It is written (Sirach 6:23): “The wisdom of doctrine is according to her name,” for wisdom (sapientia) may be described as sweet-tasting science (sapida scientia).

—St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II-II, Q. 45, art. 4

O taste and see that the LORD is good!

—Psalm 34:8
THE GIFT AT THE TOP OF THE STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

We’ve seen how the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and how piety, knowledge, fortitude, counsel, and understanding carry us along our way to complete the journey toward wisdom itself, a journey so well worth taking, since “God loves nothing so much as the man who lives in wisdom. For she is more beautiful than the sun, and exceeds every constellation of the stars” (Wisd. 7:28–29). Indeed, the Holy Spirit’s gift of wisdom can help us sail beyond the stars, all the way to heaven.

So the Spirit’s gift of wisdom is clearly immensely valuable and beautiful to boot, but what exactly is it? Recall, if you will, from chapter 4, that the virtue of wisdom was the highest of the three intellectual virtues. St. Thomas sums up their relationship like this:

Science depends on understanding as on a virtue of higher degree; and both of these depend on wisdom, as claiming the highest place, and containing beneath itself understanding and science, by judging both the conclusions of science, and of the principles on which they are based.141

The virtue of understanding, you will recall, is based upon our intuitive grasp of self-evident principles and allows us to abstract

141 ST, Q. 57, art. 2.
and form concepts about the singular particular things we encounter through our senses, helping us to “penetrate into the heart of things,” to understand the essence or gist of what things are. The virtue of science, or knowledge, you will recall, is involved in cause-and-effect relationships, and particularly lower or more immediate causes perceptible or deducible from the senses. New principles may emerge from the workings of physical sciences and come to be known as scientific “laws.” As for wisdom, above and beyond the knowledge of science, these laws of formal science examine physical causes and effects, while the field within philosophy that Aristotle termed metaphysics examines the fundamental causes that underlie them, including that ultimate cause of all effects (and all subsequent causes as well), that Uncaused Cause that he called God. This is why Aristotle called metaphysics the “divine science”:

The most divine science is also most honorable; and this science alone is, in two ways, most divine. For the science which it would be most meet for God to have is a divine science, and so is any science that deals with divine objects; and this science alone has both these qualities.... Such a science either God alone can have, or God above all others.  

The virtue of wisdom then, is a special kind of knowledge that judges of the highest and most fundamental of all causes, a science that studies God, a science worthy of God, and one that only God can fully grasp. Aristotle’s most powerful capacities

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142 Meta (beyond, upon, or transcending) and physika (physics or nature).
143 Aristotle’s Metaphysics, bk. 1, chap. 2.
for reason could carry even him just so far, though. Aristotle lived three centuries before Christ, and he did not know of the Holy Spirit's *gift of wisdom* described in the Holy Scriptures. The Philosopher's most astute student across the centuries knew it, though, and indeed he possessed it in superabundance, so now let's turn to his explanation.

**THE KNOWLEDGE AND WISDOM OF ST. THOMAS AQUINAS**

(AND OF STS. MATTHEW AND JOHN)

While the gift of knowledge judges primarily of lower, earthly, and human things, it can move us toward the consideration of the higher things of God, but only indirectly, considering how these earthly effects derive from higher causes. "The gift of wisdom," on the other hand, per twentieth-century Thomist Fr. Réginald Garrigou-Lagrange, "proceeds in the opposite direction. It judges first of divine things, then of created things as insets of the divine." In a fascinating insight, Fr. Garrigou-Lagrange observes that the Gospel of St. Matthew may be seen to follow the path of the gift of knowledge in preaching Christ, starting with Christ's human genealogy and rising from the things of the earth to the things of heaven, while St. John's Gospel starts straight off with Christ as "the Word" in the first verse, "portraying in the higher light of wisdom that radiates from above, out through the lower streams of knowledge, with which St. Matthew is more conversant."

