

WISDOM-April 9, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

We begin today a series of catechesis on the gifts of the Holy Spirit. You know that the Holy Spirit constitutes the soul, the vital lymph of the Church and of every individual Christian: He is the Love of God who makes our heart His dwelling and enters into communion with us. The Holy Spirit is always with us, in us, in our heart.

The Spirit himself is “the gift of God” par excellence (cf. John 4:10), He is a gift of God who in turn communicates different spiritual gifts to one who receives Him. The Church singles out seven, a number which symbolically means fullness, completeness; they are those that are learned when we prepare ourselves for the Sacrament of Confirmation and which we invoke in the ancient prayer called the Sequence of the Holy Spirit. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are: wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord.

1. According to this list, the first gift of the Holy Spirit is, therefore, wisdom. However, it is not simply about human wisdom, which is the fruit of knowledge and experience. The Bible recounts that Solomon, at the moment of his crowning as King of Israel, asked for the gift of wisdom (cf. 1 Kings 3:9). And wisdom in fact is this: It is the grace to be able to see everything with the eyes of God. It is simply this: to see the world, to see situations, circumstances, problems, everything with God’s eyes. This is wisdom. Sometimes we see things according to how they please us or according to the situation of our heart, with love or with hatred, with envy ... No, this is not God’s eye. Wisdom is what the Holy Spirit does in us so that we see all things with God’s eyes. This is the gift of wisdom.

2. And this obviously stems from intimacy with God, from the intimate relationship that we have with God, from the relationship of children with the Father. When we have this relationship, the Holy Spirit gives us the gift of wisdom. When we are in communion with the Lord, it is as if the Holy Spirit transfigures our heart and makes it perceive all His warmth and predilection.

3. Then the Holy Spirit renders the Christian “wise.” This, however, not in the sense that he has an answer for everything, that he knows everything, but in the sense that he “knows” of God, he knows how God acts, he knows when something is of God and when it is not of God; he has this wisdom which God gives to our hearts. In this sense, the heart of the wise man has the taste and flavor of God. And how important it is that such Christians be in our communities! Everything in them speaks of God and becomes a beautiful and living sign of His presence and His love. And this is something we cannot improvise, which we cannot acquire by ourselves: It is a gift that God gives those who are docile to the Holy Spirit. We have the Holy Spirit within us, in our heart; we can listen to Him or not listen to Him. If we listen to the Holy Spirit, He teaches us this way of wisdom, He gives us wisdom which is to see with God’s eyes, to hear with God’s ears, to love with God’s heart, to judge things with God’s judgment. This is the wisdom that the Holy Spirit gives us, and we can all have it, we only need to ask the Holy Spirit for it.

Think of a mother at home with the children, that when one does something, the other thinks of something else, and the poor mother goes from one place to the other with the problems of the children. And when mothers are tired and shout at the children, is that wisdom? To shout at children – I ask you – is that wisdom? What do you say: is it wisdom or not? No! Instead, when the Mother picks up the child and reproves him gently and says to him: “This isn’t done because ...”, and she explains it to him with much patience, is this the wisdom of God? Yes! It is what the Holy Spirit gives us in life! Then in marriage, for instance, the two spouses – the husband and the wife – quarrel, and then they don’t look at each other, or if they do look at one another they do so with a cross face: is this the wisdom of God? No! Instead they say: “well, the storm has passed, let’s make peace,” and they begin again to go forward in peace: is this wisdom? [the people: Yes!] See, this is the gift of wisdom. May it come to the home, may it come with the children, may it come with all of us!

And this is not learned: it is a gift of the Holy Spirit. Therefore, we must ask the Lord to give us the Holy Spirit and the gift of wisdom, that wisdom of God that teaches us to look with God’s eyes, to feel with God’s heart, to speak with God’s words. And so, with this wisdom we go forward, we build the family, we build the Church, and we are all sanctified. Let us ask today for the grace of wisdom. And let us ask Our Lady, who is the Seat of Wisdom, for this gift: may she give us this grace. Thank you!

UNDERSTANDING-April 30, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning.

