

SECOND SUNDAY OF ADVENT; Cycle – A; Dec. 8, 2019
Isaiah 11:1-10; Romans 15:4-9; Matthew 3:1-12

When big events are approaching, people start worrying about a lot of things and how to prepare for them. Many of us are already engrossed in the preparation for Christmas. A good number have sent out their Christmas cards, and Christmas shopping is already in full swing. Others are engrossed on deciding what gifts to give while children are busy deciding what they want to get from their godparents. Many of us have an excitement as we look forward to the Big Day. This is why the Church offers us the season of Advent, to refocus us on the gifts that really matter – the ones given to us at baptism.

In the first reading, the Prophet Isaiah said the coming Messiah would be animated by God's own Spirit and possess seven gifts that we now call the gifts of the Holy Spirit. We have been filled with these gifts also at our baptism, and given a booster shot at confirmation. Therefore, we must not be distracted looking for new gifts, but rather dust off our God-given gifts. So today let us go through each of the sevenfold gifts given by the Holy Spirit at our Baptism and Confirmation.

The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit are Wisdom, Understanding, Counsel, Fortitude, Knowledge, Piety, and Fear of the Lord. They belong in their fullness to Christ, Son of David. They complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them. They make the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations. (CCC, 1831)

Wisdom: This helps us see God at work in our lives and in the world. St. Thomas Aquinas said wisdom is the view from the hilltop – in other words, a higher perspective. The child saint, Therese of Lisieux, living in 19th century France, innocently asked God if there was an elevator to Him. The answer she received was yes, and this elevator was the very arms of God waiting to pick her up. In crowds, parents often pick up their children and place them on their shoulders. Then children gain a new vantage point, seeing the world from their parent's perspective. The same is true with the gift of wisdom which enables us to see the world through the eyes of the Creator and view His plan for creation.

Understanding & knowledge: St. Augustine said these two gifts help us appreciate the holy things of God. In other words, we are able to see that things of this world are passing; therefore, we look for the permanency of God. Material things are like counterfeits or mirages, we must look beyond them. If we seek the Divine, then seek the primary paths He gave us, namely the sacraments and prayer. These are true avenues of growth.

Counsel: Thomas Aquinas defines this gift as; “allowing a man to be directed by God in matters necessary for his salvation”. This helps us discern the difference between right and wrong. This gift is a moral rudder to steer around the reefs that will shipwreck our soul. It helps us determine what type of spiritual person we want to be and guides us there. Our goal must be sainthood for they are the only citizens of Heaven!

Fortitude (Strength): Being a follower of Christ involves risks and hardships. This gift provides us with the capacity to do the good in the face of opposition. Practicing fortitude is like getting off the inner tube in the lazy river at the water park and walking against the current. It means living counter cultural and enables us to say ‘no’ when necessary. Christians have to take a stand for something or risk falling for anything.

Piety: This gift conveys reverence and respect for God and the Church. Simply put, it means to “*know what we owe to God.*” Piety involves reorienting our lives back to God. We do this at Mass by giving praise and worship and in our prayer by practicing gratitude and obedience.

Fear of the Lord (Wonder and Awe): With this gift we realize that God is all we have or ever will desire. Period. This is not fear that God will hurt us, but fear that we will hurt our relationship with God. This is the child that avoids doing something wrong out of fear of disappointing his or her parents. Every parent has high hopes for their child’s future, and God’s ultimate hope is that we return to Him, forever.

No matter what we hope lies under the tree on Christmas morning, our Creator has already bestowed on us seven gifts of utmost importance. They help us listen for God’s voice and direction. These gifts of the Holy Spirit are modeled in the life of Jesus and we will one day be asked by the gift giver, namely God, how we used our seven gifts. Let us pray for the grace during this advent season to answer Him, we are good stewards of the God given gifts.