So, the gift of wisdom treats of the highest of things, the divine things of God. St. Thomas tells us that although the gifts

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144 The Theological Virtues, p. 396.
145 Ibid.
of knowledge and understanding flow from the theological virtue of faith, the gift of wisdom, the greatest of all the gifts, flows from charity—the greatest of all the virtues (1 Cor. 13:13). As with knowledge and understanding, the intellectual virtue of wisdom is built by our efforts and guided by human reason, but like God’s other gifts, the gift of wisdom is infused in us by the Holy Spirit. It “comes down from above” (James 3:15).

Thomas declares that “wisdom which is a gift, has its cause in the will, which cause is charity, but it has its essence in the intellect, whose act is to judge aright.” While the primary act of the intellect is to know the truth, the primary act of the will is to love the good. The gift of wisdom then empowers us through the aid of the Holy Spirit to grasp the highest truths of God of which our minds are capable, prompted by the ardent love of the highest good and source of all good—God! Joy is the emotion we experience when we attain what we love. The gift of wisdom helps us attain union with God in mind and in heart, and it brings with it great joy.

Recall, if you will, this chapter’s opening quotations. It happens that the Latin word for wisdom is sapientia, a contraction of sapor, “taste,” “savor,” or “flavor,” and scientia, “science,” which suggests that wisdom is a “sweet-tasting science.” The psalmist calls us to “taste and see” that the Lord is God. We see God with the light of our intellects and savor Him through the love in our hearts. Clearly then, the gift of wisdom has nothing to do with cold and tasteless abstractions, but is a gift that inflames our minds and hearts through a closer union with the goodness of God, a union we savor and relish. We should want the gift of wisdom so badly that we can taste it!

146 ST, II-II, Q. 45, art. 4.
Further, God has directed us to love Him with all that we are and also to love our neighbors as ourselves. The gift of wisdom, although primarily judging of the divine things of God, also has a practical use in that it allows us to judge practical matters from a divine perspective, thereby guiding and ordering our lives so that we may best serve our neighbors, sharing with them the fruits of charity and wisdom.

WELCOME TO THE HOUSE OF WISDOM!

God must certainly want us to dwell in wisdom, for in multiple places in the Bible wisdom is compared to a house. For example, Proverbs 24:3–5 tells us: “By wisdom a house is built, and by understanding it is established; by knowledge the rooms are filled with all precious and pleasant riches. A wise man is mightier than a strong man, and a man of knowledge than he who has strength.”

Another such verse that caught the Seraphic Doctor’s attention was Proverbs 9:1: “Wisdom has built her house, she has set up her seven pillars.” Now, before he supplied his exegesis St. Bonaventure asked an amusing rhetorical question: “But what are the seven pillars of this house? Should I make them up out of my own head?” He answers his question no, because the pillars of wisdom are right there in Sacred Scripture: “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, without uncertainty or insincerity” (James 3:17). He then expounds on each of the pillars, of which I’ll provide just some highlights here:

147 Collations, p. 188.
BONAVENTURE'S SEVEN PILLARS OF WISDOM

1. **Chastity** (purity) is the first pillar, because as is written in Wisdom 1:4: “Wisdom will not enter a deceitful soul, nor dwell in a body enslaved to sin.” One example is that of King Solomon, who, although he had been “filled with wisdom like a river” (Sir. 47:14), lost his wisdom because of his lust for women (see Sir. 47:19–21).

2. **Innocence of mind** (peaceable) is wisdom’s second pillar, because peace derives from an innocence and humility whereby one submits humbly to those superior in authority, treats peers impartially, and does not take advantage of one’s inferiors. Those who love their equals, obey their superiors, and properly rule those who are subject to them find peace. “Who is wise and instructed among you? Let him by his good behavior show his work in the meekness of wisdom” (James 3:13).

