

Perfected in Grace
Lenten Reflection for the TAST Program
Part 3: February 29th, 2024
Life in Christ; Life in the Spirit

Opening Prayer

The spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him: a spirit of wisdom and of understanding, a spirit of counsel and of strength, a spirit of knowledge and of fear of the LORD, and his delight shall be the fear of the LORD.

(Isaiah 11:2f)

How are we to understand this affirmation, often repeated by the Church Fathers? Re-formulated positively, it means that all salvation comes from Christ the Head through the Church which is his Body: ... the one Christ is the mediator and the way of salvation; he is present to us in his body which is the Church. He himself explicitly asserted the necessity of faith and Baptism, ... they could not be saved who, knowing that the Catholic Church was founded as necessary by God through Christ, would refuse either to enter it or to remain in it. (CCC 846)

This affirmation is not aimed at those who, through no fault of their own, do not know Christ and his Church:

Those who, through no fault of their own, do not know the Gospel of Christ or his Church, but who nevertheless seek God with a sincere heart, and, moved by grace, try in their actions to do his will as they know it through the dictates of their conscience

- those too may achieve eternal salvation.

"Although in ways known to himself God can lead those who, through no fault of their own, are ignorant of the Gospel, to that faith without which it is impossible to please him, the Church still has the obligation and also the sacred right to evangelize all men." (CCC 848)

The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are, according to Catholic Tradition, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piet, and fear of the Lord. The standard interpretation has been the one that St. Thomas Aquinas worked out in the thirteenth century in his *Summa Theologiae*:

- Wisdom is both the knowledge of and judgment about "divine things" and the ability to judge and direct human affairs according to divine truth (I/I.1.6; I/II.69.3; II/II.8.6; II/II.45.1–5).
- Understanding is penetrating insight into the very heart of things, especially those higher truths that are necessary for our eternal salvation—in effect, the ability to "see" God (I/I.12.5; I/II.69.2; II/II.8.1–3)
- Counsel allows a man to be directed by God in matters necessary for his salvation (II/II.52.1)
- Fortitude denotes a firmness of mind in doing good and in avoiding evil, particularly when it is difficult or dangerous to do so, and the confidence to overcome all obstacles, even deadly ones, by virtue of the assurance of everlasting life (I/II.61.3; II/II.123.2; II/II.139.1)
- Knowledge is the ability to judge correctly about matters of faith and right action, so as to never wander from the straight path of justice (II/II.9.3)
- Piety is, principally, revering God with filial affection, paying worship and duty to God, paying due duty to all men on account of their relationship to God, and honoring the saints and not

contradicting Scripture. The Latin word *pietas* denotes the reverence that we give to our father and to our country; since God is the Father of all, the worship of God is also called piety (I/II.68.4; II/II.121.1).

- Fear of the Lord is, in this context, “filial” or chaste fear whereby we revere God and avoid separating ourselves from him—as opposed to “servile” fear, whereby we fear punishment (I/II.67.4; II/II.19.9)

Four virtues play a pivotal role and accordingly are called “cardinal”; all the others are grouped around them. They are: prudence, justice, fortitude, and temperance. “If anyone loves righteousness, [Wisdom’s] labors are virtues; for she teaches temperance and prudence, justice, and courage.” ... (CCC 1805)

Prudence ... disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and to choose the right means of achieving it; ... Prudence is “right reason in action, ... it guides the other virtues by setting rule and measure. It is prudence that immediately guides the judgment of conscience. (c.f. CCC 1806)

1807 Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the “virtue of religion.” Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good. The just man, often mentioned in the Sacred Scriptures, is distinguished by habitual right thinking and the uprightness of his conduct toward his neighbor. “You shall not be partial to the poor or defer to the great, but in righteousness shall you judge your neighbor.” “Masters, treat your slaves justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”

1808 Fortitude is the moral virtue that ensures firmness in difficulties and constancy in the pursuit of the good. It strengthens the resolve to resist temptations and to overcome obstacles in the moral life. The virtue of fortitude enables one to conquer fear, even fear of death, and to face trials and persecutions. It disposes one even to renounce and sacrifice his life in defense of a just cause. “The Lord is my strength and my song.”⁷⁰ “In the world you have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.”⁷¹

1809 Temperance is the moral virtue that moderates the attraction of pleasures and provides balance in the use of created goods. It ensures the will’s mastery over instincts and keeps desires within the limits of what is honorable. The temperate person directs the sensitive appetites toward what is good and maintains a healthy discretion: “Do not follow your inclination and strength, walking according to the desires of your heart.” Temperance is often praised in the Old Testament: “Do not follow your base desires, but restrain your appetites.” In the New Testament it is called “moderation” or “sobriety.” We ought “to live sober, upright, and godly lives in this world.”