Lesson 10 – The Holy Spirits Gift of Piety

Questions:

What does it mean to receive the Gift of Piety?
How does the gift of piety impact the virtue of religion.
How does the gift of Piety predispose one to love others?
What is the difference between receiving the Gift of Piety and practicing norms of piety?
What are some norms of piety?
How can we grow in holiness through prayers to Our Lady?
Discuss the spiritual value of Marian practices of Piety?

Piety - One of the Gifts of the Holy Spirit:

Piety is one of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit enumerated in Isaiah 11:2-3. We receive the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit when we are infused with sanctifying grace, the life of God within us—as, for example, when we receive a sacrament worthily. As the current Catechism of the Catholic Church notes, "They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them." When we are infused with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as if by instinct, the way that Christ Himself would.

The Perfection of Religion:

Perhaps in none of the gifts of the Holy Spirit is this instinctual response more obvious than in piety. While wisdom and knowledge perfect the theological virtue of faith, piety perfects religion, which, as Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J., notes in his Modern Catholic Dictionary, is "The moral virtue by which a person is disposed to render to God the worship and service he deserves." Far from being drudgery, worship should be an act of love, and piety is the instinctive affection for God that makes us desire to render worship to Him, just as we voluntarily honor our parents.

Piety in Practice:

Piety, Father Hardon notes, arises "not so much from a studied effort or acquired habit as from a supernatural communication conferred by the Holy Spirit." People sometimes say that "piety demands it," which usually means that they feel compelled to do something that they don't want to do. But true piety makes no such demands but instills in us a desire always to do that which is pleasing to God (and, by extension, that which is pleasing to those who serve God in their own lives).
Why We Should Worship God:

Why do Christians need to worship? God does not need our worship; He is complete in Himself, even without receiving the worship of His creatures.

We, however, aren’t complete. In our fallen state, we have separated ourselves from God. Worship draws us closer to Him. When we worship Him, we imitate the angels and saints who surround His throne in heaven. We are drawn out of this life and catch a glimpse of the next. The Mass and the other liturgies of the Church are not mere human ceremonies or social hours; they are a participation in heaven here on earth.

Fulfilling Our Duty:

While worshiping God changes us for the better, the primary aim of our worship is not self-improvement. In the Liturgy of St. John Chrysostom, the liturgy used by many of the Eastern Rite Catholic churches, the priest at one point chants, “For to You is due all glory, honor, and worship, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, both now and ever, and unto ages of ages.”

While God doesn’t need our worship in order to be complete, our worship is still a duty—something that we owe to God. But it is a duty that we can perform cheerfully, knowing that, in doing so, we are participating briefly in the life of heaven.

Gifts of the Holy Spirit: Piety

Submitted by Fr. Robert McKeon on Sat, 07/11/2009 - 5:30pm. The Pastor's Pen

The sixth gift of the Holy Spirit given to a person in Confirmation is the gift of Piety which is “to give filial worship to God precisely as our Father and to relate with all people as children of the same Father.” Here a person shows reverence for God as a loving Father, and shows respect to others as children of God precisely because that is what they are. As such, the Gift of Piety perfects the virtue of justice, enabling the individual to fulfill his obligations to God and neighbor; the person is not only motivated by the requirements of strict justice but also by the loving relationship he shares with his neighbor. For example, we fulfill the commandments not simply because they are commandments but because of our love for the Heavenly Father and for our brothers and sisters in the Lord. Let us allow the Holy Spirit to develop piety in our hearts so that we will give God the worship, praise, respect and honor He is due as our loving Father and show respect and care for our neighbor as a child of God.
PIETY

1. Our reflection on the gifts of the Holy Spirit leads us today to speak of another important gift, piety. With it, the Spirit heals our hearts of every form of hardness, and opens them to tenderness towards God and our brothers and sisters.

Tenderness, as a truly filial attitude towards God, is expressed in prayer. The experience of one's own existential poverty, of the void which earthly things leave in the soul, gives rise to the need to have recourse to God in order to obtain grace, help and pardon. The gift of piety directs and nourishes such need, enriching it with sentiments of profound confidence in God; trusted as a good and generous Father. In this sense St Paul wrote: "God sent his Son,... that we might receive adoption. As proof that you are children, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, crying out, 'Abba, Father!' So you are no longer a slave but a son,..." (Gal 4: 4-7; cf. Rom 8: 15).

2. Tenderness, an authentically fraternal openness towards one's neighbor, is manifested in meekness. With the gift of piety the Spirit infuses into the believer a new capacity for love of the brethren, making his heart participate in some manner in the very meekness of the Heart of Christ. The "pious" Christian always sees others as children of the same Father, called to be part of the family of God which is the Church. He feels urged to treat them with the kindness and friendliness which are proper to a frank and fraternal relationship.