3. **Moderation in speech** (gentle) is the third pillar of wisdom, as Sirach 20:7 states: “A wise man will be silent till the right time comes, but a babbler and a fool will not pay attention to the time.” Bonaventure elaborates that evil speech kills both the speaker and the listener: “You

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Please note that, due to slight differences in translation and the fact that St. Bonaventure used a Latin translation, and his words have in turn been translated into English, some of the words he uses for the pillars differ a bit from the RSV translation I provided above, as I’ll try to make clear as we move through the pillars by placing the words from the RSV in parentheses.
cannot speak detraction about your neighbor without killing yourself with the same sword.”

4. **Docility in affect** (open to reason) is the fourth pillar of wisdom. The wise are willing to learn from others. As Proverbs 9:8 advises: “Do not rebuke a scoffer, or he will hate you; rebuke a wise man, and he will love you.” Bonaventure observes that the wise know their own faults and are displeased with them. Further, when we correct a person and persuade him of the evil of his ways, we have given him a greater favor than if we gave him the whole world.

5. **Generosity in action** (full of mercy and good fruits) is wisdom’s fifth pillar. As Bonaventure so pithily puts it: “Wisdom wants to have mercy not only in affect, but in effect as well.” Indeed, “from their fruits you shall know them” (see Matt. 7:16, 20). Pulling from a few verses of Proverbs (31:20, 26, 16), Bonaventure notes that those who have opened their mouths to wisdom have the law of mercy on their tongues, open their hands to the poor, and provide them with fruits of their labors.

6. **Maturity of judgment** (without uncertainty) is pillar number six. As Psalm 36:30 relates: “The mouth of the just one will meditate wisdom, and his tongue will speak judgment.” A mature judge will zealously approve everything good and disapprove everything...
evil. When James 2:4 states: "Are you not making distinctions among yourselves and do you not become judges with evil thoughts?" he is not saying that a person should not judge at all, "concerning an issue about which he has certitude, authority, and correct zeal." Rather, he is saying that we should not judge evil to be good and good to be evil, and further, that "a person should be more inclined to excuse kindly than to accuse wrongly." St. Bonaventure, then, believed it is wise in unclear circumstances to think the best of our neighbor and give the benefit of the doubt, rather than imputing their evil intentions or acts. And further, "it is the highest form of foolishness when people judge the personal faults of others and overlook themselves."

7. Sincerity of intention (without insincerity) is wisdom's seventh pillar. Bonaventure expounds upon 1 Kings 10:18-19, which describe King Solomon's glorious throne with six steps. Those six steps are like the wisdom's other six pillars that circle around the throne of this last and highest one, for there is one highest all of intentions the wise person will seek with the utmost sincerity, without deceit, hypocrisy, or any duplicity, indeed, with all his heart, mind, and soul. This pillar is revealed in Colossians 3:2-3: "Seek the things that are above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things that are above, not on things that are on earth."

152 Collations, p. 196.
WELCOMING WISDOM

Upon the throne of wisdom, then, sits Jesus Christ Himself. It was also He who advised us to build our own house of wisdom and who is the solid rock that serves as its foundation: “Everyone who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house upon the rock” (Matt. 7:24). And as for those of us who do embrace Christ, who do as He tells us, and who, with the Holy Spirit’s aid, build houses of wisdom on earth, He tells us as well that in the next life, there are many rooms prepared for us in his Father’s house (cf. John 14:2).

THE SACRAMENTS OF WISDOM

The wise men and women of the Church, the Fathers and Doctors and saints, have examined every virtue, grace, gift, and sacrament from God from almost every conceivable angle, and St. Thomas tells us that earlier theologians had related each of the sacraments to one of the seven virtues as follows:

They say that Baptism corresponds to Faith, and is ordained against Original Sin; Extreme Unction, to Hope, being ordained against venial sin; the Eucharist, to Charity, being ordained against the penal effect which is malice; Order, to Prudence, being ordained against ignorance; Penance to Justice, being ordained against mortal sin; Matrimony to Temperance, being ordained against concupiscence.  

