good* you are able to give them. It is the love of *beneficence*.
8. Mildness means bearing with gentleness and patience all the defects of others, without ever yielding to improper anger. It is lovingly accepting – *always* – such troublesome things.
9. Fidelity means *eagerly* rendering to all people everything you owe them. It is the *perfect* virtue of *justice*.
10. Modesty means *always* and in every circumstance keeping the just and *golden mean*, the proper measure, and never falling into contrary excesses.
11. Continenence means *fully* controlling the disorderly movements of one's sensible nature, in particular, the movements contrary to perfect chastity. This, then, is the *labourious* chastity of the soul that suffers temptations.
12. Chastity means perfect and *unalterable purity* when God, in His Mercy, wants to preserve a person, even from such temptations against the virtue of *chastity*. Such, certainly, was the chastity of Jesus and Mary.

The Fruits embellish the Christian life and dispose souls to hear what God wills for us. They can be practiced even in the presence of great temptations if we flee the occasion and remain steadfast, knowing that God's grace will never be lacking." (5)

I wonder, now that you have seen these lists of the gifts and fruits of the Holy Spirit, if you are feeling the same way I did the first time I saw them. *Good Heavens! There's no way on earth I could ever begin to do all those things! And that's the point!*

Think for just a moment. At the time of Pentecost, the Apostles were hiding behind a locked door – as if that would have held back the Roman soldiers had they wanted to apprehend those poor, frightened men. Neither did that locked door hold back the Holy Spirit, Who came in wind and flame!

What doors, I wonder, do you and I have, which might be trying to block the Holy Spirit, holding us back in our lives? St. Paul reminds us: *"To each individual"* – that's you and me! – *"the manifestation of the Spirit is given for some benefit."* (1 *Corinthians 12. 7*) Maybe, in looking at these lists of the gifts and fruits of the Spirit, after taking a deep breath, we might just ask:

'What do I need, Lord, to make the world a little bit warmer with Your fire?'

Did you notice the title of this article? *"... and ever o'er its Babel-sounds, the blessed Angels sing!"* Do you know where that line comes from? It is from the second verse of the famous Christmas carol, "It came upon the midnight clear." Why did I choose that title? Well, the first reading from last evening's vigil Mass was taken from the Book of Genesis. In that reading, Genesis 11, mankind was still speaking one language. Having become swollen with pride and arrogance, they thought that they might build a tower unto the Heavens *"to make a name for themselves..." (Genesis 11. 4)*

If we examine the lovely words of the old Christmas carol, we might begin to discover that this world, today, has become once again a *Babel*, sorely in need of purification, which only the Holy Spirit can give. But, the Holy Spirit can only do this if we *ask*... And I pose once again the treacherous question I asked last week. Don't you want more in your life? Are you really *satisfied* with the way everything is? Maybe it's just time... Well, anyway, take a look at the words of the old carol, and ponder...

"Still through the cloven skies They come, with peaceful wings unfurled,
And still Their Heav'nly music floats, o'er all the weary world;
Above its sad and lowly plains, They bend on hov'ring wing;
And ever o'er its Babel sounds, the blessed Angels sing.

Yet with the woes of sin and strife, the world has suffered long;
Beneath the Heav'nly strain have rolled two thousand years of wrong;
And man, at war with man, hears not the tidings which they bring;
O hush the noise, ye men of strife and hear the Angels sing." (6)

1. *Compendium of the Catechism of the Catholic Church*, USCCB, Washington, D.C., 2006, # 146, pg. 43
2. J. Forget, *Catholic Encyclopedia*, Robert Appleton Co., New York, vol. VII (on-line, courtesy of newadvent.org) from article *Holy Ghost*
3. *Ibid.*
4. Fr. Lawrence Lovasik, S.V.D., *Favorite Novenas to the Holy Spirit*, Catholic Book Publishing Co., New Jersey, pg. 46
5. *Ibid.*, pg. 47-48
6. "It came upon the midnight clear," vs. 2 & 3 of 5, English Melody adapted by Sir Arthur Sullivan, (1874), lyrics by Edmund Hamilton Sears (1846)