

THE VIRTUES & THE GIFTS—PART II

First, a little more on the virtue of prudence and the gift of counsel. “Counsel,” St Thomas says, “is properly about things useful for an end. Hence, such things as are most useful for an end should correspond to the gift of counsel. But this pertains to mercy.” He then cites St Paul : “Holiness is profitable in all things.” (*I Timothy 4 : 8*) Hence, mercy corresponds to the gift of counsel.

The mother addressing the needs of her child or the man giving his assistance to another are engaged in satisfying these demands and exercising mercy. St Paul's advice in *2 Corinthians 1 : 3* is to the point :

“God helps us in our troubles so that we are able to help others using the same help that we have received from God.”

We become instruments of God's aid to others.

The advice of St Stephen of Hungary to his son in or about the year 1000 AD confirms these protocols :

“In our kingdom of Hungary the Church is still a young and tender plant. For this reason there is all the greater need for more prudent and evident watchfulness so that the great gift bestowed by the divine mercy on us, unworthy as we are, may not be destroyed and brought to nothing through your apathy, indolence and neglect”

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St Thomas teaches that the virtues and the gifts grow like the fingers on the hand. If one flourishes, they all flourish ; if one is stunted, they are all stunted. There is a lesson for us here. One of the concerns of the faithful Catholic over the conduct of priests and laity in the *novus ordo* is the chatter and disrespect for Our Blessed Lord in the Blessed Sacrament that occurs before and after, and sometimes even during, the celebration of Mass. Many of the congregation see no impediment to conducting themselves as if they were in a meeting hall or entertainment centre. What is missing ? It is the character of the gift of *Fear of the Lord*. This resembles the concern a child should have of offending his father. When informed that he was on holy ground, Moses took off his shoes. The average modern Catholic, grown used to the subversion of his faith to the incursions of Protestantism and the secular, treats God with a familiarity that verges on contempt.

But if the gift of *Fear* is defective, so are each of the other gifts and each of the virtues ! The abuses that have flowed from the implementation of the Second Vatican Council via the *novus ordo* have not nourished the faith in the average Catholic ; they have harmed it fundamentally.

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To understand how the gifts operate we need to pause to consider certain aspects of human life that move us with admiration, namely genius and heroism. Some people, Aristotle says, are moved according to a higher principle than human reason.

Genius

In the field of literature, for instance, William Shakespeare operated in a manner far beyond the normal. In his play, *Hamlet*, there are phrases and lessons we repeat every day of our lives, quite

unconscious of the fact that Shakespeare was their author or that the play in which they appear was produced in a limited time frame early in the seventeenth century. He wrote 150 sonnets where the average poet would have difficulty producing 10. The point about this productivity is that he did not have to labour to produce his remarkable works. He was possessed of a certain genius.

We note the same phenomenon in the field of music. Bach, Mozart, Beethoven and Schubert excel composers not only of their own age but of every age. Again, they were possessed of a certain genius. The same may be said, in their fields, of Sir Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein, as of Aristotle in and St Thomas Aquinas. In the field of art, Michelangelo and Leonardo da Vinci produced works which are landmarks for every age.

A similar effect is found in human action. Among those who play the piano, the violin or other musical instrument, there are those who perform at a level the ordinary performer can hardly comprehend. It is the same with other activities. To take one example, the American pilot, Bob Hoover, who died not so long ago, was renowned for his ability to barrel-roll a small airliner while pouring tea from a pot into a cup without spilling a drop as if the plane was stationary on the ground, a feat the most experienced pilots, even those expert at aerobatics, are quite unable to perform.



Bob Hoover at work

Heroism

Similarly, in the operations of the will there are individual men and women who appear to be moved by a higher principle than that which moves the rest of mankind as is manifest in their feats of fortitude in the face of immense adversity. People such as the American World War II soldier, Audie Murphy, and the Australian soldiers, Bruce Kingsbury (on the Kokoda trail), and Mark Donaldson in Afghanistan in 2008. Each operated in a fashion that is beyond the comprehension of most of us. They seem to be moved by a higher principle than mere human will.

It is in a fashion similar to these instances of operation at a level that exceeds the natural that the gifts of the Holy Spirit operate. For the acts done under their inspiration are accomplished according to a higher principle than that which governs our human operations. They operate according to divine inspiration and motion.