Here I’ve culled out the parallels:

153 ST, III, Q. 65, art. 1.
We might meditate on which sacraments seem also to have the closest affinity to each of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit. Confirmation, as we have noted, bears a special relationship to the gift of fortitude as well as the virtue, since we pray both for fortitude and for a strengthening of all of the gifts in this holy rite. So which sacrament or sacraments might also have a special relationship to the gift of wisdom?

We could surely say that the Eucharist bears a special relationship to wisdom because wisdom is the highest gift that flows from the virtue of charity. In the Eucharist we also set our minds on the highest thing, Christ Himself, Wisdom Incarnate, and are joined with Him in the most intimate of ways. Indeed, after receiving Communion in the Traditional Latin Mass, the priest
prays that the body and blood of our Lord that he has received will “adhaerat visceribus meis,” “cleave to my innermost parts.”

Holy Orders should also bear a special relationship to the gift of wisdom, so that the ordained priests who bring us the body, blood, soul, and divinity of Christ can also share with us the wisdom of Christ as they open the Scriptures to us while they explicate the Gospel in their homilies. St. Thomas tells us that the gift of wisdom judges primarily of the divine things of God and then judges the things of the world from that divine perspective. And who is it that we turn to in the most difficult of situations when divine wisdom is most direly needed? “The Universal Church cannot err, since she is governed by the Holy Ghost, Who is the Spirit of Truth.” Further, regarding the pope himself, St. Thomas writes, to him belongs “authority which is empowered to decide matters of faith finally, so that they may be held by all with unshakeable faith. Now this belongs to the authority of the Sovereign Pontiff, to whom the more difficult questions that arise in the Church are referred.”

FOLLY, FOE OF WISDOM

So what, then, can we do to make sure we are not undermining our own house of wisdom? We saw that the vice of ignorance throttles the gift of knowledge and hebetude or dullness throttles the gift of understanding. The vice of folly is wisdom’s foe. The Scriptures as a whole, and the book of Proverbs in particular, spell out plenty of contrasts between the attitudes, desires, and actions of the wise and those of the foolish. We have discussed

154 ST, I, Q. 1, art. 9.
155 Ibid., art.10.
many characteristics and behaviors of the wise so far in this chapter. The fool, by contrast, according to Proverbs, rejects reproof and goes astray (10:17), is right in his own eyes (12:15), throws off restraint and is careless (14:16), has a hasty temper (14:29), gives full vent to his anger (29:11), has eyes on the ends of the earth (17:24), takes no pleasure in understanding, but only in his own opinion (18:2), will ever be quarreling (20:3), and repeats his folly “like a dog that returns to its vomit” (26:11).

These characteristics all follow when a person rejects the virtue and the gift of wisdom. Folly, says St. Thomas, “denotes a special dullness of sense in judging, and chiefly regards the highest cause, which is the last end and the sovereign good.”

Wisdom has its priorities straight and focuses most on the things that truly matter. Wisdom sets priorities, “first things first,” especially in the case of the First Cause!

Thomas says we may experience folly for two main reasons. Some small minority of people have mental limitations, whereby they may receive the grace of the gift of wisdom, but because of their deficient cognitive abilities they are not able to reason about the higher things, and there is no sin in that. But far more often the one who embraces folly over wisdom does so “by plunging his sense into earthly things, whereby his sense is rendered incapable of perceiving Divine things according to 1 Cor. 2:14, “The sensual man perceiveth not these things that are of the Spirit of God, even as sweet things have no savor for a man whose taste is infected with an evil humor: and such like folly is a sin.”

The psalmist tells us, “The fool says in his heart, ‘There is no God’” (Ps. 14:1). Perhaps some foolish people have the sense in

156 ST, II-II, Q. 46, art. 2.
157 Ibid.
their minds to know that God is there, yet because their hearts are directed to the things of the earth, their actions speak out as if God did not exist for them. As the God-Man tells us, “For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also” (Matt. 6:21). How much wiser we will be if we come to taste, see, savor, and treasure the good things of God rather than merely the pleasures of our senses.