After having examined wisdom as the first of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, today I would like to point attention to the second gift, namely, understanding. It is not about human understanding, about an intellectual capacity with which we can be more or less gifted. Instead, it is a grace which only the Holy Spirit can infuse, and which arouses in the Christian the ability to go beyond the external aspect of reality and scrutinize the depth of God’s thought and of His plan of salvation.

Addressing the community of Corinth, the Apostle Paul describes well the effects of this gift – that is, what the gift of understanding does in us, and Paul says this: “What no eye has seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived, what God has prepared for those who love him, God has revealed to us through the Spirit” (1 *Corinthians* 2:9-10). This obviously does not mean that a Christian can understand everything and have full knowledge of God’s plans: all this remains to be manifested in all its limpidness when we find ourselves in the presence of God and we are truly one with Him. However, as the word itself suggests, the intellect makes possible “*intus legere*,” that is, “to read within:” this gift makes us understand things as God understands them, with God’s understanding. Because one can understand a situation with human understanding, with prudence, and that is okay. However, to understand a situation in depth, as God understands it is the effect of this gift. And Jesus willed to send us the Holy Spirit so that we would have this

gift, so that we can all understand things as God understands them, with God's understanding. It is a beautiful gift that the Lord has given all of us. It is the gift with which the Holy Spirit introduces us into intimacy with God and renders us participants in his plan of love for us.

It is clear, then, that the gift of understanding is *closely connected to faith*. When the *Holy Spirit* dwells in our heart and illumines our mind, He makes us grow day after day in *understanding what the Lord has said and has fulfilled*. Jesus himself said this to his disciples: I will send you the Holy Spirit and He will make you understand what I have taught you: to understand Jesus' teachings, to understand his Word, to understand the Gospel, to understand the Word of God. One can read the Gospel and understand something, but if we read the Gospel with this gift of the Holy Spirit we can understand the depth of God's words. And this is a great gift, a great gift which we all must pray for and pray for together: Give us, Lord, the gift of understanding.

There is an episode in Luke's Gospel which expresses very well the depth and strength of this gift. After having witnessed the death on the cross and burial of Jesus, two of his disciples, disappointed and dismayed, leave Jerusalem and return to their village called Emmaus. While they were on their way, the risen Jesus comes alongside them and begins to talk with them, but their eyes, veiled by sadness and despair, are unable to recognize him. Jesus walks with them, but they are so sad, so desperate, that they do not recognize him. However, when the Lord explains the Scriptures to them, to make them understand that he had to suffer and die to then rise again, *their minds are opened and hope is rekindled in them* (cf. Luke 24:13-27). And this is what the Holy Spirit does with us: He opens our mind, he opens us to understand better, to understand better the things of God, human things, situations, everything.

The gift of understanding is important for our Christian life. Let us ask the Lord to give us, to give all of us this gift to understand, as He understands, the things that happen and to understand, above all, the Word of God in the Gospel. Thank you.

COUNSEL-May 7, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning!

In the reading of the Book of Psalms we heard the passage that says: "I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me" (Psalm 16:7). And this is another gift of the Holy Spirit: the gift of counsel. We know how important it is, in the most delicate moments, to be able to count on the suggestions of wise persons who love us. Now, through the gift of counsel, it is God Himself, with his Spirit, who illumines our heart, to make us understand the right way to speak and to behave and the way to follow. But, how does this gift act in us?

The moment we receive Him and host him in our heart, the Holy Spirit begins immediately to make us sensitive to his voice and to direct our thoughts, our sentiments and our intentions according to God's heart. At the same time, he leads us increasingly to turn our interior gaze on

Jesus, as model of our way of acting and of relating to God the Father and to our brothers. Counsel, therefore, is the gift with which the Holy Spirit renders our conscience capable of making a concrete choice in communion with God, according to the logic of Jesus and of his Gospel. In this way, the Spirit makes us grow interiorly, he makes us grow positively, he makes us grow in the community and helps us not to fall prey to egoism or our own way of seeing things. Thus the Spirit helps us to grow and also to live in community. The essential condition to preserve this gift is prayer. We always come back to the same subject: prayer! But prayer is so important. To pray with the prayers that we all know from childhood, but also to pray with our own words. To pray to the Lord: "Lord, help me, counsel me, what must I do now?" And with prayer we make room for the Spirit to come to help us at that moment. To counsel us on what we must all do. Prayer, never forget prayer! Never! No one, no one is aware when we pray in the bus, in the street: we pray in silence with our heart. Let us take advantage of these moments to pray, to pray that the Spirit will give us this gift of counsel.