The Girl in the Bull-ring

Dr Woodbury, former Regent of Sydney's Aquinas Academy, used as an analogy of the way the gifts operate the plight of a young girl facing a fierce bull in an arena. The girl is outmatched by the bull in quickness of movement, in cunning and in strength. She has no hope of surviving the bull's charges and saving her life. If, however, there was at the margin of the arena some helper who by a certain manner of instantaneous communication was capable of inspiring her mind in judgment of tactics and strategy, and moving her will in prompt response, and there was in the girl, apt dispositions rendering her promptly responsive to these inspirations, with the necessary agility and strength to execute them, then victory would be within the girl's power.

In this analogy, the *the bull* is our substantial human nature with its powerful inclinations to natural goods aided and abetted by the devil's suggestions to pursue our passions, and those of other men in a corrupt society. The *weak girl* is the soul with sanctifying grace (which is in us accidentally not substantially). The *helper* is the Holy Spirit and the *inspirations* sent to the girl are the divine instincts (illuminations and inspirations) whereby God helps and promotes the life and activities of the soul in sanctifying grace in its contest with its powerful foes.

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Let us conclude by giving some illustrations from the lives of individual Catholics and of the saints of the gifts' operations.

Brother Lawrence of the Resurrection was a Carmelite brother who lived in the Seventeenth Century. A small book of conversations with him and various of his letters of advice have come down to us under the title *The Practice of the Presence of God*. Here is the report of the book's opening conversation :

"The first time I saw Brother Lawrence was on the 3rd of August, 1666. He told me that God had done him a singular favour in his conversion at the age of eighteen. During that winter, upon seeing a tree stripped of its leaves and considering that within a little time the leaves would be renewed and after that the flowers and fruit appear, Brother Lawrence received a high view of the Providence and Power of God which has never since been effaced from his soul. This view had set him loose from the world completely and enkindled in him such a love for God, that he could not tell whether it had increased in the forty years that he had lived since."

This inspiration was an instance of the exercise of the gift of *Understanding* perfecting the theological virtue of faith.

Dr Woodbury cited a similar instance of the operation of the gift which occurred during the second world war. A young man, feeling the need for something to read before falling asleep, searched his tent and found nothing save a few pamphlets and among them a copy of Leo XIII's encyclical *Rerum Novarum*.

"Suddenly as he read there flashed upon his mind, without any antecedent consideration on his part, a vivid and overwhelming realisation and conviction of the order in the universe, of the transcendence of God, of the utter dependence of himself upon God, of his place in the universe of reality, of the end or final reason of his life, of the course marked out for him to follow throughout his life..."

"This mental experience endured for less than a second but the realisations granted to him in that second resulted in a profound change in outlook of the youth upon himself, and upon God, and upon the world, and upon men, and upon his life, such that the young man declared long

afterwards that 'that second changed my life, and I could never be again as I was before...'"



St Therese of Lisieux

In *The Story of a Soul*, St Thérèse of Lisieux recounts her perplexity and concern over what precisely was to be her vocation in religious life. She would have liked, despite the fact that her order was an order of enclosed nuns, to have been a missionary in Vietnam where France had one of its many colonies, but her poor health precluded her transfer. She recounts reading St Paul's description in I Corinthians ch. 12 of the many offices to be filled in the Church.

"You together are Christ's body ; but each of you is a different part. In the Church, God has given the first place to apostles, the second to prophets, the third to teachers ; after them, miracles, and after them the gift of healing ; helpers , good leaders, those with many languages..."

She could find in none of them any resonance with her desires. Then she read on, and found this—

"Be ambitious for the higher gifts. And I am going to show you a way that is better than any of them. If I have all the eloquence of men or of angels, but speak without love, I am simply a gong booming or a cymbal clashing. If I have the gift of prophecy, understanding all the mysteries there are, and knowing everything, and if I have faith in all its fulness, to move mountains, but without love, then I am nothing at all. If I give away all that I possess, piece by piece, and if I even let them take my body to burn it, but am without love, it will do me no good whatever.

"Love is always patient and kind ; it is never jealous...

"Love does not come to an end..."

She had found the answer. Her vocation was love, love at the heart of the Church. The revelation granted her was pursuant to the gift that perfects the virtue of charity, the gift of *Wisdom*.
