

The Seven Gifts Of The Holy Ghost.

Talk 2 - The Fear of the Lord

Notes on Canon Poucin's Faith Talk 12th November



The order in which we will be examining the gifts of the Holy Ghost is the reverse order of that which appears in the book of Isaiah XI 2,3, (wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord). This is because the “fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” and thus, according to St Augustine, is the gift to examine first.

The gift of ‘the fear of the Lord’ enables us to see the vast discrepancy between us, the creature and God, the creator, and thus establish the correct disposition of humility, respect and reverence that we should have before God. The gift of ‘fear of the Lord’ also enables us to be aware of our insufficient response to God, who is perfect love. This injustice on our part, should encourage us, not only to avoid any occasion of sin but to advance us on our way to conversion and progress in the spiritual life. If we truly endeavour to love God, we will also endeavour to love our neighbour. Hence, the ‘fear of the Lord’ also leads us to love our neighbour.

Fear is first mentioned in the Bible right at the beginning in the book of Genesis, just after ‘the fall’, when God called Adam, and Adam replies “I heard your voice in paradise; and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself” (Gen 3: 10). This fear is caused by Adam’s realization of his now imperfect state. Other fears are also mentioned in the Bible: Jacob fears punishment from his father Isaac if he deceives him, by pretending to be Esau; the Jews fear Moses when he descends from Mount Sinai having received the ten commandments; the angel speaks to St. Joseph telling him not to be afraid, firstly to take Mary as his wife, and again when it is safe for them to leave Egypt; the Jewish leaders had many opportunities to attack Jesus but we are told they did not because they feared the crowd.

The only legitimate ‘fear’ we should have is the fear of offending God. We should treat any other fear with contempt. St. Thomas Aquinas explains four different kinds of fear. The first is worldly fear (and thus is to be avoided) that is, fear of loss of goods, health, esteem... “Worldly fear is that which arises from worldly love as from an evil root, for which reason worldly fear is always evil” (St Thomas, *Summa Theologica*, IIa IIae, Q19, a3).

The second is servile fear, where obedience is observed only out of fear of punishment. This is an imperfect state and souls should progress to the fear of offending God, not out of fear of punishment, but because they love God: here is the difference between imperfect contrition and perfect contrition. The third fear is labelled initial fear and is the in-between state between servile fear and the fourth kind of fear, which is when filial fear reaches the perfection of the love between the Son and the Father.

In the first talk we saw how each gift of the Holy Ghost is linked to a virtue instilled at baptism, which also corresponds to one of the beatitudes. The ‘fear of the Lord’ is actually linked to two virtues, primarily **Hope** and secondarily **Temperance**. When a soul becomes conscious of its position before God, the reality of its lowly and imperfect state removes presumption, which is pride. The soul sees its total dependence on God. It requires hope to progress to union with God. Attachments to earthly things, such as gluttony and sins of the flesh, can now be viewed as obstacles in the clear way to this union and need to be purified, assisted by the virtue of Temperance. Our supreme reward will be the possession of the Kingdom of Heaven. The only beatitude to bestow this reward is for those who are ‘**poor in spirit**’: poverty of spirit being understood as total dependence on God for everything. All the virtues are linked and work together to assist the soul on its journey towards God. If one of the virtues increase, so will others. If charity increases, the soul becomes closer to God, and the more it will fear anything that will cause a separation.

In summary the gift of ‘fear of the Lord’ makes us respect God and fear to offend His Divine Majesty. It helps us avoid evil by inviting us to do good. It is a remedy against pride as we see our imperfection and poverty before God. Thus it can be seen that ‘fear of the Lord’ is the beginning of wisdom!

Next faith talk 10th December. Canon Montjean will conclude his talks on the Sacred Heart and the resumption of the talks on the gifts of the holy Ghost will be in January.