The gift of piety further extinguishes in the heart those fires of tension and division which are bitterness, anger and impatience, and nourishes feelings of understanding, tolerance, and pardon. Such a gift is, therefore, at the root of that new human community which is based on the civilization of love.

3. Let us ask the Holy Spirit for a renewed outpouring of this gift, entrusting our prayer to the intercession of Mary, sublime model of fervent prayer and maternal tenderness. May she, whom the Church salutes in the Litany of Loreto as the "Singular vessel of devotion", teach us to adore God "in spirit and truth" (Jn 4: 23) and to open ourselves with meek and receptive hearts to all who are her children, and therefore our brothers and sisters. Let us ask her in the words of the "Salve Regina", "...O clement, O loving, O sweet Virgin Mary!".
Our present conference is on the Blessed Virgin in our lives and more specifically on Marian practices of Piety. We have already said that devotion, in this case to the Blessed Virgin, is a composite of veneration, imitation and invocation. In our present conference we are concentrating on the third element of devotion to the Mother of God, namely invocation.

We might make the obvious observation that prayers to the Blessed Virgin are so typically Catholic as almost to identify Catholicism. The reason is that we believe that the Mother of God was the holiest human person who ever lived, keeping in mind that her Son is a divine Person. We further believe that a person’s influence with God, a person’s power of intercession with God, is in direct proportion to that person’s sanctity. Believing as we do that Mary, as the Mother of God, as full of grace, is the holiest of human persons, inevitably Catholic piety from the very beginning invoked Mary so that she in turn might intercede with her Son.

Father Gerald recommended especially the following forms of piety, in the sense of invocation of the Blessed Virgin. The first is the rosary; second, the examination of conscience; third, sacrifices in honor of the Blessed Virgin Mary.

**First Piety - Rosary**

We begin by asking ourselves, what is the rosary? In the devotional life of the Catholic Church, the history of the rosary is shrouded in the early centuries, in obscurity. We do know, however, that already in the first century Church, it had become customary to recite the Divine Office and more specifically the hundred and fifty Psalms. Over time, what we now call the Breviary was already practiced by the faithful laity. This Divine Office becomes part of the monastic and sacerdotal life, and indeed by the time of St. Benedict, the Divine Office as the Opus Dei was the center around which the whole monastic life revolved.

The Opus Dei, the work of God was the hundred and fifty Psalms, the total number known. Lay faithful, who could not recite the Divine Office for lack of education, instead recited what we in time called the rosary. Father Gerald uses the expression - it came to be known as the laymen’s’ breviary, the hundred and fifty Psalms corresponding to the hundred and fifty Hail Mary’s, on the complete rosary.

It was the Dominican Order of Preachers, they did not inaugurate the rosary, but under St. Dominic and his followers, made the recitation of the rosary among the faithful the most powerful way in which the Church can intercede through Mary to God, especially for protection against errors, the heresies and the calamities that threaten the Catholic Church. We speak of the rosary as so many invocations, and they are.
We repeat the Hail Mary. I think it is well to realize that the efficacy of the rosary, other things being equal, depends upon the depth of the awareness and the realization that we have when we not only recite the Hail Mary but try to be conscious and aware, at least mentally, of the mystery on which we are reflecting. That is why I strongly recommend following the directives of St. Ignatius that we periodically take time out during the year and meditate at some length on the specific vocal prayers that we recite in the rosary. This will help to obtain the graces that God wants to give to us and to the world through Mary.

Christ Himself, remember, warned us not to just multiply prayers and not be aware of what we are saying. What is the dogmatic content of the rosary? There is the Apostles Creed, the Our Father, there are the Gloria’s and there are, especially, the Hail Mary’s. Father Gerald, if anything, is lavish, extravagant, in his insistence on the daily recitation of the rosary, first of all by priests so they in turn might encourage the faithful to recite the rosary daily. However the degree of invocative power which vocal prayers have is in direct proportion to our awareness in mind and heart of what we are saying when we are praying.

It does not mean of course that we have to be mentally conscious and even theologically reflective on every word that we are saying when we are saying it. But this is why St. Ignatius wants us, when we give the Spiritual Exercises, to urge the retreatants to periodically meditate on the meaning of their vocal prayers. On the first level of reflection may I strongly recommend that you spend a half hour or an hour, or more, slowly meditating on every significant word: Hail Mary - pause - what am I saying? What do I mean? Then I apply what my mind has found in the meaning of the words of the prayer to myself. The same with the Lord’s Prayer, the same with the Apostles Creed, the same with the Gloria.

