The Gifts of the Holy Spirit are without question great gifts essential for our sanctification and salvation. Each baptized and confirmed Christian should implore the Holy Spirit to inflame in his soul these gifts. Our Holy Father, Pope John Paul II said, "With gifts and qualities such as these, we are equal to any task and capable of overcoming any difficulties."

Given this basis, traditionally the seven gifts are listed as fear of the Lord, piety, knowledge, understanding, counsel, wisdom and fortitude. In the Old Testament, seven is the number of perfection, plentitude and covenant.

First, the term "gift" needs to be clarified. They are properly termed "gifts of the Holy Spirit" because the Holy Spirit bestows them. Therefore, they are supernatural gifts operating in a supernatural mode or manner. These are not gifts one simply invokes in times of emergency; rather, these gifts are present to the person as long as he remains in a state of sanctifying grace. As such, these gifts help a person attain sanctification and bring to perfection virtues, both the theological virtues (faith, hope and charity) and the infused virtues (prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance).

The idea here is that these gifts help a person to share in the very life and nature of God, now in this life and for eternal life. In this sense, as St. Thomas Aquinas asserted, they are in the fullest sense "habits," from the Latin habitus, signifying their indwelling presence and operation. The Catechism underscores this point: "The moral life of Christians is sustained by the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These are permanent dispositions which make man docile in following the promptings of the Holy Spirit.... They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations" (No. 1830-31).

The basic definitions which follow are quoted from several different sources. Moreover, the order followed was composed by Pope St. Gregory the Great, who tried to capture the spiritual dynamic which the Holy Spirit imparts to the soul through these gifts: "Through the fear of the Lord, we rise to piety, from piety then to knowledge, from knowledge we derive strength, from strength counsel, with counsel we move towards understanding, and with intelligence towards wisdom and thus, by the sevenfold grace of the Spirit, there opens to us at the end of the ascent the entrance to the life of Heaven" (Homiliae in Hiezechihelem Prophetam, II 7,7).
FEAR OF THE LORD

The Gift of Fear of the Lord enables the person "to avoid sin and attachment to created things out of reverence and love of God." Primarily, this gift entails a profound respect for the majesty of God who is the Supreme Being. Here, a person realizes his "creatureliness" and dependency upon God, and never would want to be separated from this loving God. This gift of fear arouses in the soul a vibrant sense of adoration and reverence for the majesty of God and a sense of horror and sorrow for sin.

This gift is sometimes misunderstood because of the word fear. The fear referred to here is not a servile fear whereby a person serves God simply because he fears punishment, whether some sort of temporal punishment in this life or the eternal punishment of Hell. A genuine relationship with God is based on love, not fear. Therefore, this "fear of the Lord" is a filial or reverential fear which moves a person to do God's will and avoid sin because of love for God, who is all good and deserving of all of our love. In a similar way, a child should not be motivated to obey a parent's moral guidance or commands simply because of fear of punishment, but because of love and respect. One should fear hurting a loved one and violating that person's trust, more than one should fear punishment. (Nevertheless, one should have a healthy sense of fear for the punishment due to sin, even though this should not be the motivating factor for loving God.)

The Gift of Fear brings to perfection primarily the virtue of hope: a person respects God as God, trusting in His will and anchoring his life on Him. Moreover, he wants to be joined with God forever in Heaven. This gift is also the launch pad for the other gifts: As Sacred Scripture attests, "Happy the man who fears the Lord, who greatly delights in His commands" (Psalm 112:1) and "The beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord" (Sirach 1:12).

Secondly, this gift also perfects the virtue of temperance, which seeks to use all things wisely, and in moderation, not to the excess, especially those sensible pleasures. With reason enlightened by faith, temperance controls the passions. Temperance is related to the Gift of Fear because one's awareness and respect for the sanctity of God motivates a person as a creature to give glory to God by being temperate in actions and desires. For example, chastity is a virtue of temperance which respects the goodness of one's own sexuality, the sanctity of marriage, and the sanctity of marital love; a person moved by the Gift of Fear strives to live a chaste life because God is the creator of those goods and such a life gives glory and praise to Him.

* Fear the Lord (Wonder and Awe): With the gift of fear of the Lord we are aware of the glory and majesty of God. A person with wonder and awe knows that God is the perfection of all we desire: perfect knowledge, perfect goodness, perfect power, and perfect love. This gift is described by Aquinas as a fear of separating oneself from God. He describes the gift as a "filial fear," like a child's fear of offending his father, rather than a "servile fear," that is, a fear of punishment. Also known as knowing God is all powerful. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom (Prov 1:7) because it puts our mindset in its correct location with respect to God: we are the finite, dependent creatures, and He is the infinite, all-powerful Creator.
Fear of the Lord

The gift of fear of the Lord confirms in those who have it the virtue of hope and infuses profound respect for God’s glory and selfless love for God. It protects from sin through dread of offending God.

This gift has nothing to do with servility or fear of punishment. We express fear of the Lord in a perfect Act of Contrition.

