Filial fear holds the first place, as it were, among the gifts of the Holy Ghost, in the ascending order, and the last place in the descending order.

—St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II-II, Q. 19, art. 9

It seems to me that the fear of the Lord is a very beautiful tree planted in the heart of the holy person and watered continuously by God. And when that tree has grown to its fullness, that person is worthy of eternal life.

—St. Bonaventure, Collations on the Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit
THE GIFT OF FEAR TRUMPS ANY PRESENT UNDER THE TREE!

If we are to enjoy and share gifts, as we all know from our childhood experiences of Christmas, the first thing we must do is unwrap them. Can you recall for a moment your excitement in those early years? Admit it now too: Did you ever, when no one else but perhaps a trusted friend or sibling was with you, pick up those gifts, feel their heft in your hands, shake them a bit and listen to them, hold them up to strong light, or even, heaven forbid, unwrap them and then wrap them back up? Well, the gifts that the Holy Spirit has prepared for us are far more exciting, more worthy of unwrapping, cannot be outgrown, and will last far beyond any earthly lifetime. Happily too, they have already been unwrapped for us by two thousand years of the greatest minds of the Catholic Church—inspired by the Gift Giver Himself!

This is our first step, then, with the first gift of the Holy Spirit that we will examine in depth, yet still only scratch the surface. We will come to grasp just what these gifts are so that we may know how fully we’ve been blessed and may surrender to the Holy Spirit, who has such great plans in store for us. We will start with the word fear itself. St. Denis the Carthusian, citing St. Augustine, tells us that fear is “avoidance of future evil.”

from which we might gather that although the emotion of fear is not something pleasant that we typically seek out, we certainly do hope to avoid future evil, so if fear can help us do that, then it surely can be a good thing after all.

There is much to understand regarding fear in its several forms, and we'll begin with the kinds of fear St. Thomas Aquinas has been so kind as to catalog for us. Here they are in brief:

FOUR FORMS OF FEAR PER ST. THOMAS AQUINAS
1. Worldly fear: fear of loss of earthly goods or pleasure
2. Servile fear: fear of punishment
3. Initial fear: fear blending servile and filial fears
4. Filial fear: fear of committing a fault and offending God

Worldly fear is no gift of the Holy Spirit. It refers to our natural fears of losing the material goods or the sensual pleasures we desire and encountering privation, frustration, or physical pain instead. Neither is this kind of fear "the beginning of wisdom" (Ps. 111:10). Jesus Himself advised us, "Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul" (Matt. 10:28). It is by abandoning our worldly fears that we can focus our attention on a proper fear of the Lord: a fear infused with love, a fear lest we become less than what is fitting for creatures made in God's image.

What St. Thomas, drawing on the writings of Sts. Paul and John (Rom. 8:15; 1 John 4:17–18) and of the Church Fathers, calls servile fear is the lowest form of the Holy Spirit's gift of fear of the Lord. This is the fear of transgressing the laws of God out of a desire to avoid punishment. It is far from a perfect fear, in that it is not inspired by the love of God for His own sake, but its object—the avoidance of God's displeasure and subsequent punishment—is good.
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Initial fear derives from the Latin *initium*, "beginning." As the beginner starts to grow in a healthy fear of the Lord, servile fear and *filial* fear (a more perfect form of fear) might both be present. A man beginning to grow in charity, for example, might do the right thing both because he loves justice and because he fears to be punished for misdeeds. As his love for justice grows with time, his servile fear of punishment will fade away. As we read in 1 John 4:18, "Fear has to do with punishment, and he who fears is not perfected in love." Further, "perfect love casts out fear."

As we grow in love, then, servile fear diminishes, and the increase of *filial* fear, the last and most perfect form, leads to the perfect wisdom of charity. Filial, or *chaste*, fear, conjoined with charity, is akin to the fear and deference that a son gives to his father or a wife to her husband out of affection and love. The object of this fear is the avoidance of committing a fault, of failing to live up to God’s expectations for us. And here again we see St. Thomas’s awareness of the potential for human spiritual growth and development.