However, the rosary is also a series of meditations. I believe the surest way of insuring that our rosaries will be meditative is to introduce each decade, with at least a momentary pause; picture to myself the scene, or place before my mind’s eye the mystery.

When I say to myself or in the company of others, the first Joyful Mystery, the Annunciation, I at least momentarily reflect. The reflection can be in our imagination, our intellect or both. The Annunciation is the Incarnation. Then, depending upon the grace that God gives to me, some people find it easier to just vocalize the words and concentrate on the mystery. Some people, as I have just indicated, meditate for a moment as the mystery is introduced and then reflect on what they are saying.

But I wish to emphasize the efficacy of our prayer first of all comes from the very fact that we are praying. However, other things being equal, the more my mind and my will are involved in what I am praying when I am praying the rosary, the more graces for myself and others, Our Lady will obtain.
Second Piety - Examination of Conscience

Second Marian practice recommended by Father Gerald. St. Ignatius made what we now call the examination of conscience one of the critical essentials of the spiritual life. His biographers tell us that when our men were sick in bed or bogged down with all kinds of responsibilities, Ignatius might dispense his followers from other practices of piety but the examination of conscience, never! Including Jesuits on their death bed.

Ignatius himself, methodically, we are told, made the examination of conscience seven times a day. He spared his followers; we are only required to make it twice a day, fifteen minutes each time. I want to tell you, I have been doing it over the years. What surprised me regarding Father Gerald's approach to the examination of conscience is that he made it so unabashedly Marian. This will be a long quotation with periodic pauses. Father Gerald begins with a premise that:

The Mother of God, now gloriously assumed into heaven, is aware of our moral conduct. Her eyes rest upon us day by day, hour by hour, for it is a mother's privilege and duty to watch over her sons and daughters. And now from the high heaven she watches over the world and in particular over the Christian world.

The particular genius of Father Gerald relative to the examination of conscience is that he saw it as an examination of conscience which is made with the full awareness that not only Christ her Son, but Mary, His Mother, has been watching over us and that when we make the examination of conscience, we are aware of His presence and hers. Again, the Marian focus:

For one who is willing to face the facts honestly, it would make a very searching and penetrating examination of conscience, to ask himself, ‘Have I brought joy or sorrow or have I even made it necessary for the Mother of God to turn her eyes from me this day?’

What can we mean if we say as Father Gerald asks; "Have I brought joy or sorrow, have I even made it necessary for the Mother of God to turn her eyes from me this day?" Can Mary be sorrowful now? Can Our Lady be sad now? Can the Blessed Virgin experience pain now?

Can we now cause Our Lady sorrow or pain? Is Mary gloriously assumed into heaven? Does she behold the Face of God? Is Our Lady now in heaven perfectly happy? Can Our Lady in her physical person now in heaven, experience sorrow or pain?

I think I can safely say we are now contributing to Christ's sorrow and agony, the sorrow, and agony he felt in the first century in Palestine, when he died for ALL sin. Can we say that we contributed to Mary's sorrow? Yes, Our Lady, no less then her Son, identifies herself with the members of her Son's Mystical Body? Remember what Christ told Saul on the way to Damascus. "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me"?
Is there a sense in which Our Lady, as Mother of the Mystical Body, is suffering in the members of this Body while physically, she is no longer capable of pain? Yes! Only in heaven will we know or, better, on the last day, the day of final judgment for the whole universe will it be revealed, on the one hand, the benefits and blessings from the good actions we have performed, the blessings and benefits over the centuries that have come to perhaps untold millions, and correspondingly, whatever we do which is against the Will of God - hear it! - always has an impact on the whole world.

Back to the examination of conscience, there is no such thing as sinning in isolation, consequently there is a deeply mystical sense in which both her Son and she are suffering and are enduring pain, not in their own physical persons but in the Mystical personality of all those whom Christ has identified with Himself.

The examination of conscience is one of the standard practices or norms of piety of the spiritual life. It is one of the ways for the soul who is truly in earnest to make any progress – a way to check out that progress. If we’re runners we would carefully check our time for our daily trial runs, so too, the spiritual person will check over his daily life in earnest, his record, his score sheet.

I like the work sheet. We were trained from the novitiate, to never make an examination of conscience without putting something on paper. My friends, it is more humiliating to look at something than to just think of something. “The eyes of Mary would make a very practical, very searching way of making that check”.

Was she happy over it? Did she see my distractions? Our Blessed Mother saw my Mass - saw you participating in it and mine saying it. Did it leave her happy? And so on through the day. Oh how supremely well a person whether priests, religious or lay believers would have to live to say honestly; “I’ve held the smile in Our Lady’s eyes all day, over my soul.”