In intimacy with God and in listening to his Word, little by little we put aside our personal logic, dictated most often by our closures, our prejudices and our ambitions, and we learn instead to ask the Lord: what is your desire? What is your will? What pleases you? In this way, a profound attunement matures in us, almost innate in the Spirit and we experience how true Jesus' words are reported in Matthew's Gospel: "When they deliver you up, do not be anxious how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you in that hour; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you" (Matthew 10:19-20).

It is the Spirit who counsels us, but we must make room for the Spirit, so that he can counsel us. And to make room is to pray, to pray so that He will come and help us always.

As all the other gifts of the Spirit, then, counsel also constitutes a treasure for the whole Christian community. The Lord does not speak to us only in the depth of our heart; He speaks to us, yes, but not only there, but He also speaks to us through the voice and witness of brothers. It is truly a great gift to be able to meet men and women of faith that, especially in the most complicated and important moments of our life, help us to enlighten our heart and recognize the will of the Lord!

I remember once I was in a confessional in the shrine of Lujan, in front of which there was a long queue. There was also a very young altogether modern fellow with ear-rings, tattoos, all these things ... And he came to tell me what was happening to him. It was a big, difficult problem. And he said to me; I have said all this to my mother and my mother said: go to Our Lady and she will tell you what to do. There was a woman who had the gift of counsel. She did not know how to resolve her son's problem, but she pointed out the right way: go to Our Lady and she will tell you. This is the gift of counsel. That humble, simple woman gave her son the truest counsel. In fact, this boy said to me: I looked at Our Lady and I felt I had to do this, and this and this I did not have to speak, his mother and the boy himself had already said everything. This is the gift of counsel. You, mothers, who have this gift, ask it for your children. The gift to counsel children is a gift of God.

Dear friends, Psalm 16, which we heard, invites us to pray with these words: "I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also my heart instructs me. I keep the Lord always before me; because he is at my right hand, I shall not be moved" (vv. 7-8). May the Spirit always be able to

infuse this certainty in our heart and thus fill us with his consolation and his peace! Ask always for the gift of counsel.

FORTITUDE-May 14, 2014

Dear brothers and sisters!

In recent catechesis, we examined the first three gifts of the Holy Spirit: wisdom, understanding and counsel. Today we think about what the Lord does, He always comes to support us in our weakness with a special gift, the gift of fortitude.

1. There is a parable told by Jesus, which helps us to grasp the importance of this gift. A sower goes out to sow; not all the seed he sows, however, bears fruit. What ends up on the street is eaten by birds; what falls on stony ground or among thorns sprouting, but is soon dried by the sun or choked by the thorns. Only what ends up on the good soil can grow and bear fruit (cf. Mk 4.3 to 9 // Mt 13:3-9 // Luke 8.4 to 8). As Jesus himself said to his disciples, the Father is the sower, who sows the seed of His Word abundantly. The seed, however, often clashes with the aridness of our hearts and, even when welcomed, is likely to remain sterile. Instead with the gift of fortitude the Holy Spirit frees the soil of our heart from torpor, uncertainties and all the fears that can stop it, so that the Word of God can be put into practice, in an authentic and joyful way. This is a real help, this gift of fortitude it gives us strength and frees us from many obstacles.