Seven hundred years after St. Thomas wrote the *Summa Theologica*, when modern psychologists began building theories of the development of moral reasoning, they started with the avoidance of punishment at the bottom rung of the moral ladder, leading to concepts of perfect justice and love at its top. Indeed, St. Thomas calls us to strive continually to better ourselves, to develop our virtues with the aid of the gifts and make ourselves complete, for the greater glory of Him who made us. A healthy *filial* fear should inspire us all the more to develop our God-given capacities for His honor and glory. Further, we should always recall what the modern psychological theorists do not consider, that by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, starting with *fear of the Lord*, our moral acts are ultimately perfected by something beyond our
psychological powers—namely, the motion of the Holy Spirit Himself.

Now let's turn to the Seraphic Doctor to get our first taste of how this great saint can help us win and unwrap the gift of fear of the Lord. I'll start with a couple of winning pairs of threes. St. Bonaventure asks: “But what value is there in fearing God? Tobit 4:23 states: ‘Do not be afraid, my son. Indeed, we live a poor life. But if we fear God, we will have many good things.’” He then goes on to explain three of those “good things,” three effects or advantages of the fear of the Lord, of which I'll merely provide a few highlights with my own parenthetical comments:

THREE ADVANTAGES OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD PER ST. BONAVENTURE  
1. “The first advantage of the fear of God, I say, is that it opens us to the influence of divine grace.”

St. Bonaventure provides scriptural references from Isaiah 66:2, Psalm 146:10-11, and Philippians 2:12-13 and also includes a lengthy citation from St. Bernard of Clairvaux, including this line: “In truth, I have learned that nothing is as helpful for procuring, preserving, and increasing the grace of God as having the fear of God at all times.” (Recall how fear of the Lord is the first step up the ladder of the gifts. It is the first step in opening our souls to the channel of all the Holy Spirit’s graces.)

13 Ibid.; italics added.
2. “Second, the fear of God is important in introducing the rightness of divine justice. Sirach 1:27–28 states: Fear of the Lord drives out sin; for the person without fear cannot be justified.”¹⁴ (The gift of fear of the Lord recognizes the gravity of sins against God and the justice of God’s punishments if we do not repent.)

3. “Third, the fear of God is important for obtaining the illumination of divine wisdom, since ‘the beginning of wisdom is fear of the Lord.’”¹⁵ He clarifies that “servile fear” (servile fear) is the beginning of wisdom, “but does not remain with wisdom.” The “fullness of wisdom” comes from “the fear of filial reverence.” (We may note here the compatibility of the Thomistic and Bonaventurean approaches to the gift of fear of the Lord.)

Well, there is one pair of threes. Let us look at the Seraphic Doctor’s second winning pair, this trio being “concerned with the perfection of the fear of the Lord.”¹⁶ St. Bonaventure notes that the perfection of the gift of fear consists in these three things.

THREE PERFECTIONS OF THE FEAR OF THE LORD PER ST. BONAVENTURE

1. The first perfection of the fear of the Lord is that of “perfect holiness or cleansing of conscience.”¹⁷ Citing texts from 2 Corinthians 7:1, Sirach 2:20–22, and Romans 2:4–5 on the need to cleanse ourselves from defilement and prepare our hearts by penance, Bonaventure

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 59.
¹⁵ Ibid.; see Ps. 110:10; Sir. 1:16; Prov. 9:10.
¹⁶ Collations, p. 62.
¹⁷ Ibid.; italics added.
declares that those who fear the Lord will apply discipline to themselves and cease from sinning.

