

# LOOKING THROUGH STAINED GLASS



## A Column by Fr. Tom



### Gifts of the Holy Spirit - Part 7: Fear of the Lord - Don't Be Scared, It's Only Me, God

"The LORD, your God, shall you fear; him shall you serve, and by his name shall you swear." [Deut. 6:31] When we consider the Gift of Fear of the Lord, we might first ask, "Why would anyone consider *fear* a gift?" As we have seen with many terms before, the definition that the Church uses for Fear is different than the common definition.

According to *The Merriam-Webster Dictionary*, fear has two major definitions: "(1) an unpleasant often strong emotion caused by anticipation or awareness of danger; OR (2) profound reverence and awe, especially toward God." [Merriam-Webster Dictionary, "fear"] As we can see from these definitions, the first definition is the more common usage, and the second would be the one used by the Church.

However, we may recall that the Hebrew Scriptures (Old Testament) show many examples of people who show trepidation at the Lord, not just reverence. For example, when Moses was standing in front of the burning bush, "God said, 'Do not come near! Remove your sandals from your feet, for the place where you stand is holy ground. I am the God of your father,' he continued, 'the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob.' Moses hid his face, for he was afraid to look at God." [EX 3:5-6] However, later, after the Exodus, Moses has a different idea of God, for he says to the people, "Do not be afraid, for God has come only to test you and put the fear of him upon you so you do not sin." [EX 20:20] By the time Jesus is born, God encourages the people not to be afraid of Him, such as when the Angel Gabriel says to Mary at the Annunciation, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God." [LK 1:30] Later, Jesus says to

His disciples, when walking on the water, "Take courage, it is I; do not be afraid." [MT 14:27]

One of the most surprising characteristics of Fear of the Lord may be that it emanates from Love. It is God's love for us as a father loves His children that leads us to reverence (i.e. Fear of the Lord). Pope Francis explains it this way: "When we are pervaded by fear of the Lord, then we are led to follow the Lord with humility, docility and obedience. This, however, is not an attitude of resignation, passivity or regret, but one of the wonder and joy of being a child who knows he is served and loved by the Father." [Papal Audience, June 11, 2014, vatican.va.] Fear of the Lord helps us to respond in love to God who loves us as Our Father.

Fear of the Lord also confirms the Virtues of Faith and Hope as it helps us to realize that we must rely on God's grace. The Holy Father continues his reflection by saying, "Fear of the Lord allows us to be aware that everything comes from grace and that our true strength lies solely in following the Lord Jesus and in allowing the Father to bestow upon us his goodness and his mercy." [*Ibid.*]

As we have seen from these columns on the Gifts of the Holy Spirit, God gives us these Gifts in order that we may love Him and one another better.

Next week, we will explore the Fruits of the Holy Spirit, which are traditionally considered as charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, and chastity.