2. There are difficult moments and extreme situations in which the gift of fortitude is manifested in an extraordinary, exemplary way. This is the case of those who are facing particularly harsh and painful experiences, that disrupt their lives and those of their loved ones. The Church shines with the testimony of so many brothers and sisters who have not hesitated to give their lives, in order to remain faithful to the Lord and His Gospel. Even today there are numerous Christians in many parts of the world who continue to celebrate and witness to their faith with deep conviction and serenity, and resist even when they know that this can result in them paying a very high price. All of us know people, people who have experienced difficult situations, so much pain, let us think of those men and women who have a difficult life, who fight for the survival of their family, educate their children. They do this because the Spirit of fortitude helps them. How many, many men and women - whose names we do not know – honor our people, honor our Church because they are strong in carrying forward their lives, their work, their family, their faith – these our brothers and sisters are saints! Every day saints! Hidden saints among us! They have the gift of fortitude in carrying on in their duty as people, mother, father, brother, sister citizen. We have so many, so many. Let us thank the Lord for these Christians who are the hidden saints among us. But is the Spirit within who carries them forward and it would do us good to think of these people. If they do this, if they can do this then why not me and we ask the Lord to give us the gift of fortitude.

3. With this, we must not think that the gift of fortitude is only necessary on some occasions or in certain situations. This gift must be the base note of our being Christians, in our ordinary everyday lives. As I said we must have fortitude in our everyday life as Christians we need this fortitude to carry on in our lives, our families our faith. Paul, the Apostle Paul, said something that it would do us all good to hear: "I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me" (Phil. 4:13).

In our everyday life, in difficult times it would do us good to say this "I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me". The Lord always gives us strength, Lord never gives us more than we can handle, "I have the strength for everything through him who empowers me".

Dear friends, sometimes we may be tempted to allow ourselves be overtaken by laziness or despondency, especially when faced with the hardships and trials of life. In these cases, do not lose heart, but invoke the Holy Spirit, so that with the gift of fortitude He can lift our hearts and communicate new vigor and enthusiasm to our lives and our following Jesus.

KNOWLEDGE-May 21, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, Good day!

Today I want to highlight another gift of the Holy Spirit, the gift of knowledge. When we speak of knowledge, we immediately think of the human capacity to learn more about the reality that surrounds him and to discover the laws that govern nature and the universe. The knowledge that comes from the Holy Spirit, however, is not limited to human knowledge: it is a special gift, which allows us to grasp, through Creation, the greatness and love of God and His profound relationship with every creature.

1. When our eyes are enlightened by the Spirit, they open to the contemplation of God in the beauty of nature and the grandeur of the cosmos, and lead us to discover how everything speaks to us of Him and everything speaks to us of His love. All this arouses astonishment and a deep sense of gratitude in us! It is the feeling we experience when we admire a work of art or any marvel that is the result of the genius and creativity of man: before all of this, the Spirit leads us to praise the Lord from the depths of our hearts and recognize, in all that we have and are, a priceless gift from God and a sign of His infinite love for us.

2. The first chapter of Genesis, at the very beginning of the Bible, shows us that God delights of His creation, by repeatedly emphasizing the beauty and goodness of all things. At the end of each day, it is written: "God saw that it was good" (1, 12.18.21.25) ...but if God sees that Creation is something good and beautiful, we too must have this attitude, and we must see that Creation is something good and beautiful. The gift of knowledge, of this beauty, we have to thank God for having given us this gift, this beauty! This is the path...and when God finished creating man, He

didn't say that "it was good", He said that it is "very good!" He draws us close to Him. And in God's eyes we are the greatest, the most beautiful, the best things about Creation..."But father the Angels? No the Angels are beneath us! We are more than the Angels! We heard it in the Book of the Psalms! God really loves us! We have to thank him for this!

The gift of knowledge places us in profound harmony with the Creator and allows us to participate in the brightness of His gaze and His judgment. And it is in this perspective that we can grasp in man and woman the summit of Creation, as the fulfillment of a plan of love that is imprinted in each of us and that makes us recognize each other as brothers and sisters.

3. All of this is a source of serenity and peace and renders the Christian a joyful witness of the God, in the wake of St. Francis of Assisi and many saints who were able to sing and praise His love through the contemplation of Creation.