2. The second perfection of fear of the Lord consists of “the perfect readiness to obey.”

He cites from 2 Chronicles 19:7, “Qoheleth” (Ecclesiastes) 7:19, and Deuteronomy 10:12–13, verses that indicate that those with fear of the Lord do all of God’s things diligently, neglect nothing, keep the whole law, and summing up, quoting Qoheleth 12:13: “‘Fear God and keep God’s commandments. This makes the human person to be complete.’ This is to be perfect. Therefore, if you wish to be perfect, fear God.”

3. The third component of perfect fear of the Lord is “complete firmness of trust.”

The fear of the Lord brings such a trust in God that earthly fears are overcome. St. Bonaventure cites Psalm 90:5–6, which notes that God’s truth surrounds us like a shield so that we will not be afraid of the terrors of the night and the arrows that fly by day, and Proverbs 14:26, which says that the fear of the Lord is a tower of strength. Then he notes that “the person who truly fears God has something that no one can take away. One who fears something other than God has something that ought to be taken away.”

Now that we’ve unwrapped the kinds of fear we may experience, the nature of the fear of the Lord that is the gift of

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18 Ibid., p. 63.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
21 Ibid., p. 64.
the Holy Spirit, and its advantages and perfections, we need to examine what we can do to acquire, hold on to, enjoy, and share this great gift.

**HOW THE SACRAMENT OF BAPTISM SETS US A-SAIL TOWARD HEAVEN**

The seven sacraments were given to the Church by Christ, and through them the graces of the Holy Spirit flow into our souls. Indeed, in the first Sacrament of Initiation, Baptism, we are blessed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. These include the gift of fear in its initial state, with its potential to blossom through charity into the kind of reverential, filial fear that brings to us such good things as we've seen (e.g., openness to divine grace, justice, and wisdom; cleansing of conscience; perfection of obedience; and complete firmness and trust in God).

All the gifts, including fear of the Lord, are fortified further in the sacrament of Confirmation, when the bishop calls upon the Holy Spirit to fortify, guide, and assist us by strengthening in us the seven gifts that will help us become more like Christ.

There's a role here for the sacrament of Reconciliation as well. When we truly repent and our sins are forgiven in the sacrament of Penance, we are reconciled to God, the channel of His grace is again wide open for us, and the wind of the Holy Spirit is ready to fill our sails, if we are willing to keep from rowing in the wrong direction! Moreover, St. Bonaventure notes that as our conscience is purified, we will dread even venial sins.

**HOW NOT TO EMBRACE THE GIFT OF FEAR**

So let's say we have made a full and honest confession. (Think back to your last one. Didn’t your soul feel so good?) We walk
out of the confessional and perform our prescribed penance. Our sins have been forgiven, and our soul has been cleansed and reopened to the graces of God.

If we seek to remain in the embrace of those graces, particularly the gift of fear, we need to take action to keep our thoughts, feelings, desires, and deeds amenable to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, we need to make sure that we are not actively working against it. We oppose this gift directly when we choose to ignore God's loving mercy toward us, failing to nurture our filial fear. We also oppose it when we choose to ignore the potential of God's just punishments when we do not exercise even an appropriate servile fear, having declared our own wills the master. We will see this in ourselves when our earthly fears predominate and we worry about acquiring all the pleasurable things in life while avoiding all struggle and pain.\(^{22}\)

Some may miss the mark of a proper fear of the Lord in another way, not by ignoring or devaluing it, but through the excessive misplaced zeal of scrupulosity. Our fear of the Lord should open our hearts and minds to all of the other gifts, not paralyze us in morbid self-focused scrutiny. Twentieth-century

