

LESSON 8 – THE HOLY SPIRIT’S GIFT OF KNOWLEDGE

QUESTIONS:

What is the Gift of Knowledge?

How does Knowledge differ from Wisdom and Understanding?

How is Knowledge similar to the Gift of Counsel?

How can Knowledge be applied to our daily lives?

How does Knowledge effect the sanctification of your soul?

What goal does Knowledge seek to obtain for us?

I The Gift of Knowledge

In our world there are as many opinions as there are people (if not more!), and when it comes to questions of religion we find that even in the Church we can hear voices of dissent and confusion that would pull us away from God’s Truth. How can we know what we need to believe, and how to assess things according to Faith? **One grace God gives us to enable us to make a complete and penetrating assent (agreement) to the truth of faith is the Gift of Knowledge.** The Gift of Knowledge is a perfection of the human mind that **disposes us to follow the impulses of the Holy Spirit when we judge human or created things in relation to God.** Through the Gift of Knowledge, the Holy Spirit guides our judgment so that we can recognize created things—especially human thoughts, words, inclinations, circumstances, and deeds—in the light of Faith.

The Gift of Knowledge, when operative, is concerned with differentiating between what is and is not consistent with Faith. By this Gift, God enables us to recognize when a human and temporal thing—a plan, a practice, an idea—ought to be received as consistent with the revealed truth or not.

Unlike God himself, whose knowledge is “sheer and simple,” instantaneous and perfect, our human knowledge depends on a process of reasoning and logical progress. We naturally need examples, arguments, diagrams, evidence, illustrations, instruction, and many other helps before we can ever know anything with certainty—and, of course, we can make mistakes.

God, on the other hand, judges the truth of all things by a simple and utterly infallible insight. And shockingly enough, he wants to impart a share of that capacity to us. Through the Gift of Knowledge, the Holy Spirit blesses us with the ability to know and judge in an enhanced way that resembles, to some extent, the perfect knowledge of God.

The believer in whom the Gift of Knowledge is active will recognize, when confronted with facts, ideas, circumstances, or any created being, what is in harmony with the truths of Faith. **This Gift operates, then, as a kind of supernatural instinct for discerning the authentic and the inauthentic in all that pertains to God and to our salvation. The Gift of Knowledge keeps the saints—those who truly love God—from falling into errors and confusion in faith and morals.**

As Saint Thomas Aquinas explains, although Faith itself touches on what is divine and eternal (that is, God), the act of believing is a temporal and created event in the mind of the believer. Our ideas about God, even when true, are not the same as God himself. This is why a particular Gift is needed for dealing with them here and now. Knowledge provides a means by which we can conform our beliefs to the truth of Faith, thus bringing us confidence and certainty in questions that concern the practical and theoretical judgments of religion.

In his explanation of Knowledge, Saint Thomas observes that ignorance is never entirely removed from us except by the input of two kinds of knowledge: theoretical knowledge and practical knowledge. The Spirit's **Gift of Knowledge is both theoretical and practical at the same time.** First and foremost, **it is engaged with contemplation, illumining a believer to know what he or she ought to hold by faith.** Therefore, pure truth remains the gift's main concern.

However, the Gift of Knowledge also, and **in a secondary way, considers what we do and what we think about—since our practical, active life and works should be directed by the knowledge of divine truth, the matters of faith, and the conclusions to be drawn from them.** Knowledge, then, also prevents us from being misled with regard to the moral life and in practical matters that bear on the Faith.

We witness the efficacy of the Gift of Knowledge in the holiness of the saints. **Through the outpouring of the Spirit's grace, the saints possessed sure judgment in all matters of faith and practice so that they never strayed from the straight paths of justice and right faith.** The Holy Spirit calls us to the same kind of holiness, and provides for it in his Gift of Knowledge.

