

THE VIRTUES & THE GIFTS

It is time for us to revisit the life of Grace and to gather an understanding of how it works, of what its powers are, and the end it entails. Recall the proportionality to which I referred you in our first year of lessons. (Have a look at Lesson 13 there). There is a fixed proportionality between these four—

natures → powers → acts → ends

A mosquito possesses the *nature* of a mosquito which gives it the *powers* of a mosquito to do the *acts* of a mosquito in order to attain the *end* of a mosquito. This proportionality applies universally. It applies to the life of Grace. We live at four different levels and each level has its proper powers, acts and ends.

| | <i>Nature</i> | <i>powers</i> | <i>acts</i> | <i>ends</i> |
|---|---------------|--|---|--|
| 4 | Grace | virtues, gifts | naturally & supernaturally | eternal life |
| 3 | Rational | intellect, will | knows universals, appetises things | chooses what is fitting, bids & executes |
| 2 | Sensitive | external senses (5), internal senses (4), sense appetite | knows singular things, coordinates its acts, appetises the good | knows, moves place, lives |
| 1 | Vegatative | nutrition, growth reproduction | nourishes itself, grows reproduces its kind | lives, moves |

The first thing to note about these different levels at which we live is that numbers 1 to 3 *substantial* realities. That is, they are involved in the *substance* which is our soul. 1 and 2 are subsumed into 3 ; for our life as a man (whether male or female) is as a *rational animal*, an animal with intellect. While we have bones and teeth that grow and consolidate like the branches of a tree, they are yet the structure of an animal, not of a plant. And while we have sense powers and appetites like any dog or cat, these are embodied in an animal of much higher ordination than a brute animal.

In contrast, the fourth level at which we live as baptised Christians who believe what God has revealed to us, the life of Grace, is superadded in the fashion of an *accident* to our substance. We should not, however, be misled into thinking that it is not a powerful reality—consider just how powerful are the accidents of gravity and of light ! Indeed, this is the most powerful of realities for it is, the theologians teach us, a created participation of the life of God, of the Divine Life.

Just as each of the three substantial levels of life has its proper powers and acts, so does this fourth, accidental, level. The powers are the *Virtues* (Christian virtues) and the *Gifts* of the Holy Spirit. Each

Virtue is supported by a corresponding Gift, as set out below —

| | VIRTUES | GIFTS |
|---------------|----------------|------------------|
| <i>theol.</i> | Charity | Wisdom |
| <i>theol.</i> | Faith | Understanding |
| <i>moral</i> | Prudence | Counsel |
| <i>moral</i> | Fortitude | Fortitude |
| <i>theol.</i> | Hope | Knowledge |
| <i>moral</i> | Justice | Piety |
| <i>moral</i> | Temperance | Fear of the Lord |

You will notice that I have prefaced each of the virtues with a note, *theol.* or *moral.* This shows the derivation of each of the seven. The theological virtues, faith, hope and charity, derive from God's revelation. The object, the end, of each is Almighty God. That is, what God has revealed specifies each of the three. By *faith* we believe what He has taught ; by *hope* we direct our lives in accordance with what He has promised us ; by *charity* we love Him first above everything He has created for His sake.

The other four virtues derived from the moral order are called *cardinal* virtues because each encapsulates a collection of virtues which embrace all our human doing and desiring. The virtues that fall under justice, fortitude and temperance are virtues that involve our will. Those that fall under prudence involve the intellect. We exercise each of these virtues every day about mundane things— that I should pay this man what I owe him ; that I should resist this bully ; that I should not indulge myself excessively in food and drink ; that I should order the means at my disposal in order to achieve the ends I desire.

The four achieve *supernatural* focus when we apply them in attaining *the end* God desires for us. The principle of proportionality applies. Powers and acts are specified by their end.

Now to each virtue and gift there corresponds, as set out below, one of the seven beatitudes referred to by Our Blessed Lord in his Sermon on the Mount that one may find in chapter 5 of St Matthew's Gospel, with its corresponding reward. (I hear you say that there are eight beatitudes, not seven ! St Thomas teaches that the 8th simply summarises the first seven.

| VIRTUES | GIFTS | BEATITUDES | REWARDS |
|----------------|---------------|--------------------|------------------------|
| Charity | Wisdom | Peacemakers | Called children of God |
| Faith | Understanding | Pure of heart | See God |
| Prudence | Counsel | Merciful | Receive mercy |
| Fortitude | Fortitude | Hunger for justice | Be satisfied |
| Hope | Knowledge | Mourn | Be comforted |
| Justice | Piety | Meek | Inherit the earth |

Temperance

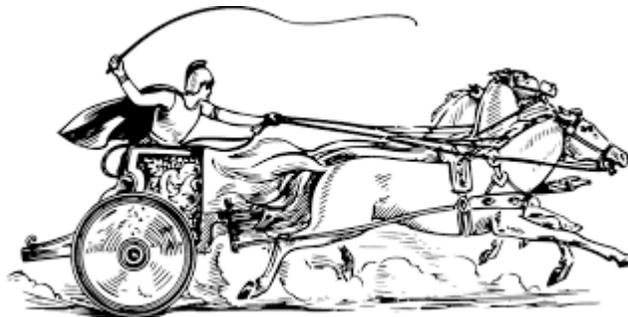
Fear of the Lord

Poor in spirit

Kingdom of Heaven

But we have yet to explain how the virtues and the gifts complement each other. The seven Christian virtues operate in a *natural* way to achieve a supernatural end. Their focus, their end, is a supernatural one, eternal. The end specifies them, determines their nature, as supernatural. Despite their supernatural end, they are subject to all the uncertainties, the shortcomings, the imperfections, of our natural human activity. In other words, though their end is supernatural, their mode of operation is human and limited (natural).

In contrast, the *Gifts* of the Holy Spirit, whose focus is, likewise, the supernatural, operate in a manner which is *not* human, but supernatural. We will elaborate on this in our next lesson and address the reason why the virtues need to be supported by the Gifts. For the moment let us take one of the supernatural virtues, that of Prudence, see how it operates, and contrast it with its corresponding *Gift*. Prudence is defined as *recta ratio agibilium*—right reason about things to be done. It is called by the theologians the *auriga virtutum*, the “chariot-driver of the virtues” because the virtue of prudence is involved in *all* our exercises of virtue to manage them, as the driver of a chariot manages the operations of each of the horses that draws his vehicle.



By the Christian virtue of prudence we deliberate, judge and bid the execution of acts concerning the requirements of Our Blessed Lord and His Church *humano modo* so as to conform our lives to the demands of charity. The *Gift* of Counsel is a disposition in the soul, placed there by God at our baptism, whereby we are moved to respond to God's inspirations and illuminations. It does not operate *humano modo* but in a supernatural fashion, for God is the agent acting, though the extent of His influence is determined by our previous fidelity to the graces that God has given us. The Virtues and the Gifts are placed in us at the moment of our baptism as seeds, much as the mighty oak is contained in the acorn.



Whereas our *Prudence* operates with human limitations, our *Counsel* does not. It operates by a better principle than human reason. It acts promptly, effortlessly, securely and most perfectly, to achieve certainty about what we are to do here and now, because the Holy Spirit is doing the acting for us !