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\(^{22}\) I can't help but stand on the soapbox and note that as I write this very morning, June 14, 2016, I read that the Supreme Court of the nation of Canada has officially abandoned the fear of the Lord by granting its physicians the power that the fictional spy James Bond was so famous for, namely, the "license to kill," a direct transgression of the Fifth Commandment (not to mention the old Hippocratic Oath: "I will use treatment to help the sick according to my ability and judgment, but never with a view to injury and wrongdoing. Neither will I administer a poison to anybody when asked to do so, nor will I suggest such a course.")
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spiritual writer Bernard J. Kelly, C.S.Sp. 23 observed that “scrupulous people are the victims of a false concept of law which they obey under the compulsion of fear.” 24 They perceive God as a tyrant and take no account of His mercy and kindness. “They want to make their future salvation a certainty even now through their own efforts; He wishes them to be saved by His mercy and nothing else. They fret and agitate themselves, are always in action, for fear gives them no rest: He wishes them to surrender themselves fully into His hands, to leave their salvation to His Omnipotence.” 25

As I write in this Jubilee Year of Mercy (and in the 800th Jubilee Year of the Dominican Order as well), I think of St. Catherine of Siena’s powerful lines in her Dialogue when God told her that what troubled Him more than Judas’s betrayal of His Son, Jesus Christ, was Judas’s despair in that it deprecated the loving power of God’s mercy and forgiveness. If God’s forgiveness was there for the asking even for Christ’s betrayer, why should we be so scrupulous as to doubt God’s capacity to forgive us our sins? Why shouldn’t our fear be, rather, that of disappointing Him in His superabundant mercy as the fount of all goodness and love for us?

THE POWER OF PRAYER TO FORGE FEAR AND FIRE OUR FURNACES OF LOVE

Those who fear God and love Him lift up their hearts and minds to Him in prayer. Indeed, St. Paul has advised us to “pray

23 C.S.Sp. stands for Congregation of the Holy Ghost under the protection of the Immaculate Heart of Mary.
25 Ibid., pp. 97–98.
constantly” (1 Thess. 5:17). When we pray to God, we petition Him, asking for good things, and asking Him to spare us from evil. We thank Him for all the good things He showers us with, indeed, even the fact that He breathed life into us and sustains us in our existence. Our prayer shows proper fear of the Lord when our petitions for good things for ourselves keeps God's will and plans for us in mind, since He knows so much better than we do what we really need. Prayer is not a useless thing, though, since part of God's plan and explicit advice is that we talk to Him and ask Him for good things. Loving filial fear is also expressed in our prayer when we ask that God grant us the grace to act in ways that will please and not offend Him.

All manner of formal and informal prayers to God help dispose our souls to all manner of His graces. Although all Catholic prayers invoke the Holy Trinity either explicitly or implicitly, over the centuries, the spiritual treasure house of the Church has also amassed a bountiful store of prayers specifically directed to the Holy Spirit. As we progress through the gifts one by one, in the portions of our chapters devoted to prayer I'll present a small sample or two that we might pray as we read, asking the Holy Spirit to bless us with each gift. The opening quotation from the prologue provides the prayer as provided in the Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 2671, drawing the first line from the Roman Missal Pentecost Service and the remaining lines from the Byzantine Liturgy, Pentecost Vespers, Troparion. Recall that first line, “Come, Holy Spirit, fill the hearts of your faithful and enkindle in them the fire of your love” (italics added). So now perhaps you see what inspired this section's heading.

The Holy Spirit came down upon Mary and the disciples on Pentecost in tongues of flame that gave them the gift of speaking
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in other tongues. Although you or I may or may not receive the charism of the gift of tongues in our day, the sanctifying gifts are for all of us, and having asked the Holy Spirit to come, we can also specifically ask Him to bless us with each and every one of the those seven gifts. Indeed, there are also Catholic prayers that ask for each gift by name. It seems quite fitting, then, to conclude this section on prayer for the gift of fear, with, well, a prayer for the gift of fear, this one from the great Church Doctor St. Alphonsus Liguori (1696–1787):

O Giver of all supernatural gifts, who filled the soul of the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of God, with such immense favors, I beg You to visit me with Your grace and Your love and to grant me the gift of holy fear, so that it may act on me as a check to prevent me from falling back into my past sins, for which I beg pardon.  