Unfortunately, though, we fall. How well we know the temptation to pursue evil things as if they were truly good, enriching, and satisfying for us. When we pursue evil under an appearance of good, it inevitably turns on us and betrays us. The very things we had hoped to master, instead master us. We become infatuated with evils (masquerading as goods!) and are robbed of our authentic freedom. **The created things we mistakenly trust to fulfill us instead become tragic occasions for our turning away from God. Saint Thomas considers these pitfalls—these created things that we mistakenly seek and love as if they would fulfill us—and likens them to idols, which, as Scripture says, “have become abominable amid God's works, snares for the souls of men and a trap for the feet of the senseless” (Wisdom 14:11).**

The Gift of Knowledge gives us the supernatural good sense to keep our feet out of those snares. The office and function of the Gift of Knowledge is to pass a right judgment about created things so as to purify and perfect our relationship with God. Creaturely things can never stir us to spiritual delight unless they are enjoyed in their fitting and proper relation to the Divine Good. In a special way, the Spirit's **Gift of Knowledge helps us to come to this right judgment about created things.** It helps make us **aware of the deadly loss created things may occasion when we stake our happiness on them.** And it helps us to maintain a right and holy relation between God's uncreated Goodness and **the things of creation that are designed to lead us to divine Goodness.** The Gift of Knowledge instills in us solid sense of balance, proportion, and judgment.

For this reason, Saint Thomas relates the Gift of Knowledge to the Beatitude of mourning (Matthew 5:5). In this he relies on the insight of Saint Augustine, who observed that knowledge befits those who mourn, that is, those **people who have learned a hard lesson by the difficulty of defeat they experience whenever they seek evil things as goods. Saint Thomas reminds us how precious is the knowledge we gain from our mistakes.** True, it fills us with sorrow for what we have done wrong. But at the same time it gives us true consolation, for our regret over past failings finally persuades us to accept the created things in our life in the way that God would have us accept them: not making idols out of them, but using them in God's Providence to lead us more surely into his love. The right judgment of Knowledge comforts us by assuring us how created things are ordered to divine Good.

Saint Thomas says that the comfort effected by the Gift of Knowledge begins now but will be complete only in heaven. Therefore, while this Gift presently on earth overcomes the hunger of ignorance, only in heaven will the gift manifest its real mettle. For there it is destined to fill and satisfy

the mind with a complete and perfect certainty not of faith, but of vision—for in heaven, we shall see God.

II KNOWLEDGE

1. The reflection which leads us today to speak of another gift, the gift of Knowledge, by which we are granted to know the true value of creatures in their relationship to the Creator.

We know that modern man, precisely because of the development of the sciences, is particularly exposed to the temptation to give a naturalistic interpretation to the world. Before the manifold magnificence of things, their complexity, variety and beauty, he runs the risk of absolutizing and almost divinizing them to the extent of making them the supreme purpose of his very life. This happens especially when it is a matter of riches, pleasure and power, which indeed can be drawn from material things. These are the principal idols before which the world too often prostrates.

2. In order to resist such subtle temptations and to remedy the pernicious consequences to which they can lead, the Holy Spirit aids people with the gift of Knowledge. **It is this gift which helps them to value things correctly in their essential dependence on the Creator. Thanks to it, as St Thomas writes, man does not esteem creatures more than they are worth and does not place in them the end of his life, but in God** (ct. "Summa Theol.". II-II, q. 9, a. 4).

He thus discovers the theological meaning of creation, seeing things as true and real, although limited, manifestations of the Truth, Beauty, and infinite Love which is God, and consequently he feels impelled to translate this discovery into praise, song, prayer, and thanksgiving. This is what the Book of Psalms suggests so often and in so many ways. Who does not recall some instances of this raising of the soul to God? "The heavens are telling the glory of God; and the firmament proclaims his handiwork" (*Ps* 18 [19]:2; cf. *Ps* 8:2). "Praise the Lord from the heavens, praise him in the heights.... Praise him, sun and moon, praise him, all you shining stars!" (*Ps* 148:1, 3).

3. Enlightened by the gift of Knowledge, **man discovers at the same time the infinite distance which separates things from the Creator, their intrinsic limitation, the danger that they can present, when, through sin, he makes improper use of them.** It is a discovery which leads him to realize with remorse his misery and impels him to turn with greater drive and confidence to him who alone can fully satisfy the need of the infinite which assails him.

