

The Gifts that Pertain to the Intellect

“This is everlasting life, that they may know you,
the only true God and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn 17:3)

Faith is Superior to the Gifts, but aided by them

- Supernatural knowledge is of capital importance in the Christian life, for Jesus has said: “This is everlasting life, that they may know you, the only true God and him whom you have sent, Jesus Christ” (Jn 17:3). The supernatural knowledge of God, of Jesus Christ, of the mysteries of heaven, is the proper object of faith.
- But the theological virtue of faith, even though superior in dignity to the intellectual gifts, is obscure and imperfect and has to be bolstered and clarified by them.

The Gifts Correspond to the Intellectual Habits

- The four intellectual gifts correspond perfectly to the natural habits of our intelligence, for “grace is founded on nature,” as St. Thomas tells us. There is a marvelous parallelism between the intellectual and the divine, since nature and grace have the same source and emanate from the same principle, God, who formed our nature and is also the Author of grace.

Understanding, Knowledge, Wisdom, and Counsel

- In our intellect we find:
 - the first principles, which are the basis of understanding;
 - knowledge, which is a perception of the nature of things through their causes;
 - wisdom, which is the capacity to relate all things to their ultimate end;
 - prudence, which is the art of applying speculative principles to practical purposes.
- Now there is a wonderful correspondence of the four intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit with these four habits that exist in the natural order. The intellectual gifts of the Holy Spirit are: understanding, knowledge, wisdom, and counsel.

Guided by Faith

- A common characteristic of these four gifts is that they are all founded on faith. Faith is a virtue by which we trust in God's divine authority and believe all that he has revealed to us. It is the light on the way of our exile, like the little lamp that shines in a dark place, as the Apostle St. Peter says, a sign of our expectation of the day of glory, of our hope for the rising of the morning star in our hearts (2 Pet 1:19). Faith is the guide, even though the truths of faith are made more brilliant by the illumination of the gifts.

Penetrating the Truths of Faith

- We know it on the authority of God, on the authority of the Church established by Jesus Christ. However, when by means of the gifts of the Holy Spirit we penetrate those truths of faith, then we discover their depth and appreciate the harmony that exists among them. We have an intimate, profound knowledge of them, although we may never have objective evidence in this life.

Knowledge by Discourse vs Intimate Experience

- St. Thomas teaches that there are two ways of knowing: one by discourse in its various forms, the other by intimate experience. The first is purely intellectual; the second springs from the very depths of love. We can have the first by reading books on the mysteries of faith, by listening to sermons about them. It can be more or less broad, more or less perfect, yet it is a knowledge of pure understanding. The other is granted to loving souls united with God: in the very close union of love, these souls know divine things by sweet and intimate experience. That knowledge is obtained through the gifts of the Holy Spirit.

Intuition

- Love accomplishes the most perfect union. When charity unites us with God so that we are one single spirit with him, we recognize divine things by a sweet experience in the same intimate way in which we are conscious of the depths of our own heart.
- In the knowledge that the intellectual gifts of the Spirit produce in our spirit, there is no reasoning; there is only INTUITION. The soul that is under the power of the gifts does not analyze or reason, but sees. In a flash, in one single vision, it beholds marvelous things. What reason and the reading of erudite works cannot teach it, it can understand by the profound movement of the Spirit.