HOW THE GIFT OF FEAR WATERS THE ROOTS OF HUMILITY AND TEMPERANCE AND FLOWS FROM THE VIRTUE OF HOPE

When St. Thomas wrote about the gifts in the Summa Theologica, he did so in the order of and the context of the theological virtues from which they flow or the cardinal virtues that they perfect. He addressed the gift of fear of the Lord when examining the virtue of hope. Being a supernatural virtue, the habit of hope is infused in us only through God’s grace, and ultimately what we hope for is to attain union with God in heaven by means of His divine assistance.

So where does the gift of fear fit in? Thomas notes that “God is the object of hope and fear, but under different aspects.” As hope has two objects—(1) the future good of heaven and (2) God’s help to achieve it—fear also has two objects—(1) the evil of punishment and (2) God, from whom such punishment may come. The evil of God’s punishment is only a relative evil, though, because from God flows only good. It is an evil that may befall us due to our own fault when we fail to fear God and follow the guidelines and aids He provides for our salvation.

So then, if we hope to spend eternity with God, the Holy Spirit’s gift of fear is itself an invaluable aid, boosting us up the first rung of the ladder to heaven by helping us to reject the thoughts and behaviors that separate us from God when we do not take His power and His justice seriously. In this way it is a powerful counter to the sin of presumption, that perversion of hope that expects God to welcome us into heaven with no need for us to cooperate by trying to walk in the right upward direction in our thoughts, words, and deeds.

Now, recall from our opening quotation how St. Bonaventure compared the fear of the Lord to a beautiful tree watered by God, that when full grown is worthy of eternal life. When the virtue of hope is infused in our souls and the gift of fear is freely accepted, that fear takes root, and as the tree begins to grow tall, it branches out into a variety of other virtues, beatitudes, and fruits, such as these:

• **Humility**: John of St. Thomas has explained that humility is not the same thing as fear, because we may humble ourselves before those we do not fear, as Christ did when He washed the feet of His disciples, and yet, “humility

27 ST, II-II, Q. 19, art. 1.
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can flow from fear and be regulated by it.”28 He explains that St. Thomas noted that humility can be an effect of fear because anyone who perfectly fears God will not exalt himself in pride but will express the humility that recognizes our nothingness without God, who creates and sustains us. This calls to mind God’s words to St. Catherine of Siena: “Do you know, daughter, who you are, and who I am? If you know these two things you will be blessed. You are she who is not; whereas I am He who is.”29

• Temperance: The gift of fear also works to bring acts motivated by the virtue of temperance to a far higher perfection. Through temperance, we regulate our desires for pleasure and flee from sinful behaviors to avoid personal shame and to preserve our integrity, while the gift of fear works to repress our passions and our focus upon their delights, not to preserve our health or reputation, but out of reverence for God.

• Poverty of Spirit: St. Augustine observed and St. Thomas concurred that from the fear of the Lord flow both the virtue of humility and the beatitude of poverty of spirit. Per Augustine: “The fear of the Lord is befitting the humble of whom it is said: Blessed are the poor in spirit.”30 The fear of the Lord prompts not only the humility by which man avoids exalting himself before God, but also the

30 ST, II-II, Q. 19, art. 12.
poverty of spirit through which man places God before all temporal goods, earthly treasures, and victories over others. As stated so well in Psalm 20:7: “Some boast of chariots, and some of horses; but we boast of the name of the LORD our God.”

- Modesty, continency (self-control), and chastity: Thomas notes that these are fruits of the Holy Spirit that correspond to the gift of fear, since they pertain to the moderate use of or abstention from temporal things or earthly goods and pleasures that may offend God.

So, how do we build these related virtues and enjoy the blessing of poverty of spirit, and the fruits that bring our passions under control? Well, we do nothing to earn the gift of fear, for it is freely given, but once we have received and unwrapped it, there are things that we must do, as Sts. Bonaventure and Paul have laid out so clearly for us (in a way that so appeals to the weightlifter in me):

Those who wish to have strong arms must give themselves to hard work. In a similar way, those who wish to have grace that strengthens them must give themselves to the practice of the virtues. The Apostle states: “By the grace of God I am what I am,” and then adds, “I have labored more than all others.”