PRAYING FOR WISDOM

St. Bonaventure links the seventh petition of the Lord’s Prayer, “and deliver us from evil,” with a prayer for the gift of wisdom, since we cannot conquer evil desires of the flesh without the Holy Spirit’s gift of wisdom. Indeed, as we just saw in St. Thomas’s explication, we arrive at folly rather than wisdom when we plunge our senses into worldly things, and as St. Paul has told us, “the wisdom of the world is folly with God” (1 Cor. 3:19).

To achieve the gift of wisdom “from above,” St. James simply says, “If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him” (James 1:5). Let us pray, then, with St. Alphonsus Liguori: “Grant me the spirit of wisdom that I may despise the perishable things of this world and aspire only after things that are eternal.”

THE PEACE THAT WISDOM BRINGS

We saw from Bonaventure’s exegesis of James 3:17 that to be peaceable is a pillar of wisdom, and St. Thomas explains that from the gift of wisdom flows the seventh beatitude “blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matt. 5:9). He notes on the merit side of the beatitude, citing Augustine’s
observation that "peace is the tranquility of order," that a peacemaker produces peace either in himself, or in others, which is the result of setting in proper order all the things required for peace. He cites Aristotle as well, who described a defining characteristic of wisdom as setting things in order. As for the reward side of the beatitude, that peacemakers will be called sons of God, Thomas notes that we become children of God by participating in the likeness of his only-begotten son, Jesus Christ, "according to Rom. 3:29: Whom He foreknew ... to be made conformable to the image of His Son, Who is Wisdom Begotten. Hence by participating in the gift of wisdom, man attains to the sonship of God."^59

Although Thomas did not specifically address the fruits of the gift of wisdom, we may conclude that they coincide with those of the gift of charity, from which the gift flows, including the joy that comes from union with the highest object of our love (recall again the savor of sapiential), as well as that pillar, beatitude, and also the fruit of peace.

MARY. SEDES SAPIENTIAE

The Blessed Mother was so graced with wisdom that one of her many titles is "Seat of Wisdom," a very ancient title that came to be recited in the sixteenth-century Litany of Loreto, as is the title "Mother of Good Counsel," as was noted in chapter 5. Indeed, the English Dominican Fathers' translation of St. Thomas's Summa Theologica from which we have been drawing is dedicated to "the Blessed Virgin Mary Immaculate, Seat of Wisdom."

^58 ST. II-II, Q. 45, art. 6.
^59 Ibid.
WELCOMING WISDOM

Mother Mary had often been depicted in statuary and in paintings as seated upon a majestic throne with the child Jesus in her lap. Mary had been likened by medieval theologians to Solomon’s throne of wisdom, and Christ was considered Wisdom Incarnate. Therefore, Mary’s lap was indeed the seat or throne of wisdom! Through her total submission to and cooperation with the Holy Spirit, she attained to the most intimate union with God, she sheltered Wisdom in her womb and then brought Him forth for all of us. May Mary, Seat of Wisdom, serve as our model and our intercessor so that we too might share it the spirit of the gift of wisdom.

CHRIST, WISDOM INCARNATE

Lastly we come to Wisdom Incarnate, to Christ, who sits in the seat of wisdom, at the right hand of God, who dwells in wisdom’s house, lays the foundations for wisdom’s pillars, and awaits us at the top of the ladder set up for us by the Holy Spirit’s seven gifts, to guide us to the rooms in heaven that He has prepared for us. Christ asks us to taste and see His goodness in the Eucharist and to judge of the things of the earth through the divine wisdom He imparted to us in His sermons, in His parables, and in the wisdom of the Cross.

