

The
WAY
OF THE
SPIRIT

Using *the* Gifts,
Showing *the* Fruits

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Introduction

Why We Need This

“Be holy, because I am holy.”

1 PETER 1:16

Pope Francis has written to “repropose the call to holiness in a practical way for our own time.” He says, “The Lord has chosen each one of us ‘to be holy and blameless before him in love’ (Ephesians 1:4) ... The Lord asks everything of us, and in return he offers us true life, the happiness for which we were created. He wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence” (*Rejoice and Be Glad*, 2, 1).

The first pope wrote: “As he who called you is holy, be holy yourselves in all your conduct; for it is written, ‘You shall be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Peter 1:16).

The current pope writes: “Let the grace of your Baptism bear fruit in a path of holiness ... Do not be dismayed, for the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life” (see Galatians 5:22–23, *Rejoice and Be Glad*, 15).

Obviously, Christians should focus on experiencing the “fruit of the Holy Spirit,” not just on living good human lives

according to the Ten Commandments. To live only by the Ten Commandments is to live a sub-Christian life. Christians are called—and empowered—to live divine lives according to the New Law of Christ.

We know we are living that divine life when we experience “the fruit of the Holy Spirit.”

St. Paul describes the “fruit of the Spirit” by listing nine benchmarks that set the standard for normal Christian living. The traits that identify us as authentic Christians in daily life are, “*love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control*” (Galatians 5:22–23). These are the benchmarks we should constantly keep in mind.

To achieve them, however, we need special divine help. God empowers us to bear the “fruit of the Spirit” by giving us the gifts of the Holy Spirit that Isaiah prophesied Jesus would have:

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of *Wisdom and Understanding*, the spirit of *Counsel and Strength*, the spirit of *Knowledge and Fear of the LORD*. His delight shall be in the Fear of the LORD. ■ ISAIAH 11:1FF.

(*The Septuagint and the Vulgate read “Piety” for “Fear of the Lord” in its first occurrence, from which we have the traditional seven gifts.*)

Obviously, if we are serious about living by the Spirit, we need to give serious attention to these gifts. What are they, what do they help us do, and how can we make the best use of them? This book shows us how to grow in holiness by using the gifts of the Holy Spirit so that the fruit of the Holy Spirit will be evident in our lives.

The
GIFTS
OF THE
SPIRIT



TO LIVE BY THE SPIRIT WE NEED THE GIFTS OF THE SPIRIT

Peter said to them, “Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ so that your sins may be forgiven; and you will receive the gift of the Holy Spirit.”

ACTS 2:38

We hardly speak of the “gift of the Holy Spirit” today. But in the early Church it was recognized as a major element of the Christian life—so much so, that if someone did not receive the gift of the Spirit at baptism, something had to be done about it.

When the Greek Christians fled to Samaria to escape persecution, they preached the Good News, although they were laypersons. And they baptized converts. When the apostles at Jerusalem heard this, they sent Peter and John to them, who laid their hands on the newly baptized, “and they received the Holy Spirit... for as yet the Spirit had not come upon any of them; they had only been baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.” And when Paul found believers at Ephesus, he asked them, “Did you receive the Holy Spirit when you became believers?” When they replied, “No, we have not even heard that there is a Holy Spirit,” Paul “laid his hands on them, the Holy Spirit came upon them, and they spoke in tongues and prophesied” (Acts 8:14–16; 19:2–6).

This was in fulfillment of Jesus’s promise to the Apostles (Acts 1:8): “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.”

Credible witness to the Good News can only be borne by those who show the fruit of the Spirit in their lives. But for this we need to be empowered by the gifts of the Spirit. The letter to the Hebrews (2:4) says God backed up the testimony of Jesus “by signs and wonders and various miracles, and by gifts of the Holy Spirit, distributed according to his will.”