31 If you will forgive the digression, I can’t help but note my favorite ancient application of this particular verse. The ancient lives of St. Patrick of Ireland say that when warned by his Druid priests of St. Patrick’s arrival and how it boded so poorly for the fate of their pagan religion, King O’Leary set forth “thrice-nine” chariots to intimidate the saint, whereupon Patrick, a man so immersed in the Scriptures, recited aloud this verse from memory!

32 Collations, p. 36. See 1 Cor. 15:10.
If we are to learn to embrace fully the gifts of the Holy Spirit, what greater human example is there for us than the Blessed Virgin Mary, espoused of the Holy Spirit, made Mother of our Lord Jesus Christ, and given to us by Christ to be our Mother as well? St. Albert the Great (ca. 1200–1280), St. Thomas Aquinas’s great teacher, wrote that when the angel Gabriel addressed Mary as “full of grace” (Luke 1:28) he essentially gave her a new name, a name that no other creature in the universe could claim. Mary was preserved from sin through her Immaculate Conception and was the open channel for all of God’s graces, becoming literally “full of grace.” Her response to Gabriel, “Let it be to me according to your word” (Luke 1:38), also served to open the founts of grace for us, through the birth, life, death, and Resurrection of her Son, Jesus Christ.

St. Albert notes in his book Mariale that to say that Mary was “full of grace” means that she was gifted with all of the virtues and graces, including the intellectual, cardinal, and theological virtues, the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, the eight beatitudes, and the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit. Indeed, he provides as well a fascinating look at Blessed Mary as she was prefigured in Isaiah 11:1: “There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.” This shoot, notes St. Albert, represents Mary as Mother of God. The shoots are “long and straight, upright and solid, graceful and flexible—here are all the symbols of the graces of Mary.”

is Christ, who, in the very next verse (indeed, the foundational verse of this book), is rested upon by the Holy Spirit, receiving all seven gifts. St. Albert notes as well in his Commentary on St. Luke that “the virginal process in which the stalk gives birth to the flower recalls the virginal birth.”

Mary, then, has received all the graces and cooperates in bringing us Christ and His New Law, letting loose those graces of the Holy Spirit for us all. No wonder one of the Blessed Mother’s many titles is Mediatrix of All Graces, operating not through her own power, but through the power of her Son, having been given this role, although a creature, as a free gift from God for her complete cooperation in God’s plan for our redemption.

So, what can Mary teach us about the fear of the Lord? Good question. Although Mary was without sin, she clearly displayed the heights of a loving filial fear in her question to Gabriel after he told her she would bear the “Son of the Most High”: “How can this be, since I have no husband?” (Luke 1:34). Mary’s question shows that she surely knew how babies usually came into the world! Still, the fact that she was already betrothed to Joseph reveals she had previously made a vow of perpetual virginity. She showed fear of the Lord then, lest the angel was suggesting that she would break her vow.

Mothers teach us by their words, but even more so by their examples. In 1874, Reverend Henry Formby, O.S.D., published...
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a book nobly entitled, Sacrum Septenarium, or The Seven Gifts of the Holy Ghost as Exemplified in the Life and Person of the Blessed Virgin for the Guidance and Instruction of Her Children, in which he focused specifically on how Mary can help us grow in the gifts, as any loving mother would want us to do. I drew from that tome the lesson of Mary’s vow and how it relates to the gift of fear. Fortunately for us, Father Formby formulated Marian lessons on each one of the gifts, and we’ll gratefully pull from them in the chapters ahead.

Now, though, we will turn to the lessons of the branch who, as Isaiah foretold, would grow from the shoot that was Mary and would receive and employ most perfectly all of the Sacrum septenarium, “seven gifts.”