At the same time, however, the gift of knowledge helps us to avoid falling prey to excessive or incorrect attitudes. The first lies in the risk of considering ourselves masters of Creation. Creation is not a property, which we can rule over at will; or, even less, is the property of only a few: Creation is a gift, it is a wonderful gift that God has given us, so that we care for it and we use it for the benefit of all, always with great respect and gratitude.

The second incorrect attitude is the temptation to limit ourselves to creatures, as if they can provide the answer to all our expectations. With the gift of knowledge, the Holy Spirit helps us not to give in to all of this...but I would like to return to the first wrong path...Custodians of Creation, not Masters of Creation it is a gift that the Lord has given us, to us! We are Custodians of Creation. But when we exploit Creation we destroy the sign of God's love for us, in destroying Creation we are saying to God: "I don't like it! This is not good!" "So what do you like?" "I like myself!" – Here, this is sin! Do you see? Custody of Creation is custody of God's gift to us and it is also a way of saying thank you to God. I am the master of Creation but to carry it forward I will never destroy your gift. And this should be our attitude towards Creation. Safeguard Creation. Because if we destroy Creation, Creation will destroy us! Never forget this!

Once I was in the countryside and I heard a saying from a simple person who loved flowers and he nurtured these flowers and he said we must nurture these beautiful things that God has given us. Creation is for us to use well, not exploit to nurture...because do you know father, God always forgives - Yes it is true God always forgives...We men, women, we forgive sometimes – Yes sometimes we forgive, not always ...But father Creation never forgives! And if you don't custody Creation it will never forgive you".

This should give us pause for thought and ask the Holy Spirit for the gift of knowledge that Creation is a gift from God, a gift for the best thing He created which is the human person...

Thank you

PIETY-June 4, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning.

Today we want to pause on a gift of the Holy Spirit which is often misunderstood and considered in a superficial way; instead it touches in the heart our identity and our Christian life: it is the gift of piety.

It is necessary to clarify immediately that this gift is not identified with having compassion for someone, having pity for one's neighbor, but it indicates our belonging to God and our profound bond with Him, a bond that gives meaning to the whole of our life and which keeps us firm, in communion with Him, also in the most difficult and trying moments.

1. This bond with the Lord is not intended as a duty or an imposition. It is a bond that comes from within. It is a relation lived with the heart: it is our friendship with God, given us by Jesus; a friendship that changes our life and fills us with enthusiasm and joy. Therefore, the gift of piety arouses in us, first of all, gratitude and praise. This is, in fact, the motive and the most authentic meaning of our worship and of our adoration. When the Holy Spirit makes us perceive the presence of the Lord and all his love for us, He warms our heart and moves us almost naturally to prayer and to celebration. Piety, therefore, is synonym of authentic religious spirit, of filial confidence in God, of that capacity to pray to Him with love and simplicity which is proper of persons who are humble of heart.

2. If the gift of piety makes us grow in our relation and communion with God and leads us to live as His children, at the same time it helps us to pour this love also on others and to recognize them as brothers. And then yes we will be moved by sentiments of piety -- not of pietism! -- in our dealings with those around us and those we meet every day. Why do I say not pietism?

Because some think that to have piety is to close one's eyes, to make an imaginary face, and feign to be like a saint. In Piedmont we say: to make a "*Mugna Quacia*" This isn't the gift of piety. The gift of piety means to be truly capable of rejoicing with those in joy, to weep with those who weep, to welcome and help those who are in need. There is a very close relation between the gift of piety and meekness. The gift of piety that the Holy Spirit gives us makes us meek, it makes us tranquil, patient, in peace with God, and at the service of others with meekness.

Dear friends, in the Letter to the Romans the Apostle Paul affirms: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, for you did not receive the spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received the spirit of sonship, when we cry, 'Abba! Father!'" (Romans 8:14-15).

Let us pray to the Lord that the gift of his Spirit may conquer our fear, our uncertainties, also our restless, impatient spirit, and be able to render us joyful witnesses of God and of his love, adoring the Lord in truth and also in the service of our neighbor, with meekness and with

the smile that the Holy Spirit always gives us in joy. May the Holy Spirit give all of us this gift of piety.

