Counsel: A Gift of the Holy Spirit

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Counsel, the third of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit enumerated in Isaiah 11:2-3, is the perfection of the cardinal virtue of prudence. While prudence, like all the cardinal virtues, can be practiced by anyone, whether in a state of grace or not, it can take on a supernatural dimension through sanctifying grace. Counsel is the fruit of this supernatural prudence.

Like prudence, counsel allows us to judge rightly what we should do in a particular circumstance. It goes beyond prudence, though, in allowing such judgments to be made promptly, "as by a sort of supernatural intuition," as Fr. John A. Hardon writes in his Modern Catholic Dictionary. When we are infused with the gifts of the Holy Spirit, we respond to the promptings of the Holy Spirit as if by instinct.

Counsel in Practice

Counsel builds on both wisdom, which allows us to judge the things of the world in light of our final end, and understanding, which helps us to penetrate to the very core of the mysteries of our faith.

"With the gift of counsel, the Holy Spirit speaks, as it were, to the heart and in an instant enlightens a person what to do," writes Father Hardon. It is the gift that allows us as Christians to be assured that we will act correctly in times of trouble and trial. Through counsel, we can speak without fear in defense of the Christian Faith. Thus, the Catholic Encyclopedia notes, counsel "enables us to see and choose correctly what will help most to the glory of God and our own salvation."