THE FEAR OF THE LORD IN THE LORD JESUS CHRIST

We said earlier that Christ received the seven gifts, but could He have fear of the Lord when He is the Lord? Sounds as if I have some 'splainin' to do! Fortunately, I can draw from St. Thomas and others. Jesus Christ, of course, is the Word of God, the second person of the Trinity incarnate and made man. Jesus Christ had both divine and human intellects and wills, divine power along with potential human limitations, but He always kept them aligned. He did not sin and was God, so He would have had no servile fear dreading punishment, yet He had complete reverence for the Father and sought only to do the Father’s will. Indeed, He declared, “I and the Father are one” (John 10:30). Facing the pains of Crucifixion while in human flesh, Jesus famously prayed “Father, if thou art willing, remove this cup from me,” and yet He also added, “nevertheless not my will, but thine, be done” (Luke 22:42; cf. Matt. 26:39).
Jesus so loved God the Father that He embraced the Holy Spirit's gift of filial fear to prevail over any fear of unimaginable sufferings that He would feel in His flesh for the sake of each and every one of us. Although there have been and probably will continue to be martyrs for Christ, who among us will likely ever have to face willingly a horror like Christ's Passion on the Cross? Can we then thank the Holy Spirit for the great gift of fear that can help us reject whatever attachment we have to things of this earth that might bar our way to heaven?
Saul of Tarsus was a merciless persecutor of the Christians. Indeed, as the deacon Stephen, the first martyr for Christ, was stoned to death and cried out, asking that the Lord not hold the sin against the mob who stoned him, young Saul was right there “consenting to his death” (Acts 8:1). Of course, a funny thing happened to Saul soon after on the road to Damascus, where he had planned to gather more Christians for persecution in Jerusalem. He was blinded by a flash of light, fell to the ground, and heard a voice asking, “Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?” When Saul asked who had spoken, the voice responded “I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting” (Acts 9:4–5). Saul, still blind, was carried into Damascus, and God told the disciple Ananias that Saul was His chosen instrument to carry His message to the Gentiles and the Israelites. Ananias went to Saul and told him, “The Lord Jesus . . . has sent me that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit” (Acts 9:17). Ananias laid his hands on Saul, scales fell from Saul’s eyes, and his sight returned.

After Saul was filled with the Holy Spirit and His gifts, he immediately began proclaiming in the synagogues that Jesus was the Son of God. Later, as the carrier of Christ’s message to the Gentiles, he no longer used his Hebrew name of Saul, but went by his Latin name, Paul, to accommodate his potential non-Jewish converts throughout the Roman Empire, of which he was a citizen.
Paul’s conversion to Christ was a swift and powerful transformation through the power of the Holy Spirit, but Paul cooperated with that awesome gift of grace for the rest of his life—indeed, in “fear and trembling” (1 Cor. 2:3; cf. Phil. 2:12). His filial fear of the Lord was palpable. He sought only to live through and as Christ, and to bring the world to Christ as well, so deep was his fear of offending Him whom He loved. His filial fear set him free from any presumption that heaven was guaranteed him because of the great graces God gave him. He advised the Christians of Corinth to practice unremitting self-control in subduing their bodies, explaining that he must do the same “lest after preaching to others I myself should be disqualified” (1 Cor. 9:27).

St. Paul, the Apostle to the Gentiles, shares a feast day with St. Peter, the rock on which Christ built the Church, on June 29.

St. Paul, pray for us, that we too may work out our salvation with the filial fear of the Lord, and inspire our neighbors to do the same.
So where in the Bible are the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit? Scripture itself was inspired by the Source of the seven gifts, and their Source Himself appears in Scripture’s very first verses: “In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was upon the face of the deep; and the Spirit of God was moving over the face of the waters” (Gen. 1:1–2). God’s Holy Spirit is the Giver of these life-giving gifts as He moves over the waters to breathe within the depths of our own innermost beings.

