

I got an interesting email from someone outside of the parish, and given today's 2nd reading today from Saint Paul in which he talks about the Holy Spirit, I thought I would share the email and share my response.

I changed the name to protect the innocent.

HELLO!

My name is Sue Smith, and I am a confirmed Roman Catholic living within the Fort Wayne diocese. I have attended mass at most of the catholic churches within this diocese. However, I am fully convinced that none of the ordained priests are "born of the Spirit" as I am. I also pray in tongues and pray the Scriptures. I stumbled into the new birth while attending parochial school many years ago as well as the infilling of the Holy Spirit even before confirmation. I truly have been born again by faith, by hearing the message and believing.

I have mentioned more than once openly to contact the diocese in Fort Wayne and have them send a Roman Catholic priest who is born of the Spirit and functions in the gifts of the Holy Spirit, and understands people like me. He can be my pastor. I will listen to him.

SINCERELY, Sue Smith

Hi Sue,

My name is Father Mark Gurtner. I am happy to respond to your questions and your concerns.

There is a crucial distinction, I think, that will be helpful to our conversation. The Church makes a distinction between the "ordinary" gifts of the Spirit and the "extraordinary" gifts of the Spirit.

So, first, the ordinary gifts of the Spirit are those gifts which the Lord Jesus gave to the Church so that the Church might have its proper structure and obtain to its proper purpose, which is the salvation of souls. So, for example, all the sacraments are manifestations of the ordinary gifts of the Spirit. When a priest (or other minister) pours water over an unbaptized person and says, "I baptize you in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit," by the action of the Holy Spirit, the person becomes baptized. When in the confessional, the priest absolves a penitent from sin, by the action of the Holy Spirit, the person is forgiven of their sins. See John 20:19-23 where Jesus gives the Apostles the power to forgive sins, and this power has been passed down from the Apostles to every Bishop and from every Bishop to every priest by virtue of ordination.

Other ordinary gifts of the Spirit would include the 7 gifts given to each individual person at Confirmation.

The [*Catechism of the Catholic Church*](#) Lists the seven gifts as follows:^[16]

- [Wisdom](#): It is the capacity to love spiritual things more than material ones;
- [Understanding](#): In understanding, we comprehend how we need to live as followers of Christ. A person with understanding is not confused by the conflicting messages in our culture about the right way to live. The gift of understanding perfects a person's speculative reason in the apprehension of truth. It is the gift whereby self-evident principles are known;
- [Counsel \(right judgement\)](#): With the gift of counsel/right judgment, we know the difference between right and wrong, and we choose to do what is right. A person with right judgment avoids sin and lives out the values taught by Jesus;
- [Fortitude \(courage\)](#): With the gift of fortitude/courage, we overcome our fear and are willing to take risks as a follower of Jesus Christ. A person with courage is willing to stand up for what is right in the sight of God, even if it means accepting rejection, verbal abuse, or physical harm. The gift of courage allows people the firmness of mind that is required both in doing good and in enduring evil;
- [Knowledge](#): With the gift of knowledge, we understand the meaning of God. The gift of knowledge is more than an accumulation of facts; it also helps us to choose the right path through life;
- [Piety \(reverence\)](#): With the gift of piety/reverence, we have a deep sense of respect for God and the Church. A person with reverence recognizes our total reliance on God and comes before God with humility, trust, and love. Piety is the gift whereby, at the Holy Spirit's instigation, we pay worship and duty to God as our Father, Aquinas writes;
- [Fear of the Lord \(wonder and awe\)](#): With the gift of fear of the Lord/wonder and awe, we are aware of the glory and majesty of God. A person with wonder and awe knows that God is the perfection of all we desire: perfect knowledge, perfect goodness, perfect power, and perfect love. This gift is described by Aquinas as a fear of separating oneself from God. He describes the gift as a "filial fear," like a child's fear of offending his father, rather than a "servile fear," that is, a fear of punishment. Fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

For other ordinary gifts of the Spirit, the list could go on and on and on. It is by the ordinary gifts of the Holy Spirit that the work of the Church is accomplished.

Now, turning to the extraordinary gifts. These are legitimate gifts given by the Holy Spirit for the upbuilding of the Church such as prophecy, speaking in tongues and interpretation of tongues, praying in tongues, miracles, etc. As you mention, you have experienced some of these gifts. Indeed, I wish that more Catholics would be open to asking God to bestow these gifts upon them because it would lead to an increase of depth in the life of the Church.

However, one must be very careful not make the lack of presence of the extraordinary gifts of the Spirit a belief that the Spirit is not present or working in the Church. The Ordinary gifts of the Spirit give us the assurance that we have access to the working of the Spirit at any time. So even from the priest who seems lukewarm and not personally filled with the Holy Spirit (maybe even sinful), the Holy Spirit still works through him through the ordinary gifts of the Spirit (at Mass, in confession, etc.). This is a guarantee from Jesus to the faithful, that they have access to His grace always through the ordinary means that He has established. This is a great gift because it means that access to His grace is not dependent on the personal holiness of the priest. If it did, we would all be in trouble. Now, it is better if the priest (or other minister) is holy because that helps the grace offered to have more effect, but we can go to any priest, for example, and be confident through the sacraments that we are receiving the grace of God.

I hope this explanation helps you. I would be happy to meet with you sometime, if you wish, to answer your questions further.

God bless.
Father Mark

My brothers and sisters, God is not stingy with His gifts. Pray that He will pour upon you the gifts of the Holy Spirit, both ordinary and extraordinary, so that you might be led more fully into salvation and be a light of God's love to the world.

Given by Father Mark Gurtner at Our Lady of Good Hope Catholic Church, Fort Wayne, Indiana, on the 2nd Sunday of Ordinary Time, 2016.