It should give us pause that Paul said, “Those who are unspiritual do not receive the gifts of God’s Spirit, for they are foolishness to them, and they are unable to understand them because they are spiritually discerned.” But formed Christians “have received not the spirit of the world, but the Spirit that is from God, so that we may understand the gifts bestowed on us by God” (1 Corinthians 2:12). And, in fact, Understanding is the second of the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

So it is important for us not only to know what the gifts of the Spirit are, but to be able to define them and use them. Only by using the gifts of the Holy Spirit will we be able to live by the Spirit in such a way that the fruit of the Spirit appears in our life.

The Way of **WISDOM**

A shoot shall come out from the stump of Jesse, and from his roots a bud shall blossom. The spirit of the LORD shall rest on him, the spirit of Wisdom and Understanding, the spirit of Counsel and Strength, the spirit of Knowledge and Fear of the LORD. His delight shall be in the Fear of the LORD. ISAIAH 11:1FF.

(As stated earlier, the Septuagint and the Vulgate read “Piety”—that is, Family Spirit—for “Fear of the Lord” in its first occurrence, which gives us the traditional seven gifts.)

Four gifts of the Spirit enlighten the intellect: *Wisdom, Understanding, Knowledge, and Counsel*. Three strengthen the will: *Family Spirit, Strength, and Awe of the Lord*. Wisdom is defined as the habit of seeing everything in the light of our last end.

The striking thing that should shine out in any Christian’s life is a *joie de vivre*, an enthusiasm for living that comes from awareness that we have something to live for. Not “pie-in-the-sky when you die,” but literally heaven on earth: a joy, a fulfillment that is ours right now, that is increasing, and will be ours completely when our earthly pilgrimage is over.

Our “last end” is something we are tasting now, that gives purpose, meaning, and motivation to everything we do.

For Christians, “heaven” is not a place. It is that “life to the full” that Jesus said he came to give (John 10:10). It is something we

believe in and are experiencing in increasing measure right now.

The Christian “heaven” is not human life to the full, such as we might imagine in some modern version of Valhalla or the Happy Hunting Ground. The fullness of life we live for is the Life of God: the ecstatic mutual Oneness of the Three Persons interacting with each other in total awareness of all that is True and Good and Beautiful.

We who have been made divine by “the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” (2 Corinthians 13:13, words we use to begin Mass) share in that Life now. We are caught up now in the Life of the Trinity, sharing in their communal act of knowing, sharing in their communal act of loving, sharing in the unity they enjoy as totally One in Being, Goodness, and Truth.

We are in heaven now.

True, we don’t share in that Life with full consciousness yet.

For now we see in a mirror, dimly, but then we will see face to face. Now we know only in part; then we will know fully, even as we have been fully known. ■ **1 CORINTHIANS 13:12**

Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we will be has not yet been revealed. What we do know is this: when he is revealed, we will be like him, for we will see him as he is.

■ **1 JOHN 3:2**

We all received “life to the full” in baptism, when, in the words of St. Augustine, as Christ’s body on earth, we “became Christ.”

We have become not only Christians, but Christ himself. Do you understand and grasp, brethren, God’s grace toward us? Marvel and rejoice: we have *become Christ*.

■ **SEE CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, 795**

The Fathers of the Church were so conscious of the divine life we receive at baptism that they took for granted language that shocks us today. St. Athanasius said the Word was “made human so that we might be made God” (*De Incarnatione*, 54.3). Saint Basil the Great (329-379 A.D.) wrote: “Through the Spirit we acquire a likeness to God; indeed, we attain what is beyond our most sublime aspirations—we become God” (Office of Readings, Tuesday of the 7th week of Eastertide).

We are divine. We just have to surrender completely to living fully the Life that is already ours.

