

The gifts of the Holy Spirit (4/7):

The gift of counsel

"Speak, O Lord; your servant listens" (1 Sam 3:9).

The Holy Spirit reminds us of all that Jesus said and did (cf. Jn 14:26). He dwells in us and teaches us what to do in the concrete situations of our lives. Thanks to the gift of counsel, we become able to perceive within us the quiet voice of the Holy Spirit and to distinguish it from other voices. However, this requires the capacity for inner silence and a willingness to detach ourselves from the hustle and bustle and chaos of so many different opinions and points of view, both outside and inside us.

By practising the virtue of prudence, we have learned to see everything from God's perspective. However, because of the imperfection of our nature, there remains the uncertainty of whether we are really able to distinguish the voice of the Holy Spirit from our own thoughts or other voices. The action of the Holy Spirit within us is rather gentle and quiet, like a gentle breeze (cf. 1 Kgs 19:11-12). As we become more familiar with him, we learn to distinguish his voice more accurately. However, we need an increasing inner freedom, so that we are not so trapped in our own views, desires and illusions that the delicate voice of the Spirit cannot penetrate us. We need this inner light, which enables us to grasp in an instant the Will of God.

Normally the path of following Christ presents us many opportunities to ask the Holy Spirit for concrete advice. Even if many things in our lives are predetermined and regulated, there will always be situations in which we do not know for sure what is right, what decision to make, what is best... It is then that we can ask ourselves how the Lord would act in this situation, and then we will know what to do. Especially if we are at the beginning of our spiritual journey or if we are not yet so used to addressing the Holy Spirit concretely, we should frequently ask him for advice, so that we can get to know his way of guiding us better.

If we do not clearly understand his answer, inasmuch as we do not have any concrete inner impulse or do not receive a particular light for the given situation, then we act according to what the virtue of prudence dictates to us.

We need not fear that we will become strange and feel particularly "enlightened" if we start asking for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. On the contrary! This should be the norm in the Christian life, even if it has often been lost in practice.

It is often said that the light of the Holy Spirit is accompanied by an inner peace, with the assurance that we are doing the right thing. This is certainly true! But inner peace is not to be confused with a mere relaxation of the situation. We will have to go a long way until this God-given gift can work, and until we become familiar with it. As with all the other gifts of the Holy Spirit, we must first strive to practise the virtue that corresponds to this gift, which in this case is prudence, in order to prepare the ground for the work of the Spirit.