FEAR OF THE LORD-June 11, 2014

Dear Brothers and Sisters, good morning.

The gift of the fear of God, of which we speak today, concludes the series of seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. It does not mean to be afraid of God: we know well that God is Father, and that He loves us and wants our salvation, and He always forgives, always, so that there is no reason to be afraid of Him! The fear of God, instead, is the gift of the Spirit that reminds us how little we are before God and His love, and that our good lies in abandoning ourselves with humility, with respect and with trust into His hands. This is the fear of God: abandonment into the goodness of our Father who loves us so.

1. When the Holy Spirit comes to dwell in our heart, he infuses in us consolation and peace, and leads us to see ourselves as we are, namely, little, with the attitude – so recommended by Jesus in the Gospel – of one who entrusts all his preoccupations and expectations to God and feels enveloped and sustained by His warmth and His protection, in fact, as a child with his Daddy! This is what the Holy Spirit does in our hearts: He makes us feel like children in the arms of our Daddy. In this connection, then, we understand well how the fear of God assumes in us the form of docility, of gratitude and praise, filling our heart with hope. Often, in fact, we fail to grasp God's design, and we are aware that we are not capable of ensuring happiness and eternal life for ourselves. It is, in fact, in the experience of our limitations and of our poverty, however, that the Spirit confronts us and makes us perceive how the only important thing is to let ourselves be led by Jesus into his Father's arms.

2. See why we are in such great need of this gift of the Holy Spirit. Fear of God makes us aware that everything comes from grace and that our real strength lies only in following the Lord Jesus and allowing the Father to pour His goodness and mercy on us. We must open our heart so that God's goodness and mercy will come to us. The Holy Spirit does this with the gift of the fear of God: He opens hearts. An open heart so that the Father's forgiveness, mercy, goodness, and caresses come to us, because we are infinitely loved children.

3. When we are permeated by the fear of God, then we are led to follow the Lord with humility, docility and obedience. This, however, not with a resigned, passive even mournful attitude, but with the wonder and joy of a child who sees himself served and loved by his Father. Hence, the fear of God does not make us timid, compliant Christians, but it generates in us courage and strength! It is a gift that makes us convinced, enthusiastic Christians, who are not subjected to the Lord out of fear, but because we are moved and conquered by His love! To be conquered by the love of God! And this is something lovely. To let ourselves be conquered by this Daddy's love, who so loves us, who loves us with His whole heart.

However, we must be careful, because this gift of God, the gift of the fear of God is also an “alarm” in face of the tenaciousness of sin. When a person lives in evil, when he blasphemes against God, when he exploits others, when he tyrannizes them, when he lives only for money, for vanity or power or pride, then the holy fear of God puts us on alert: be careful! With all this power, with all this money, with all your pride, with all your vanity, you will not be happy. No one can take with him to the other side money, or power, or vanity or pride. Nothing! We can only take the love that God the Father gives us, God’s caresses, accepted and received by us with love. And we can take what we have done for others. Be careful not to put your hope in money, in pride, in power, in vanity, because all this cannot promise us anything good! I am thinking, for instance, of persons who have responsibility over others and who allow themselves to be corrupted; do you think a corrupt person will be happy on the other side? No, all the fruit of his corruption has corrupted his heart and it will be difficult for him to go to the Lord. I am thinking of those who live from the traffic of persons and of slave labor; do you think that these people who traffic in persons, who exploit people with slave labor have the love of God in their heart? No, they do not have the fear of God and they are not happy.

They are not. I am thinking of those who manufacture arms to foment wars, but think what an occupation this is. I am sure that if I now ask the question: how many of you are manufacturers of arms? No one, no one. Manufacturers of arms do not come to hear the Word of God. They manufacture death, they are merchants of death and make death merchandise. May the fear of God make them understand that one day everything will end and they will have to render an account to God.

Dear friends, Psalm 34 makes us pray thus: “This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him, and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them” (vv. 7-8).

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to unite our voice to that of the poor, to receive the gift of fear of God and to be able to recognize ourselves, together with them, clothed with the mercy and love of God, who is our Father, our Daddy. So be it.