Our experience of Jesus is the mystical experience of realizing with Saint Paul that “it is *no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me*” (Galatians 2:20). Jesus is not just a historical figure outside of us to look at and imitate, but the mystery of “*Christ in us, our hope of glory*” (see Colossians 1:27). We are called, not just to “follow” Jesus but to let Christ “*be formed in us*” (Galatians 4:19)—that is, to let his life, his truth, his love grow in us and permeate every part and particularity of our unique human nature and characteristics—until we all “become one in faith and in the knowledge of God’s Son, and *form that perfect man who is Christ come to full stature*” (Ephesians 4:12–13). This is our “end,” what we exist for. It is what the gift of Wisdom helps us to live for consciously.

By definition Christians are seekers—a “pilgrim Church”—and what we are seeking is ever-deepening, ever-expanding experience of the mystery of God—and of ourselves as sharing in the life of God (Romans 6:4; 2 Corinthians 5:17, 6:18). That is our purpose on earth.

All of us, with unveiled faces, seeing the glory of the Lord as though reflected in a mirror, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another; for this comes from the Lord, the Spirit. ■ 2 CORINTHIANS 3:18

This is the mystery of Christian life, a mystery that should be visible in the evident zest for life that Christians have, fired by awareness of purpose and promise. We exist to be drawn into understanding of God's innermost thoughts, to be totally one with God in mind and will and heart.

Awareness of this is the gift of *Wisdom*—*the gift of seeing everything we do in the light of all we are and are called to be.*

We use the gift of Wisdom by cultivating the habit of seeing everything in the light of our “last end,” the goal of our existence, which, as we have seen, we possess already by grace, although we do not yet experience it completely.

Paul shows us Wisdom in action:

I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ and be found in him. Not that I... have already reached the goal; but I press on to make it my own, because Christ Jesus has made me his own.... This one thing I do... I press on toward the goal for the prize of the heavenly call of God in Christ Jesus.

▪ **PHILIPPIANS 3:8FF.**

“I press on toward the goal.” That is Wisdom. Conscious intentionality. Purpose. Something to live and hope for, confident we will attain it, because we already possess it.

A highway will be there, called the holy way;
No one unclean may pass over it, nor fools go astray on it...
It is for [the wise] those with a journey to make...

▪ **ISAIAH 35:8**

The key to Wisdom is awareness. Awareness that we already possess what we are living for and are simply growing into it. Awareness that we are living the Life of God. Awareness all day long that God the Son, Jesus, is living in us, acting *with us, in us, and through us*. We are already one with God. If we keep ourselves conscious of this, every thought, word, and deed will unite us more intimately with him. And with one another.

Jesus prayed “that they may all be one. As you, Father, are in me and I am in you, may they also be in us... so that they may be one, as we are one” (John 17:21).

That is heaven: the whole human race gathered together around one table at the “wedding banquet of the Lamb” (Revelation 19:9), in total unity of mind and will and heart with God and each other, seeing all that is True and Good and Beautiful in God and in every other human being.

At the end, St. Augustine said, there will be “one Christ, loving himself” (Homily 10, on 1 John 5:1–3). The way of Wisdom is to keep ourselves conscious that we are one with Christ now, and to let him live and love *with us, in us, and through us* in every word we speak, every choice we make, every action we perform, longing for the day when all will be perfectly one in him.

This awareness is the first thing that should shine out in any Christian’s life: the Wisdom of those who know they have something to live for, and by the power of the Holy Spirit within them are consciously living for it.

Pope Francis said in his homily on Ash Wednesday, March 6, 2019:

In life’s journey, as in every journey, what really matters is not to lose sight of the goal. If what interests us as we travel, however, is looking at the scenery or stopping to eat, we will not get far. We should ask ourselves: On the journey of life, do I seek the way forward? Or am I satisfied with

living in the moment and thinking only of feeling good, solving some problems and having fun? What is the path? Is it the search for health, which many today say comes first but which eventually passes? Could it be possessions and well-being? But we are not in the world for this. *Return to me*, says the Lord. To *me*. The Lord is the goal of our journey in this world. The direction must lead to him.

Wisdom also means *appreciation*, desire for what is spiritual.