Most of the gifts and their related virtues share the same names. In fact, one task we will face, as St. Thomas did, will be to distinguish the two kinds of special blessings and perfections that we receive from God in different ways. While the gifts appear alone or grouped together in hundreds of places throughout the Bible, there is one essential place in which all are listed together:

There shall come forth a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and a branch shall grow out of his roots.
And the Spirit of the LORD shall rest upon him, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and the fear of the LORD.
And his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD. (Isa. 11:1–3)
Latin Vulgate translation courtesy of St. Jerome:

Et egredietur virga de radice Jesse, et flos de radice ejus ascendet. Et requiescet super eum spiritus Domini: spiritus sapientiae et intellectus, spiritus consilii et fortitudinis, spiritus scientiae et pietatis; et replebit eum spiritus timoris Domini. (Italics added)

In the Douay-Rheims edition of the Bible, translated from the Latin, we find the word godliness meaning essentially the same thing as piety. Although some translations of the Bible show fear of the Lord a second time instead of piety, St. Jerome used the word pietas (piety) for the spirit following scientiae (science or knowledge) and used timoris Domini (fear of the Lord) at the end of verse 3. The name of the gift of piety has hence come down through Tradition from the early Church Fathers to Pope St. Gregory the Great, to St. Thomas Aquinas, and is listed among the gifts in our current Catechism of the Catholic Church (no. 1831).
There are some gifts of the Holy Spirit that we can hold in our hands, and one was handed to the Church by Eusebius Sophronius Hieronymus — better known as St. Jerome (347–420). Jerome was one of the four original Latin Doctors of the Church (along with Sts. Ambrose, Augustine, and Pope Gregory the Great) and is known as the Father of Biblical Science. His greatest gift to us was the Latin Vulgate Bible, an elegant and faithful translation from Hebrew and Greek sources into the vulgar, or common, Latin used by the people in his day, rendering the Bible more understandable and engaging than ever before for a Latin-reading audience. It influenced theologians for centuries and in the sixteenth century was promulgated at the Council of Trent as the authentic Latin translation for use by the Church.

Jerome as a man and a saint shows how God showers His gifts on all kinds of people with all kinds of personalities, sometimes producing from surly sinners some startling saintly surprises! In his youth Jerome was engrossed in sensual pleasures and so immersed in classical pagan philosophy and literature that even decades after his conversion he was flogged by an angel in a dream for being more Ciceronian than Christian. As a mature hermit, in his tireless efforts to defend the Church, Jerome sometimes wrote

17 See Profile in Grace #4 for a brief look at Cicero and his influence on many Christian theologians.
very harshly about his theological opponents and was prone to arguments and estrangements from his family and friends. He is the patron saint of translators, librarians, and encyclopedists and could be patron of the hot-tempered too!

Still, he was also known for his penitence and his attempts at reconciliation with some of his foes. Centuries after Jerome’s death, Pope Sixtus V (1521–1590) saw a painting depicting Jerome beating his breast as the tax collector in Luke 18:13 did (and as we do at Mass in the Penitential Rite), but Jerome was holding a stone. The pope said to the figure of St. Jerome in the painting that if it were not for the pebble he held, he would not be a saint!

St. Jerome has special relevance for us in our consideration of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit, because his rendering of the names of the gifts in the Vulgate has formed the basis of sixteen hundred years of deeper reflection on the gifts within Church Tradition. And why did St. Jerome consider the study of Scripture so important that he would spend years learning Greek and Hebrew and would sequester himself in a cave outside Bethlehem, laboring every day for years on end to bring to the world the Vulgate? Thankfully, he told us exactly why in his Commentary on Isaiah: “Ignorance of the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ.”

St. Jerome’s feast day is September 30.

*St. Jerome, Father of Biblical Science, pray for us, so that under the guidance of the Holy Spirit we may grow in our knowledge of and love for Christ as we read Scripture.*