The gift of fear of the Lord fills us with a sovereign respect for God, and makes us dread, above all things, to offend Him.

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PIETY

Through the Gift of Fear, the person rises to the Gift of Piety: "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 respects 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.

Piety (Reverence): With the gift of reverence, sometimes called piety, we have a deep sense of respect for God and the church. A person with reverence recognizes our total reliance on God and comes before God with humility, trust, and love. Piety is the gift whereby, at the Holy Spirit's instigation, we pay worship and duty to God as our Father, Aquinas writes.

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Piety

The gift of piety perfects the virtue of justice toward God. It infuses an instinctive love for God and devotion to those who are consecrated to God. Piety arises from the Holy Spirit’s supernatural communication, rather than from effort or acquired habit.
The gift of piety enables those who have it to see God as a loving Father. St. Paul told us, Rom 8:14 “All who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God. For you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship. When we cry, ‘Abba! Father!’ it is the Spirit himself bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God.”

The gift of piety also infuses in those who have it an affectionate obedience to God because they love Him so much.

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.

**KNOWLEDGE**

Knowledge is the gift that enables a person "to judge rightly concerning the truths of faith in accordance with their proper causes and the principles of revealed truth." Under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, the human intellect makes correct judgments regarding earthly things and how they are related to eternal life and Christian perfection. As such, this gift is a special illumination, which enables the person to realize the emptiness of created things in themselves so that they do not become roadblocks to union with God.

At the same time, it enables the person to see through created things to the God who created them. Therefore, instead of seeing created things as obstacles to union with God, the soul views them as instruments for union with God. As such, a person sees how to use created things rightly and even in a holy way. Moreover, the gift gives to the person a sense of faith, sensus fidei, meaning that the person has a divine instinct about whether or not something, like a devotion, is in accord with the faith even though he may never have had a formal theological education. This gift produces several effects which have great value for sanctification of the soul: introspection, enabling the person to see the state of his soul; detachment from material things; and repentance for the misuse of material things or when they have been allowed to become obstacles to God. St. Thomas taught that the Gift of Knowledge brings to perfection the virtue of faith, but is linked also to the perfection of prudence, justice and temperance.

**Knowledge**: With the gift of knowledge, we understand the meaning of God. The gift of knowledge is more than an accumulation of facts.

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

*With the Gift of Fortitude, a person is able "to overcome difficulties or to endure pain and suffering with the strength and power infused by God." As with the other gifts, fortitude operates under the impulse of the Holy Spirit, and gives strength to the person to resist evil and persevere to everlasting life. This gift brings the virtue of fortitude to perfection, charging it with energy, perseverance and promptness. Moreover, it brings a confidence of success to the virtue. For example, St. Maximilian Kolbe not only had great fortitude to offer promptly his life in exchange for another and to endure a horrible death, but also had the confidence of success that he would overcome the powers of evil and gain everlasting life. Lastly, the Gift of Fortitude enables the individual to live the other virtues heroically, to suffer with patience and joy, to overcome all lukewarmness in the service of God.*

*Fortitude* (Courage): With the gift of fortitude/courage, we overcome our fear and are willing to take risks as a follower of Jesus Christ. A person with courage is willing to stand up for what is right in the sight of God, even if it means accepting rejection, verbal abuse, or even physical harm and death. The gift of courage allows people the firmness of mind that is required both in doing good and in enduring evil, especially with regard to goods or evils that are difficult, just like Joan of Arc did.

**Fortitude**

The virtue of fortitude, or courage, is firmness of spirit, steadiness of will in doing good despite obstacles in the performance of our daily duty. It suppresses inordinate fear and curbs recklessness. Because fortitude also moderates rashness, it is the special virtue of pioneers in any field.

Fortitude is the obverse of temperance. Where temperance limits inordinate desire for major pleasures such as food and drink or the marital act, fortitude limits inordinate rashness and fear in the face of major pain that threatens to unbalance human nature.

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

**COUNSEL**

*The Gift of Counsel is "to render the individual docile and receptive to the counsel of God regarding one's actions in view of sanctification and salvation."* Primarily, this gift enables a person to judge individual acts as good and ought to be done, or as evil and ought to be avoided. The counsel is made in view of one's own personal sanctification and one's ultimate supernatural end.
Therefore, this gift prompts the person to ask himself, "Will this act lead to holiness? Will this act lead to Heaven?"

Clearly, this gift is linked with the virtue of prudence; however, while the virtue of prudence operates in accord with reason as enlightened by faith, the Gift of Counsel operates under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Consequently, the counsel given may be that which reason would not be able to give an explanation. For example, using the example of St. Maximilian Kolbe, such an act of self-sacrifice for another is the right thing to do but does not necessarily follow the normal, reasonable course of self-preservation.

Also, counsel can deal with the immediacy of the situation. For example, through the Gift of Counsel, the Holy Spirit helps a person in a dilemma reconcile the necessity of guarding a secret with the obligation of speaking the truth. Counsel aids the virtue of prudence, and brings it to perfection. This gift also has great effects: preserving a good conscience, providing solutions to difficult and unexpected situations, and helping to give counsel to others, especially in matters of personal sanctification and salvation.