**Third Piety - Sacrifices in Honor of Mary**

The highest faculty we have as human beings is our will enlightened by the mind. The highest use to which we can place our free will is to pray. The highest form of prayer is adoration of the Infinite God. And the highest form of adoration is offering sacrifice to God. When Father Gerald speaks of making sacrifices in honor of Mary, he means exactly what he says. We do not offer sacrifices to Our Lady, frankly, we cannot. Only God may be adored and only toward Him may we offer sacrifice. But that is not what Father Gerald is talking about. We offer sacrifice indeed to Mary’s Son who is her God and ours, but it helps immensely to offer these sacrifices to the Son of God in honor of, after the example of, and inspired by, the Mother of God.

What is the highest form of sacrifice? Mary is our perfect model. **The highest form of sacrifice is the surrender of our free will to the Will of God.** Our Lady simply declared; “Be it done to me according to Thy Word”.

What are we saying? We are saying that the Blessed Virgin by her total submission to the Will of God, as occurred at the Annunciation, is giving us the pattern and the way that we should offer sacrifice to her Son who is God, but after the example of His Mother, who surrendered her will to God.
And because of her total sacrifice she was privileged to become the Mother of God. Had it not been for Mary's submission to the Will of God at the Annunciation - well, there might have been an Annunciation but there would not have been an Incarnation. The Incarnation of the Son of God, we believe, was the consequence of Mary's total sacrifice of her free will. To whom? To the God who made her. To the God who invited her to become His Mother.

**Piety and the Types of Prayer (from Catechism)**

I. **BLESSING AND ADORATION**

2626 *Blessing* expresses the basic movement of Christian prayer: it is an encounter between God and man. In blessing, God's gift and man's acceptance of it are united in dialogue with each other. The prayer of blessing is man's response to God's gifts: because God blesses, the human heart can in return bless the One who is the source of every blessing.

2627 Two fundamental forms express this movement: our prayer *ascends* in the Holy Spirit through Christ to the Father - we bless him for having blessed us; it implores the grace of the Holy Spirit that *descends* through Christ from the Father - he blesses us.

2628 *Adoration* is the first attitude of man acknowledging that he is a creature before his Creator. It exalts the greatness of the Lord who made us and the almighty power of the Savior who sets us free from evil. Adoration is homage of the spirit to the "King of Glory," respectful silence in the presence of the "ever greater" God. Adoration of the thrice-holy and sovereign God of love blends with humility and gives assurance to our supplications.

II. **PRAYER OF PETITION**

2629 The vocabulary of supplication in the New Testament is rich in shades of meaning: ask, beseech, plead, invoke, entreat, and cry out, even "struggle in prayer." It's most usual form, because the most spontaneous, is petition: by prayer of petition we express awareness of our relationship with God. We are creatures who are not our own beginning, not the masters of adversity, not our own last end. We are sinners who as Christians know that we have turned away from our Father. Our petition is already a turning back to him.

2630 The New Testament contains scarcely any prayers of lamentation, so frequent in the Old Testament. In the risen Christ the Church's petition is buoyed by hope, even if we still wait in a state of expectation and must be converted anew every day. Christian petition, what St. Paul calls "groaning," arises from another depth, that of creation "in labor pains" and that of ourselves "as we wait for the redemption of our bodies. For in this hope we were saved." In the end, however, "with sighs too deep for words" the Holy Spirit "helps us in our weakness; for we do not know how to pray as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with sighs too deep for words."

2631 The first movement of the prayer of petition is *asking forgiveness*, like the tax collector in the parable: "God, be merciful to me a sinner!" It is a prerequisite for righteous and pure prayer. A trusting humility brings us back into the light of communion between the Father and his Son Jesus Christ and with one another, so that "we receive from him whatever we ask." Asking forgiveness is the prerequisite for both the Eucharistic liturgy and personal prayer.
Christian petition is centered on the desire and search for the Kingdom to come, in keeping with the teaching of Christ. There is a hierarchy in these petitions: we pray first for the Kingdom, then for what is necessary to welcome it and cooperate with its coming. This collaboration with the mission of Christ and the Holy Spirit, which is now that of the Church, is the object of the prayer of the apostolic community. It is the prayer of Paul, the apostle par excellence, which reveals to us how the divine solicitude for all the churches ought to inspire Christian prayer. By prayer every baptized person works for the coming of the Kingdom.

When we share in God's saving love, we understand that every need can become the object of petition. Christ, who assumed all things in order to redeem all things, is glorified by what we ask the Father in his name. It is with this confidence that St. James and St. Paul exhort us to pray at all times.