Wisdom helps us focus on our goal by giving us desire for it. In Latin, Wisdom is “*sapientia*”—from *sapor*, savor. Wisdom is also defined as the gift of “taste” or appreciation for spiritual things.

One who desires the goal will desire the means. So Wisdom, by keeping us conscious of the promise of our destiny, also makes us appreciate all the spiritual helps that lead to its fulfillment.

TO USE THE GIFT OF WISDOM

Form the habit of saying the WIT prayer when you wake up in the morning and all day long, before everything you do: “*Lord, do this **with** me, do this **in** me, do this **through** me.*” Add, if you like, “*Let me think with your thoughts and speak with your words and act as your body on earth.*”

The
FRUITS
OF THE
SPIRIT



THEY WILL KNOW WE ARE CHRISTIANS BY—THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT

But thanks be to God, who... through us spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ to God among those who are being saved....

2 CORINTHIANS 2:14–17

What does it really mean to be a Christian? If we are living authentic Christian lives, we should be the “aroma of Christ” in the world. That is, wherever we are, whatever we do and say, people should feel in our presence what they felt in the presence of Jesus.

Our friends should feel this. Our family. Our children. Those we work with. To some extent, even the people we pass on the street.

There should be something about us—an aura?—that is not just human goodness but divine.

Our mission, our privilege, and our duty as Christians, is to make the beauty of Christ visible in all of us who are his physical presence on earth. Paul says that through us Jesus “spreads in every place the fragrance that comes from knowing him. For we are the aroma of Christ” (2 Corinthians 2:14–17). If we are not the “aroma of Christ,” we are not living authentically Christian lives, no matter how perfectly we keep the Ten Commandments or how frequently we plunk our bodies in the pews.

How do we know whether we are the aroma of Christ? It is simple. We ask whether the “fruit of the Spirit” is evident in our lives.

“Every good tree bears good fruit, but the bad tree bears bad fruit. . . . Thus you will know them by their fruits.”

▪ MATTHEW 7:17, 20

The fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace, Patient Endurance, Kindness, Generosity, Faithfulness, Gentleness, and Self-Control. ▪ GALATIANS 5:22–23

When we evaluate our lives as Christians, we should not begin by looking for our “sins.” Our first question should be, “Is the fruit of the Spirit visible in my life? Do people see me, above all, as *loving*? Do they sense a deep, underlying *joy* in me, even when things are not going well? Do I give the impression of being at *peace* with myself and seeking peace with everyone around me?

“The fruit of the Spirit is Love, Joy, Peace...”

When people try my patience, do I respond with positive acts of kindness—sometimes almost shocking in their generosity? “The fruit of the Spirit is... Patient Endurance, Kindness, Generosity...”

When I do what is right, or refuse to do what is wrong, do people sense that in me there is more to this than just ethical behavior or law observance? Do they get the feeling I am acting out of faithfulness to a personal relationship? That for me, “obedience” is faithfulness to a covenant, an experience of love? “The fruit of the Spirit is... Faithfulness...”

Do those I live and work with recognize in me an a priori abstinence from power? An abhorrence of getting things done by intellectual dominance, threats, or intimidation? Is my way the way of gentleness and persuasion? Always drawing rather than pushing? “The fruit of the Spirit is... Gentleness...”

And when I exercise self-control, does it come across to others as surrender? Instead of being impressed, or perhaps intimidated, by my “higher self”—my intellect and will—dominating

my “lower self” of appetites and emotions, do they somehow sense that my whole self is surrendered to the control of another? Instead of a self-discipline that is rigid, off-putting, or even frightening to others, does my self-control make people feel safe, at ease with me, and welcome? The “fruit of the Spirit” is the Self-Control of total surrender to God.