**Counsel** (Right Judgment): With the gift of counsel/right judgment, we know the difference between right and wrong, and we choose to do what is right. A person with right judgment avoids sin and lives out the values taught by Jesus. The gift of truth that allows the person to respond prudently, and happily to believe our Christ the Lord

**Counsel**

The gift of counsel perfects in those who have it the virtue of prudence. It enables them to judge promptly and rightly, as by supernatural intuition, what should be done in difficult situations. It primarily enhances one’s own prudent conduct, and only secondarily that of others.

The Holy Spirit speaks to the heart through the gift of counsel and shows those who have it what to do. Christ gave His followers a gift like counsel when He told them, Mt 10:19 “When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.”

**UNDERSTANDING**

Understanding is a gift "to give a deeper insight and penetration of divine truths held by faith, not as a transitory enlightenment but as a permanent intuition." Illuminating the mind to truth, The Holy Spirit aids a person to grasp truths of faith easily and intimately, and to penetrate the depths of those truths.
This gift not only assists in penetrating revealed truths, but also natural truths in so far as they are related to the supernatural end.

The essential quality of this gift is a "penetrating intuition" - in a sense, the moving beyond the surface. This gift, penetrating the truths of faith, operates in several ways: disclosing the hidden meaning of Sacred Scripture; revealing the significance of symbols and figures (like St. Paul seeing Christ as fulfillment of the rock of the Exodus account that poured forth water to quench the thirst of the Israelites (1 Cor 10:4); showing the hand of God at work in a person's life, even in the most mysterious or troublesome events (like suffering); and revealing the spiritual realities that underlie sensible appearances (like penetrating the mystery of the Lord's sacrifice in the ritual of the Mass).

This gift brings the virtue of faith to perfection. Accordingly, St. Thomas said, "In this very life, when the eye of the spirit is purified by the gift of understanding, one can in a certain way see God" (Summa theologiae II-II, q. 69, a. 2, ad. 3).

**Understanding:** In understanding, we comprehend how we need to live as a follower of Jesus Christ. A person with understanding is not confused by all the conflicting messages in our culture about the right way to live. The gift of understanding perfects a person's speculative reason in the apprehension of truth. It is the gift whereby self-evident principles are known, Aquinas writes

**Understanding**

The gift of understanding gives to the mind of those who have it a charisma for apprehending Christ’s public revelation easily and profoundly.

More specifically, the gift of understanding helps those who have it penetrate to the heart of revealed truth even when they do not fully understand its entire meaning. It gives great confidence in the revealed word of God and leads those who have it to reach true conclusions from revealed principles.

Understanding is greater than faith. Faith is assent to the defined articles of Catholic teaching. Understanding goes farther because it gives insight into these defined articles of belief. The gift of wisdom exceeds the gift of understanding in that it shows us God’s perspective.

**WISDOM**

The last of the seven gifts is that of **Wisdom:** "to judge and order all things in accordance with divine norms and with a connaturality that flows from loving union with God." The Holy Spirit aids the contemplation of divine things, enabling the person to grow in union with God. With this gift, even an "uneducated
soul" can possess the most profound knowledge of the divine. For example, St. Therese of Lisieux had no formal education in theology, and yet was wise to the ways of the Lord; for this reason, she has been declared a Doctor of the Church. While this gift contemplates the divine, it is also a practical wisdom. It applies God's ideas to judge both created and divine matter. Consequently, it also directs human acts according to the divine.

This gift has great effects: With this gift a person will see and evaluate all things - joy and sorrow, pleasure and pain, success or failure - from God's point of view, and accept them with equanimity. With Wisdom, all things, even the worst, are seen as having a supernatural value. For example, the Gift of Wisdom gives value to martyrdom. Here a person arises above the wisdom of this world, and lives in the love of God. For this reason, the Gift of Wisdom brings to perfection charity.

**Wisdom**: With the gift of wisdom, we see God at work in our lives and in the world. For the wise person, the wonders of nature, historical events, and the ups and downs of our lives take on deeper meaning. The matters of judgment about the truth, and being able to see the whole image of God. We see God as our Father and other people with dignity. Lastly being able to see God in everyone and everything everywhere.

**Wisdom**

The gift of wisdom leads the soul of those who have it to see things from God’s perspective. Wisdom is fullness of knowledge through affinity for the divine, as when a person comes to know Christ’s Passion through suffering. It is also love, which inspires contemplative reflection on what we believe and directs the mind to judge according to its precepts. The gift of wisdom supplements the virtue of faith and shields us against folly.

The virtue of charity is part of wisdom; it inspires contemplative reflection on the divine mysteries, enjoys thinking about them, and directs the mind to judge all things according to their right principles.

Wisdom is distinct from faith. Faith is assent to the defined articles of Catholic belief. Wisdom goes farther to a certain divine penetration of these truths. Wisdom is first and highest among the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

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