III. PRAYER OF INTERCESSION

Intercession is a prayer of petition which leads us to pray as Jesus did. He is the one intercessor with the Father on behalf of all men, especially sinners. He is "able for all time to save those who draw near to God through him, since he always lives to make intercession for them." The Holy Spirit "himself intercedes for us . . . and intercedes for the saints according to the will of God."

Since Abraham, intercession - asking on behalf of another has been characteristic of a heart attuned to God's mercy. In the age of the Church, Christian intercession participates in Christ's, as an expression of the communion of saints. In intercession, he who prays looks "not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others," even to the point of praying for those who do him harm.

The first Christian communities lived this form of fellowship intensely. Thus the Apostle Paul gives them a share in his ministry of preaching the Gospel but also intercedes for them. The intercession of Christians recognizes no boundaries: "for all men, for kings and all who are in high positions," for persecutors, for the salvation of those who reject the Gospel.

IV. PRAYER OF THANKSGIVING

Thanksgiving characterizes the prayer of the Church which, in celebrating the Eucharist, reveals and becomes more fully what she is. Indeed, in the work of salvation, Christ sets creation free from sin and death to consecrate it anew and make it return to the Father, for his glory. The thanksgiving of the members of the Body participates in that of their Head.

As in the prayer of petition, every event and need can become an offering of thanksgiving. The letters of St. Paul often begin and end with thanksgiving, and the Lord Jesus is always present in it: "Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you"; "Continue steadfastly in prayer, being watchful in it with thanksgiving."

V. PRAYER OF PRAISE

Praise is the form of prayer which recognizes most immediately that God is God. It lauds God for his own sake and gives him glory, quite beyond what he does, but simply because HE IS. It shares in the blessed happiness of the pure of heart who love God in faith before seeing him in glory. By praise, the Spirit is joined to our spirits to bear witness that we are children of God, testifying to the only Son in whom we are adopted and by whom we glorify the Father. Praise embraces the other forms of prayer and carries them toward him who is its source and goal: the "one God, the Father, from whom are all things and for whom we exist."
VATICAN CITY, 7 SEP 2011 (VIS) - This morning Benedict XVI continuing a series of catecheses on the subject of "the school of prayer", the Holy Father turned his attention to Psalm 3 which recounts David's flight from Jerusalem when Absalom rose against him. "In the Psalmist's lament", the Pope said, "each of us may recognise those feelings of pain and bitterness, accompanied by faith in God, which, according the biblical narrative, David experienced as he fled from his city".

In the Psalm, the king's enemies are many and powerful, and the imbalance between David's forces and those of his persecutors "justifies the urgency of his cry for help". Nonetheless his adversaries "also seek to break his bond with God and to undermine the faith of their victim by insinuating that the Lord cannot intervene". Thus, the aggression "is not only physical, it also has a spiritual dimension" aimed at "the central core of the Psalmist's being. This is the extreme temptation a believer suffers: the temptation of losing faith and trust in the closeness of God", the Holy Father said.

Yet, as the Book of Wisdom says, the unrighteous are mistaken because "the Lord ... is like a shield protecting those who entrust themselves to Him. He causes them to raise their heads in sign of victory. Man is no longer alone ... because the Lord hears the cry of the oppressed. ... This intertwining of human cry and divine response is the dialectic of prayer and the key to reading the entire history of salvation. A cry expresses a need for help and appeals to the faithfulness of the other. To cry out is an act of faith in God's closeness and His willingness to listen. Prayer expresses the certainty of a divine presence which has already been experienced and believed, and which is fully manifested in the salvific response of God".

Psalm 3 presents us "a supplication replete with faith and consolation. By praying this Psalm we share the sentiments of the Psalmist: a just but persecuted figure which would later be fulfilled in Jesus. In pain, danger and the bitterness of misunderstanding and offence, the words of this Psalm open our hearts to the comforting certainty of faith. God is always close, even in times of difficulty, problems and darkness. He listens, responds and saves.

"However", the Pope added, "it is important to be able to recognise His presence and to accept His ways: like David during his humiliating flight from his son Absalom, like the persecuted righteous of the Book of Wisdom and, finally and fully, like the Lord Jesus on Golgotha. In the eyes of the unrighteous it appeared that God did not intervene and that His Son died, but for believers it was at that precise moment that true glory was manifested and definitive salvation achieved".

The Pope concluded: "May the Lord give us faith, may He come in aid of our weakness and help us to pray in moments of anguish, in the painful nights of doubt and the long days of pain, abandoning ourselves trustingly to Him, our shield and our glory".