This was the experience of the saints. However, in a very special way this was the experience of Our Lady who, by the example of her personal journey of faith teaches us to travel "among the events of the world, having our hearts fixed on where true joy resides" (Prayer of the Twenty-first Sunday in Ordinary Time).

III The Gift of Knowledge.

To know or not to know, that is the question today. The cultural norm is to doubt the existence of truth unless it is proven by the scientific method. If there is objective reality, there is a stoic assumption that we cannot know what it is. Like Pilate when he answered Jesus claim, "I came to give witness to the truth," many today might retort, "Truth? What is that?" People have reason to be confused. Information overload is hard to deal with: we may become skeptics, trusting nothing (like Pilate); or we could equally become ideologues, willing only to listen to and believe certain sources and points of view and shut out all the rest.

We need the gift of knowledge from the Holy Spirit. More than merely possessing and sorting information, **the knowledge given by God's Spirit goes beyond words.** A good metaphor for this is becoming a mother. No matter how much you read about motherhood or observe other mothers, until you become pregnant, wait and hope for nine months, give birth and nurse that tiny baby, you don't really *know* what being a mother is. Motherhood is experiential. You feel it and know it in the very cells of your body! It grows with you and becomes part of your identity. In the same way, the Spirit's gift of knowledge is an *experiential taste of the truth of God's existence and love.* Luke's gospel alludes to this saying God gives us "knowledge of salvation" (Luke 1:77). This is not an intellectual, argument-convincing knowledge, but a gut-wrenching, life-changing, exultant knowledge that compels us to sing God's praise. It is the spark of the spiritual life. It allows us to walk the path of faith and persevere, because, as Peter said to Jesus with such conviction, "Lord, to whom shall we go? You alone have the words of everlasting life!"

If God did not reach out to us with the gift of knowledge, we would remain in a darkness and ignorance that lead to despair. **The gift of knowledge feeds hope. It makes us rejoice in what God has done in creating us and promising us a share in the love and life of God offered to all.** Sometimes people of faith think it is our job to "convince" others about the truth of God. But we must be careful to remember that this kind of knowledge is a gift. That is why, after we respectfully offer the reason for our faith we must preach primarily by our actions and our own walk of faith. This will dispose the hearts of others to receive the gift of knowledge far more than fancy arguments, and once they are disposed, the Spirit will rush in.

The Spirit's gift of knowledge gives our whole life a character of dedicated perseverance to what we know to be true. **We may falter, sin, fall or get side-tracked, but the Spirit guides us back, saying softly: here is the knowledge of truth; embrace it and thus embrace yourself and all creation.**

It is a great consolation to know that we and our children are called to live in the light: "by the tender mercy of our God, the dawn from on high will break upon us, to give light to those who sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace" (Luke 1:78-79).

IV Knowledge.

By the Gift of Knowledge, the Holy Spirit enlightens us with an inner light, that we may know ourselves and discern the snares of self-love, of our passions, of the devil and of the world, and may choose the fittest means to overcome them. By this Gift, the Holy Spirit illuminates us more and more as He lets His Divine light stream into our hearts and enlightens us with regard to revealed truths and the duties we have to fulfill. **The known truth appears to us in a clearer light than it could be perceived by our own intelligence.** This is the knowledge of the Saints that surpasses all worldly knowledge, "coming down from the Father of lights." (James 1:17). Even created nature is made an open book wherein we read God and His perfections.

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.