We are not talking here about ordinary human virtues. These are not just character traits deliberately developed or culturally acquired. Human efforts play a part, of course, but they cannot explain the end product. To be a Christian is to be divine. The “grace of the Lord Jesus Christ” is “the favor of sharing in the divine life of God.” Saint Paul’s theme song is that those who are “in Christ Jesus” should live by “the law of the Spirit of life in Christ.” This means we are called and empowered to live on the level of God. We “walk not according to the flesh”—human nature alone—“but according to the Spirit” (Romans 8:1ff.).

If we live by the Spirit, let us also be guided by the Spirit....

If you are led by the Spirit, you are not subject to the law.

▪ GALATIANS 5:16, 25

As Christians, we don’t evaluate our lives by the laws of good human morality—the Ten Commandments—but by the New Law of Christ, which is summarized, though not complete, in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew, chapters 5 to 7).

Surprise! We can read the Sermon on the Mount from beginning to end, and we will not find a single rule! The New Law of Christ is not presented in the form of rules. It does not have the precision of concrete laws. Jesus presents it in the form of ideals to aim at: ideals that attempt to translate God’s way of thinking and loving into various forms of human behavior.

A rule tells us what to do. An ideal tells us what to aim at. Rules are obligations. Ideals are invitations.

The Aroma of **JOY**

“I have told you this so that my joy might be in you and your joy might be complete.” **JOHN 15:11**

The second fruit of the Spirit is Joy.

It is a common saying among Christians that “joy is the infallible sign of the presence of God.” We say, “A sad Christian is a sad Christian indeed.”

That is logical. If the second “fruit of the Spirit” is Joy, it follows that people who are living by the Spirit should experience Joy, and it should be visible in their lives.

For Christians, Joy and suffering are compatible. The ultimate proof of this is Jesus himself, who had deep Joy—not to be confused with superficial feelings of joy—even while suffering on the cross. His Joy came from the consciousness that through his suffering he was bringing about what he came to earth to do: “I came that they might have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10). He found his Joy in loving, and no amount of pain could prevail against it. Something like a woman giving birth:

“Very truly, I tell you, you will weep and mourn, but the world will rejoice; you will have pain, but your pain will turn into Joy. When a woman is in labor, she has pain, because her hour has come. But when her child is born, she no longer remembers the anguish because of the joy of having brought a human being into the world.” ■ **JOHN 16:20–21**

Christianity is very different from Buddhism. Buddhism was inspired by an awareness of human suffering and a desire to find a path of spiritual practices by which one might deal with suffering, draw its teeth, and eventually escape from suffering entirely. The focus of Christianity is not on suffering but on love. Christians are moved by love to alleviate the sufferings of others and to eradicate the causes of suffering in the world, but that is a consequence of Christianity, not its goal. The goal of Christianity is deep, all embracing, total union with God and others in mind and heart and will—not a union that can be achieved by any human practices, but one made possible for us by the free gift of “Grace,” the favor of sharing in God’s own divine Life. If we have this gift, then whether we are suffering or not, we can have Joy.

Christians live for what Paul prayed for:

I pray that you may have the power to comprehend, with all the saints, what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge, so that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.

▪ **EPHESIANS 3:18–19**

Christian Joy is based, not on negation, but on affirmation; not on escaping, but on embracing. Christians have Joy, not because we have found a way to ignore pain, but because we have found something else. We know the Good News.

Our Joy depends on memory, on keeping aware of the Good News. And believing it. Christian Joy is the fruit and proof of the gift of divine Faith, enhanced by the gift of the Holy Spirit called Understanding.

Paul prays that we will “comprehend” and “know” the love of Christ. Jesus said we will find Joy by keeping aware of what he told us: “I have said these things to you so that my Joy may be in you, and that your Joy may be complete” (John 15:11).

If we are aware of the Good News, nothing can take away our Joy. If we are not aware of the Good News, nothing can give us joy that is lasting or complete.

What is the Good News?

It is the gospel.

The word comes from the Old English *gōdspel*, from *gōd* “good,” and *spel* “news, a story.” Christianity is based on the good news, the story, of Jesus Christ. As long as we are aware of that story, we have a reason for Joy.

