Columns
Spirituality



"Pentecost" (detail) by an unknown 16th-century painter in Portugal (Wikimedia Commons/Jose Goncalves)



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Despite years of preparation for the feast of Pentecost and an ongoing devotion to the Holy Spirit, I find myself again considering just how those beautiful sevenfold gifts of the Spirit manifest in my daily life. Customarily, I make a novena to request a deepening of those gifts, but this year I felt moved to pray more with how these are at work in me as I experience the unique current world situation.

No matter what one's political, philosophical or religious views, I think we can all agree that we are called to navigate daily through an environment of fear and divisiveness that seems to have permeated all aspects of life. We may have even experienced rifts and broken relationships among family members and friends because of differing perspectives. Certainly, the long months of COVID-19 isolation have contributed to and intensified a feeling of disconnection, aloneness and loneliness.

So how is the Spirit enlightening, guiding and strengthening me to live a Christian life of love and unity *now*, when I feel so many forces pulling me away from doing just that?

Romans 8:14-17 remains a constant reminder to me to continually make the life-giving choices that keep me focused on Jesus and the Gospel: "For all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you have received a spirit of adoption. When we cry, Abba! Father! It is that very Spirit bearing witness with our spirit that we are children of God." The Holy Spirit daily challenges me to let go of fear as I claim and live my true identity as a beloved child of God.

The **gift of wisdom** is especially important in helping me make right judgments and choices about my thoughts and actions. It is the gift of wisdom that helps me realize and accept that I am not all-knowing, have my blind spots, and need to remain open to a quest for God's truth in all circumstances. It is wisdom that gives me the right words at the right time or advises silence and reflection in the face of so much contradictory information. "For wisdom opened the mouths of those who were mute and made the tongues of infants speak clearly" (Wisdom 10:21).

The **gift of understanding** enables me to let go of my own ideas and expectations of how things ought to be and allow God's providence to control and labor in all the events and happenings of daily life. How difficult this is when trying to "understand"

or make sense of useless tragedy and widespread suffering.

Understanding empowers me to trust in God's unconditional love, healing and redemptive power. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:9).

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Because of the gifts of wisdom and understanding, the **gift of counsel** ignites and enflames in me the willingness to make life-giving choices. It clarifies options and enlightens me regarding the consequences of the choices I make.

Like St. Paul, I find myself doing what I don't want to do, and not doing what I know I ought to do (Romans 7:15). But the Spirit empowers me to "choose life" (Deuteronomy 30:19-20) despite the hardship and difficulties that may result from such choices. "I bless the Lord who gives me counsel; in the night also, my heart instructs me." (Psalm 16:7)

To me, the **gift of fortitude** means perseverance in prayer; remaining grounded in faith, hope and love; staying focused on God; maintaining joy and a positive attitude; not giving up; not giving into discouragement; always trusting in God's presence, power, and providence. "Rejoice in hope, be patient in suffering, persevere in prayer" (Romans 12:12).

The **gift of knowledge** aligns with wisdom and understanding, though I see it evident in my life as a spirit of compassion, nonjudgmentalism and acceptance of those people and opinions toward whom I feel dislike or opposition. Rather than give into an initial reaction of anger or recrimination toward those I perceive as my "enemies," understanding prompts me to pray for them because I "understand" that God loves each human being and wants the salvation of all.

Wisdom teaches me that I don't "know it all." Understanding reminds me that God's ways are far above and beyond mine. Knowledge aids my vision to see everyone and everything as God sees. "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

The **gifts of piety and fear of the Lord** act as a "Global Positioning System" to keep me in right relationship with God, others and all creation. These gifts foster humility, reminding me that I am a uniquely unrepeatable expression of God —

called to use all God has given me for the building of God's kingdom. Nothing is a possession; everything is a gift given for the service of God. "I say to the Lord, You are my Lord; I have no good apart from you" (Psalm 16:2).

Come Holy Spirit! Increase and deepen in me your sevenfold gifts that my life may bear fruit according to your will and purpose!

[All quotations are from the Catholic Women's Devotional Bible.]