

GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT

For God has not given us a spirit of timidity, but of power and love and discipline.¹

You hear these words, quotes from the bible, and so many like them. “Put on the whole armour of God so that you may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.”² “I have fought an excellent fight; I have finished my race and I have kept my faith.”³ But what do these passages really mean to you? You don’t live in *that* world. You don’t talk about fighting the devil. You live in a world of social media. A world connected by technology. You fight *for* things – like clean air, safe drinking water, green products. You are *against* bullying and things that restrict your freedom. School takes up most of your days and in the evenings, you have hockey practice, soccer games and music lessons.

The things of our faith seem so old-fashioned, don’t they? Sacraments and prayer, for instance. What do they do for you? And spirituality – isn’t it something found in the movies, alluded to on talk-shows.

But, do you realize that all the things you fight for, all the things you are against and all the sports you play, are a part of your faith? The desire you have to protect our environment is a desire from God who created it. The anger you feel against bullying is the love you have for your neighbour which has been given to you by God. And the sports you play, the competitive spirit that drives you, comes from that same God – the one who has given you the drive – the desire – to win. Remember the words: fight the fight, run the race? Same virtues – different game.

Reflect now on your strengths. You have a sense of courage, standing up for the things you believe are right. Did you stand up for a friend? Did you defend an idea? You have knowledge and understanding of not just school work, but you get why someone might act the way they do. And you have wisdom enough to show respect for others around you. Certainly you know what is right and what is wrong. In most situations, you can usually determine the good and the bad.

Where do these strengths come from? Actually, they come from God. At baptism, you were freely given gifts from God, gifts which were accepted by your family and Godparents on your behalf. These gifts were virtues: wisdom, understanding, right judgement, courage, knowledge, reverence and awe. Up until now, and without you even knowing it, you have been counting on these virtues to help guide you through your day. Think about times when things have just gone right or something unexpectedly good happens. Think about when you have helped someone and surprised even yourself on how it happened. Those are God-moments. They are times when the Holy Spirit worked in your life and gave you strength to use the supernatural gifts that have always been yours.

Now through the Sacrament of Confirmation, you have the opportunity to accept these gifts on your own. But before you accept them, recognize how powerful they will be in your life. They are spiritual gifts which, once sealed in your heart, will always be there.⁴ It is up to you to use these gifts or not. And each time one of the gifts is used, the Holy Spirit strengthens it in your heart. So, with eyes wide open in the Sacrament of Confirmation, you will be accepting the gifts with a promise to use them to defend your faith and begin your journey towards holiness – becoming the best person you can be. “Virtues are the tools God uses to build the-best-version-of-ourselves.”⁵

Remember the things you stand up for, the things you fight against? Ask yourself: Do they help make me a better person? In years from now, will you look back and be proud of what you are doing? If you

were standing next to Jesus, would you be able to say “I knew you would want me to do that”? That’s why the gifts of the Holy Spirit are completed in you during Confirmation. You are mature enough to accept not only the gifts but the responsibility that comes with them. The responsibility to respond to the world in faith and truth. The responsibility to understand your role in making the world a better place because of your love for God.

Wisdom is given to you so that you may contemplate the things of God. Wisdom opens the doors for the Holy Spirit to lead you in what is right and what is wrong, and in what is good and bad in God’s eyes. Understanding gives you the confidence to walk in your faith while Knowledge gives you the ability to know which way you should turn to move closer to God. Close your eyes and imagine all the decisions you will make in your lifetime. Imagine the difficult ones which faith will help you to make. Ethical decisions about healthcare. Moral decisions about profit and social justice. Wisdom, Knowledge and Understanding are the gifts which will keep you on the path to holiness.

Now think about the gifts which will help you to stand firm in your faith. Already you can probably think of times when you have been challenged. Perhaps, it was an invitation to meet your friends in a place where you shouldn’t have been. Maybe, you went on a website you shouldn’t have seen because everyone else had seen it. The gift of Right Judgement opens your heart to the guidance of the Holy Spirit to know what is wrong and to defend your faith. And the gift of Courage helps you to square your shoulders and say the word ‘No’.

And finally, the last two gifts – Reverence and Awe – give you the strength to walk the talk. If you want to be a great basketball player, you practice basketball all the time. For ten years before Michael Jordan was a star player, he never went to bed at night until he had made 500 free throws.⁶ If you want to become a better person in the eyes of God, then you need to practice your faith. The gift of Reverence opens your heart to the desire to love and worship God and to do what is right because of that love. And the gift of Awe ensures that you make decisions that will not offend Him.

So, know that the sacraments and your faith are not old-fashioned. Even in this world of social media and high-tech industry, the gifts of the Holy Spirit provide us with the strength and guidance we need to become better people. Focus on God, use His gifts often and pray always to the Holy Spirit for guidance and strength.

“I can do everything through him who gives me strength.”⁷

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¹ 2 Timothy 1:7

² Ephesians 6:11

³ 2 Timothy 4:7

⁴ Ref: translated by Michael J. Miller, *Youcat English: Youth Catechism of the Catholic Church* (San Francisco, CA: Ignatius Press, 2011), Par 205.

⁵ Ref: Matthew Kelly, *Rediscover Catholicism: a Spiritual Guide to Living with Passion and Purpose*, New ed. (Maryland: Beacon Publishing, 2011), 314.

⁶ Ref: *Ibid*, 145.

⁷ Philippians 4:13