Christian Joy is dependent on remembering. Whenever we feel sad, depressed, or discouraged, we need to recall whatever we know that is a cause for happiness, enthusiasm, and encouragement. For example, no matter what we are experiencing here and now, we should make ourselves conscious that we have within us, right now, everything required to make us totally happy for all eternity. We are living right now by God’s own Life. That is “the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ” that we proclaim at the beginning of every Mass.

Suppose we feel unloved. And maybe we actually are unloved—by people. Then we recall that Jesus said, “As the Father has loved me, so I have loved you; abide in my love” (John 15:9). Is that not love enough to give anyone Joy? Again, we are invited in every Mass to remember the “love of God” the Father.

If we feel lonely, isolated, cut off from other people, the Mass reminds us that we have “communion in the Holy Spirit” with all the believers—our brothers and sisters—throughout the world.

Suppose we feel like failures. And perhaps we really are failing in everything we do. Then we remember that Jesus said, “I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing.... You did not choose me but I chose you. And I appointed you to go and bear fruit, fruit that will last” (John 15:5, 16).

Success and failure do not depend on visible results in this

world. In fact, anything done “apart from” Jesus is “nothing,” no matter how impressive it may seem. But if we are “abiding in him,” we are certain that we are bearing fruit, because he says we are. We take it on faith, which is the most certain kind of knowledge. That is cause for Joy.

Suppose we are sad because we have lost loved ones in death. When Jesus was about to die, he told his beloved disciples, “A little while, and you will no longer see me, and again a little while, and you will see me... You will weep and mourn... but your pain will turn into Joy... I will see you again, and your hearts will rejoice, and no one will take your Joy from you” (John 16:17–22).

He says the same to us about the loss we feel for those who have gone ahead of us into total union with God. Jesus does not deny the pain of mourning a loved one. He himself wept at the tomb of Lazarus. But he adds something. He says, “You will see each other again, your pain will turn into joy.” He doesn’t say not to mourn. He says, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matthew 5:4).

Death is not the final word.

Suppose we are broke, have lost our job, the bank is foreclosing on our house, and we have nowhere to go. We remember Jesus said, “I tell you, do not worry about your life... saying, ‘What will we eat?’ or ‘What will we drink?’ or ‘What will we wear?’... Your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things... So do not worry about tomorrow” (Matthew 6:25–34).

How can we be sad, just because we are broke? Our Father is rich. All we have to do is keep doing what we can do and wait for the Father to come through with what we need.

Even the fear of death cannot take away our Joy. Jesus said, “Do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul... Are not two sparrows sold for a penny? Yet not one of them will fall to the ground apart from your Father... So do not be afraid; you are of more value than many sparrows” (Matthew 10:28–29).

Notice that in none of these passages does Jesus deny that the suffering exists. He calls our attention to something else, something added, that puts our pain into perspective and gives us cause for Joy. It is a Joy that depends on Hope.

May the God of Hope fill you with all Joy and Peace in believing, so that you may abound in Hope by the power of the Holy Spirit. ■ ROMANS 15:13

Joy is a fruit of the Spirit. After telling us, “I have said these things to you so that my Joy may be in you, and that your Joy may be complete” (John 15:11), he promised that the Spirit would remind us of the Good News:

The Advocate, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you everything, and remind you of all that I have said to you. ■ JOHN 14:26

When as Christians we are aware of “all that he has said,” we experience Joy. And our Joy will surround us like an aura. We will be the *aroma of Christ* in the world, the *fragrance that comes from knowing him*.

HOW DO WE DO THIS?

If we are going to be the “aroma of Christ” in the world, and to all around us, we need to bring all this down to ground level and put it to the test of daily experience.

- Would most people who know me call me a joyful person?
- Would I say I experience Joy most of the time—at least, when I stop to reflect?
- Aside from temporary disturbances, is there anything deep and abiding that diminishes my joy?