

LESSON 6 - THE HOLY SPIRIT'S GIFT OF COUNSEL

Questions:

- 1.) Explain how the Gift of Counsel differs from the virtue of Prudence. Give examples.
- 2.) Describe a moral situation that required the Gift of Counsel in order to respond to a situation in accordance with Christ's teachings. What did you do?
- 3.) How can we grow in receiving and using the Gift of Counsel?
- 4.) What are the two major rewards are gained by receiving the Gift of Counsel?
- 5.) How can the Gift of Counsel effect your life as a Christian?

Gift of Counsel

Edited talk given by Fr. John A. Hardon, S.J.

What is the Gift of Counsel? This gift belongs to the virtue of prudence. What does it do? **The Gift of Counsel enables a person to judge promptly, correctly and intuitively.** What should be done in a difficult situation? The Gift of Counsel perfects, and elevates, the virtue of prudence.

I would like to compare the Virtue of Prudence with the Gift of Counsel. And I have three levels of comparison. For prudence, we **reflect**, we think, before we act. **The Gift of Counsel does not excuse us from being prudent.** But, the Gift of Counsel is more than just prudence. When I'm prudent, I reflect, I think before hand. With the Gift of Counsel, **instantly, I know what I should do.** This Gift of Counsel is real!

Secondly, with the Virtue of Prudence, I **analyze**. In other words, I look into the situation. The more important the action, the more analysis or reflection I should give before I act. In the case of the Gift of Counsel, Our Lord says when they are questioning you, putting you on trial, testing and persecuting you; **"Take no thought on what you are to say, it shall be given to you what you are to say"**.

In other words, there are emergencies in all of our lives; you've got to make a decision. But I'm not ready. Well, **trust the Holy Spirit!** You must be willing to do God's will. That is why the Gift of Counsel is priceless! **There is one important condition, the disposition of my soul. I must always want to do God's will.**

The Apostles, especially St. Peter, had to deal with difficult decisions that arose right from the beginning; they didn't consult each other...no...they knew what to do immediately.

This Gift of Counsel, is not only for counseling myself, it is also the Gift of Counsel for others. You're only as effective, in using this gift for others, as we are faithful in following this gift in our own lives".

In other words, counsel is a definite, specific, particular, directive. The Holy Spirit is non-vague. And the spiritual life is not lived in vague generalities; it is lived specifically, concretely, and with complete trust in the Holy Spirit. And the more closely we are united with Him, the more we can go through life and do the most humanly impossible things, wisely and correctly, because we are being guided by the Spirit of God.

The Gift of Counsel is especially necessary for giving others direction and giving ourselves discrimination. Who needs the Gift of Counsel? Everybody! Especially, Bishops, Priests, and Superiors. Without this Gift, there is no assurance of doing what God wants. Without the Gift of Counsel, there would be nothing but confusion.

What is lacking is our obtaining God's grace and then using the grace that Christ won for us by his death on Calvary. Two free wills redeem the world. First, the free will of Christ, who became man to have a free will, and then the submission of our free will to His will.

The Gift of Counsel is necessary in the more important decisions of life. There is need for discrimination. We must depend more than ever before, on the Gift of the Holy Spirit to counsel us. To tell us what we should do in a given situation. This includes the assurance that what we are doing is pleasing to God. Nothing is more important than to depend on the Holy Spirit. **Consult Him; ask Him, "What should I do." And then trust Him!**

The deepest decisions of our lives are not external decisions. "What kind of work do I do? Or how should I do it?" The deepest decisions are deep down inside of our souls. And these are decisions which no human being can tell you what to do. There must be an intimacy with God; a closeness of the Holy Spirit. And living as much as we can in His presence, so that the decisions we make, interiorly, is not advice, **the Holy Spirit does not give just advice. The Holy Spirit gives directives.** And that is what we call the Gift of Counsel. **In the last analysis, our first, principle and primary Spiritual Director, is the Holy Spirit.**

How can we grow in this Gift of Counsel; first....develop deep personal humility. The more humble a person is, the more active and effective will be the Gift of Counsel. Never, never, cherish a self admiring thought. Never admire yourself in your own eyes. The mind is the most dangerous mirror. The most dangerous pride is how we look into ourselves. I admire myself....oh...how smart I must be!