V Knowledge

The fifth gift of the Holy Spirit, knowledge, is often confused with both wisdom and understanding. Like wisdom, knowledge is the perfection of faith, but whereas wisdom gives us the desire to judge all things according to the truths of the Catholic Faith, knowledge is the actual ability to do so. **Like counsel, it is aimed at our actions in this life. In a limited way, knowledge allows us to see the circumstances of our life the way that God sees them. Through this gift of the Holy Spirit, we can determine God's purpose for our lives and live them accordingly.**

- 1) Wisdom and knowledge are distinguished according to their objects. Wisdom pertains to God and the things of God. Knowledge pertains to created things and how they relate to our final end.
- 2) Understanding too, meant here as the Gift of Understanding has a rather specific focus: It penetrates revealed truth to grasp its fullest meaning. Hence one may understand Spanish, but we are not referring to the Gift of Understanding in speaking this way. To grasp the purpose, meaning and implications of the redemption wrought by Jesus Christ would be a more proper usage of this word in terms of the Gift of Understanding.

OK, How about some Definitions. Incidentally, these definitions are gleaned from the Summa and also substantially from Fr. Antonio Royo Marin O.P. in his Book, The Great Unknown, The Holy Ghost and His Gifts

- 1) **The Gift of Knowledge** is a supernatural habit infused by God through which the human intellect, under the illuminating action of the Holy Spirit, judges rightly concerning created things as ordained to the supernatural end. **Notice that it is a habit.** That is, it does not come and go. But like all habits, it can and does grow in depth and breadth. Grace builds on nature, and as one matures and gains experience the Gift can and does make use of these human qualities. Because the gift is supernatural it is not a matter of human or philosophical knowledge deduced by natural reason. In other words you don't go to school to get this gift. However, it is not unrelated to human development which school can provide. But this is not its origin. **There are plenty of learned and humanly smart people who do not manifest the Gift of Knowledge. This can be due to a lack of faith or to resistance caused by weak faith and sin.** By the Gift of Knowledge the human intellect apprehends and judges created things by a certain divine instinct. The individual does not proceed by laborious reasoning but judges rightly concerning all created things by a kind of superior gift that gives an intuitive impulse. I have underlined "created things" because this

essentially distinguishes knowledge from wisdom (which pertains to Divine, rather than created things). Notice that the Gift is especially oriented to created things insofar as they pertain to our ultimate end. **Now created things tend either toward our supernatural end or away from it and the Gift of Knowledge helps us to judge rightly in this respect.** Looked at another way, the Gift of Knowledge **helps us to apply the teachings of our faith to the living of daily life,** the proper usage of material creation, knowing the proper utility and value of things as well as their dangers and misuses. By it we are able to determine well what conforms to faith and what does not. We are able to make use of creation in a proper way with necessary detachment and proper appreciation for what is truly good.

- 2) **The Gift of Wisdom** is a supernatural habit, inseparable from charity, by which we judge rightly concerning God and divine things under the special instinct of the Holy Spirit who makes us taste these things by a certain intuition and sympathy. In other words **The truths of God begin to resonate with us and we begin to instinctively love what God loves, will what God wills.** What he is and wills makes great sense to us. His teachings clarify and make sense. **We see things increasingly from God's point of view through this supernatural gift.** The thinking of the world increasingly seems as folly and appreciation of God's Wisdom magnifies. More and more through this gift the human person desires to be in union only with God and His ways. By this gift the world is defeated and its folly clearly perceived. Our love of neighbor is also perfected by it since the Gift of Wisdom helps us to see and thus love others more and more as God sees and loves them. **Since this is a gift, it cannot be learned or acquired. But, as with the Gift of Knowledge, one's study of Scripture and Tradition can help dispose one for the growth of the Gift which can and does make use of what is humanly supplied. Grace builds on nature.**
- 3) **The Gift of Understanding** is a supernatural habit, infused by God with sanctifying Grace, by which the human intellect, under the illuminating action of the Holy Spirit, is made apt for a penetrating intuition of revealed truths, and even of natural truths so far as they are related to the supernatural end. **It enables the believer to penetrate into the depths of revealed truth and deduce later by discursive thinking the implicit conclusions contained in these truths.** It discloses the hidden meaning of Sacred Scripture. It reveals to us the spiritual realities that are under sensible realities and so that the smallest religious ceremonies carry tremendous significance. It makes us see causes through their effects simply and intuitively. This gives a profound appreciation for God's providence.

VI Knowledge

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