It is up to us whether we are willing to submit to the stirrings of the Holy Spirit, take up our own crosses and follow Him, so that ultimately, through the infusion of the virtue of charity and the great gift of wisdom, we might become gentle and lowly of heart like Wisdom Incarnate, and might find His yoke is easy and His burden light (Matt. 11:30), and the path that He and His Spirit will guide us along will lead us to the heavenly paradise.
The pages of this book have drawn so heavily from the heavenly wisdom of the Angelic Doctor that what more is there to say? Not much perhaps, but here we go! If the Scriptures themselves and St. Jerome’s Vulgate are among the Holy Spirit’s gifts of wisdom that we can hold in our hands, so too is the *Summa Theologica*. The gift of wisdom provides knowledge of divine things whereby we can judge of all things. Carol Robinson, a twentieth-century lay Thomist, once compared studying St. Thomas to climbing a mountain through a path carved out by a powerful intellect: “At the summit is wisdom. Should you attain it you can stand tall and admire God and His greatness. Then you can look down on human affairs and judge them.”

St. Thomas helps us stand tall in wisdom, because that is just what he did. His *Summa Theologica* starts at the heights of the majesty of God, follows His work of creation, and judges of the nature of humanity and of human happiness, before pointing to Christ as the only true guide along the path back to God. St. Thomas tasted of the wisdom of God and saw that it was good. When Christ told him in a vision that he had served Him well in his writings, He asked Thomas what he would like as his reward. “Only You, Lord” was his answer.

St. Thomas Aquinas’s feast day is January 28.

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St. Thomas, Angelic Doctor, residing among the choirs of angels and saints, pray for us, so that we may so fully possess the Holy Spirit's gift of wisdom that our hearts and minds will savor divine things and seek only Christ.
THE GIFTS AND THE FRUITS

The fruits of the Spirit are perfections that the Holy Spirit forms in us as the first fruits of eternal glory. The tradition of the Church lists twelve of them: “charity, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, generosity, gentleness, faithfulness, modesty, self-control, chastity.”

—Catechism of the Catholic Church, no. 1832

The beatitudes are acts of virtue: while the fruits are delights in virtuous acts.

—St. Thomas Aquinas, Summa Theologica, II-II, Q. 157, art. 2

The Church’s list of the twelve fruits of the Holy Spirit build upon the list of “fruits of the Spirit” St. Paul provides in Galatians 5:22–23 in contrast with a list of sinful behaviors that are “the works of the flesh” in verses 19–21. St. Thomas draws our attention as well to a verse in Revelation “that may be a reference to them: Apoc. 22:2: On both sides of the river was the tree of life bearing twelve fruits.”

161 Although the RSV cited above, as well as various other translations, list nine fruits in this verse, the Church’s tradition built upon the twelve fruits listed in St. Jerome’s Latin Vulgate translation, which can also be seen, with minor variations of the names of some fruits, in the Douay-Rheims translation.

162 ST, I-II, Q. 70, art. 3.
So what exactly are these fruits of the Holy Spirit? To put it in a nutshell (or perhaps, more suitably, a coconut shell), Thomas points out that “the fruits are any virtuous deeds in which one delights.” As fruit is produced by the tree, good works are produced by man. As material fruits please and refresh us, so do spiritual fruits, “with a holy and genuine delight.” The gifts make us receptive to the inspiration of God, so that we may bear (and enjoy) the fruits.

FRUITS AND BEATITUDES: WHAT'S THE DIFFERENCE?

So then, the fruits are delights that we take in virtuous acts, especially those acts perfected by the gifts. How, then, do the fruits differ from the Beatitudes? St. Thomas notes that “all beatitudes may be called fruits, but not vice versa.” The Beatitudes and the fruits share in common that both are virtuous deeds that bring us delight, but the difference is that “it is sufficient for a fruit to be something ultimate and delightful; whereas for a beatitude, it must be something perfect and excellent.” In other words, as natural virtues and gifts are both habits disposing us toward the good, the gifts are superior in that they operate under the guidance of the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. Fruits and beatitudes are both delightful results of meritorious acts, but Beatitudes are more complete and perfect works that provide even higher delights. How delightful that the Giver gives us so many ways to guide us toward happiness, on earth and in heaven.