Second...develop the sense of my own weakness and ignorance. You've got to grow in learning, realizing how stupid and weak we are! It takes time. How do we grow in this Gift of Counsel? **We keep asking our Lord. "Show me Lord, your ways and teach me your paths". Keep asking our Lord. "Lord, tell me what to do next. What to think next". Because the most important part of our lives are our thoughts. Every thought, unless we control it, becomes a desire. Every desire, unless we control it, becomes an action. Every action, unless we control it, becomes a habit.**

Jesus preached nothing but the truth. And He practiced nothing but charity. This is the mark of being an authentic follower of Christ. Proclaiming what Christ taught and paying the consequences. Not being accepted by the world. **Lord Jesus, give us, be beg you, the grace to know the truth, to live the truth, and to proclaim the truth.** But you know us. You know how weak we are! What compromisers we are! What conformists we are! How terrified we are, not to be accepted by others! Give us, we beg you, the grace to follow your example and live the truth, proclaim the truth, and if it is Your will, to die for the truth, Amen.

We must use our free will in obtaining the graces that Christ won. How? In three ways; by prayer, by the sacraments and by doing good works. These are the three basic ways in which we obtain grace from God. We must put those graces to use. In other words, we must cooperate with the graces. And that's what St. Paul means when he says that we are to make up what is lacking. What's lacking? **Our cooperation!**

THE GIFT OF 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 for which reason alone 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.**

THE GIFT OF COUNSEL

It is given to the Christian to enlighten the conscience in moral choices which daily life presents.

A need that is keenly felt in our days, disturbed by many crises and by a widespread uncertainty about true values, for "reconstructing consciences". That is to say, one is aware of the necessity of neutralizing certain destructive factors which easily find their way into the human spirit when it is agitated by passions, and of introducing healthy positive elements into it.

In this commitment to moral restoration the Church must be, and is, in the forefront; hence the prayer that arise: from the hearts of her members - of all of us - to obtain especially the help of light from on high. The Spirit of God responds to this plea through the gift of Counsel, by which He enriches and perfects the virtue of prudence and guides the soul from within, enlightening it about what to do,

especially when it is a matter of important choices (for example, of responding to a vocation), or about a path to be followed among difficulties and obstacles. In fact experience confirms that "the deliberations of mortals are timid, and unsure are our plans", as the Book of Wisdom says (9:14).

The gift of Counsel acts like a new breath in the conscience, suggesting to it what is licit, what is becoming, what is more fitting for the soul (cf. St Bonaventure). Thus the conscience becomes like the "healthy eye" of which the Gospel speaks (*Mt* 6:21), an eye which acquires, as it were, a new pupil, by means of which it is able to see better what to do in a given situation, no matter how intricate and difficult. Aided by this gift, the Christian penetrates the true meaning of gospel values, in particular those expressed in the Sermon on the Mount (cf. *Mt* 5:7).

Let us therefore ask for the gift of Counsel! Let us ask for it for ourselves and, in particular, for the pastors of the Church, so often called, by the demands of their work, to make arduous and agonizing decisions. Let us ask for it through the intercession of her who, in the litany, is greeted as "Mater Boni Consilii", Mother of Good Counsel.

The Perfection of Prudence:

Counsel is the perfection of the cardinal virtue of prudence. While prudence can be practiced by anyone, whether in a state of grace or not, it can take on a supernatural dimension through the gift of sanctifying grace. Counsel is the fruit of this supernatural prudence.

Like prudence, counsel allows us to judge rightly what we should do in a particular circumstance. It goes beyond prudence, though, in allowing such judgments to be made promptly, "as by a sort of supernatural intuition."

Counsel in Practice:

Counsel builds on both wisdom, which allows us to judge the things of the world in light of our final end, and understanding, which helps us to penetrate to the very core of the mysteries of our faith.

"With the gift of counsel, the Holy Spirit speaks, as it were, to the heart and in an instant enlightens a person what to do." **It is the gift that allows us as Christians to be assured that we will act correctly in times of trouble and trial.** Through counsel, we can speak without fear in defense of the Christian Faith. Thus, the Catholic Encyclopedia notes, **counsel "enables us to see and choose correctly what will help most to the glory of God and to our own salvation."**