163 Ibid., art. 2. The words used to list the twelve fruits in the ST, I-II, Q. 70, art. 3 as translated by the Dominican Fathers are as follows: charity, joy, peace, patience, long-suffering, goodness, benignity, meekness, faith, modesty, continency, and chastity.
164 Ibid.
The Seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit

The Fruits that Flow from the Gifts

We've seen by now that St. Thomas Aquinas was not one to leave any loose ends untied or any potential connections unconnected! He described certain beatitudes that flow from each particular gift, and you may rest assured he did the same in detailing which fruits tend to grow most directly from the nourishment of the gifts.

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<tr>
<th>Gift</th>
<th>Fruit</th>
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<td>Fear of the Lord</td>
<td>Modesty, self-control, chastity</td>
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<td>Piety</td>
<td>Kindness, generosity</td>
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<td>Knowledge</td>
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<td>Patience, gentleness</td>
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<td>Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wisdom</td>
<td>Charity, joy, peace</td>
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ST. PATRICK OF IRELAND: FRUITS WORTH DECADES OF CULTIVATION

The patron saint of Ireland was not Irish, at least not by birth, but the fruits he planted in Irish soils are all still there for the picking. St. Patrick (ca. 387–461) was born at Bannavem Taburniae (the field of the tents) somewhere on the island that now houses England, Scotland, and Wales, and his first extended visit to the island next door to the west was in the role of a slave, courtesy of Irish pirates.

While we are blessed with nearly countless pious legends of St. Patrick's life, we are blessed as well with the pages of his own authentic Confessio, wherein he tells the story of his kidnapping and escape. Although he was the son of a deacon, Patrick did not take his Faith seriously until after he was kidnapped before he turned sixteen. While made to tend sheep in the mountains of Ireland, Patrick would pray as often as a hundred times per day and as many times at night, imploring God for his freedom and deliverance from Ireland, which was not to come for nearly seven years. In his Confessio he relates the story of his kidnapping and escape, including his acute awareness of the stirrings of the Holy Spirit. He tells of an incident one night when he saw someone praying, and it was as if Patrick were inside his own body and hearing himself pray above him, above his interior, or inner, man. He prayed powerfully with signs and groans and realized near the end of the prayer that it was the Holy Spirit praying through him. He remembered that St. Paul had written,
“the Spirit himself intercedes with us with sighs too deep for words” (Rom. 8:26).

When he returned to Ireland, St. Patrick must have demonstrated all of the succulent fruits of the Holy Spirit for virtually the whole island nation to reject the gods of their ancestors and accept the Triune God whom he taught them about. Perhaps one fruit in which St. Patrick grew most abundantly was patience, rendered perhaps even better in his case by the old word longanimity or long-suffering. Although St. Patrick had prayed for nearly seven years to escape from Ireland, in his Confessio, in merely the third sentence after describing his return home, he writes of his burning desire to go back and bring Christ’s gospel message to Ireland.

Still, and here is where the fruit of longanimity really comes in, because Patrick was kidnapped as a young man, it took him decades to complete his education, become a priest, then a bishop, achieve papal endorsement, and assemble a team that could build up in Ireland the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic Church (along with scores of physical wooden churches to house a whole island of new priests and parishioners). Indeed, the great saint who converted Ireland did not go back there and really get down to business until he was in his forties or fifties, but powered as he was by the gifts of the Holy Spirit, that did not slow him down.

St. Patrick’s feast day is, well, on St. Patrick’s Day, of course, March 17.

*St. Patrick, pray for us, that the Holy Spirit might sigh and groan through us, strengthening our gifts and yielding all the sweet fruits, including longanimity—regardless of how long it might take.*