

Session 9 • The Gifts Begin: Fear of the Lord and Piety

Isaiah 11:1-3; Proverbs 9:10; Romans 8:14-17

Leader Preparation Guide

Session Overview

Discovery Aim. The group discovers the seven Gifts at their scriptural root, learns that the Gifts are the Messiah's own anointing shared with his members, and begins the ladder at its base: filial fear of the Lord and the piety of sons and daughters.

Catholic Touchstone. The seven Gifts of the Holy Spirit, wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, and fear of the Lord, belong in their fullness to Christ and complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them; they are given to all the baptized (CCC 1266, 1830-1831).

What You Need to Know

A new movement begins, and the vocabulary shifts. Fruits are what the Spirit's life produces in us; the Gifts are standing capacities the Spirit gives that make us quick to hear and follow his promptings, "docile" in the old and honorable sense: teachable, responsive, like a sail cut to catch wind. St. Thomas describes the Gifts as habits disposing us to follow the Spirit's instinct promptly. The distinction matters and Session 11 completes it (Gifts versus charisms); tonight, establish where the Gifts come from.

They come from a stump. Isaiah 11 announces a shoot from the stump of Jesse, and on him, the coming Davidic king, the Spirit will rest with a sevenfold endowment. The Gifts are the Messiah's job equipment. This resolves a question planted in Session 1: why did the Spirit descend on Jesus at his baptism if Jesus is God's own Son? Not because anything was lacking: anointed from the Incarnation (CCC 727), the Christ bears the Spirit as man, for us, and the Jordan reveals it publicly in order to share the anointing with his whole body. Our confirmation is a share in his anointing; the Gifts are family property.

One honesty note to deliver plainly when counting to seven. The Hebrew text of Isaiah 11:2-3 names six endowments and then repeats fear of the Lord ("and his delight shall be in the fear of the LORD"). The ancient Greek and Latin translations render the first occurrence as piety, yielding the seven the Church has counted since the Fathers. As with the twelve fruits, the Church hands on the tradition as she prayed it, and piety is a thoroughly scriptural reality either way: the Spirit of sonship who moves us to cry "Abba! Father!" (Romans 8:15). Same policy as Session 7: hedged honesty over pretended tidiness.

Old Testament Roots and Fulfillment

Tonight the Old Testament is not background; it is the main reading. Beyond Isaiah 11, fear of the Lord anchors Israel's entire wisdom literature: "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 111:10). Beginning as foundation: the first stone laid, on which everything else rests.

Scripture itself distinguishes two fears. Israel at Sinai is told in one breath "Do not fear... that the fear of him may be before your eyes" (Exodus 20:20): do not cower, and do revere. Imperfect, servile fear dreads punishment, and even that fear can be the salutary start of a conversion; filial fear dreads wounding the Father it loves. The Gift is the second, and the saints treat it as the doorway to all the rest.

Voices of the Church

St. Augustine

On Christian Doctrine 2.7 (summary)

St. Augustine reads Isaiah's seven as a staircase climbed from the bottom: the ascent begins in fear of the Lord, a fear he ties frankly to judgment and our mortality, rises through piety, knowledge, fortitude, and the counsel of mercy, then through the cleansing of the eye of the heart (the step tradition links with understanding), and arrives at wisdom, which is rest in God. Fear is not the ceiling of religion but its floor.

St. Gregory the Great

Moralia in Job (summary)

St. Gregory notices the direction of Isaiah's list: the Spirit descends on the Messiah from wisdom down to fear, but raises us from fear up to wisdom. The prophet describes the Gifts as they exist in Christ, from the summit; we receive them from the bottom stair. What descended on him ascends in us.

St. Thomas Aquinas

Summa Theologiae II-II, q. 19 (summary)

St. Thomas dissects fear: servile fear flees punishment, imperfect yet able to serve conversion; filial fear flees separation from the Father, and only the second grows as charity grows. Perfect love casts out the first fear (1 John 4:18) precisely by perfecting the second: the saints fear sin more as they love God more, the way a devoted spouse fears betraying, not being caught.

Catechism Connection

CCC 1830 defines the Gifts: permanent dispositions that make us docile to follow the promptings of the Holy Spirit; the moral life of Christians is sustained by them.

CCC 1831 counts the seven from Isaiah 11, states that they belong in their fullness to Christ, and that they complete and perfect the virtues of those who receive them, making the faithful docile in readily obeying divine inspirations.

CCC 1266 and 1303 trace the sacramental path: Baptism confers sanctifying grace with the gifts of the Holy Spirit (1266), and Confirmation increases and deepens them (1303). The Gifts are not a prize for the advanced; they are conferred in Baptism and strengthened at Confirmation.

CCC 2144 on reverence: the sense of God's holiness and the refusal to treat the holy as common; fear of the Lord has a speech pattern.

Thread Watch

Threads in play

Shoot of Jesse (resolved tonight). Planted in Session 1 at the baptism of Jesus. When the group discovers Isaiah 11, name the thread: the Spirit rested on him so that the anointing could reach us. Let someone say the word "Christ" means Anointed.

Darkness-to-light. Still holding for Session 12. The Gifts now being unpacked are equipment for that sending.

Session Goals

1. Discover Isaiah 11:1-3 live and establish the Gifts as Christ's own anointing shared with his body.
2. Deliver the six/seven honesty note without embarrassment.
3. Distinguish servile from filial fear and establish fear of the Lord as foundation, not ceiling.
4. Present piety as the Spirit of sonship, warmth toward God as Father and reverence for all he loves.

Time Note

Runs 75-85 minutes. If short, cut Build question 4 (Exodus 20:20 two-fears cross-check) and fold its point into the Aquinas voice.

Discussion Guide

Opening Prayer

Come, Holy Spirit, Spirit of the fear of the Lord and Spirit of sonship. Teach us the reverence that is the beginning of wisdom, and the boldness that cries out, Abba, Father. Amen.

Win · Opening Questions

1. What is something or someone you have deep reverence for, and how does that reverence change how you behave nearby?
2. When you were a child, were you ever afraid of disappointing someone you loved, not of being punished, but of hurting them? What is the difference?

Build · Into the Text

Live Discovery

Open with the hunt. Say: in Session 1 someone mentioned the Spirit descending on Jesus at his baptism, and I promised an answer to why the Son of God would need that. The answer is in Isaiah 11, in the first three verses. Have them find and read it aloud, then count the endowments listed. Let the counting produce the honesty note rather than lecturing it.

1. Isaiah 11:1-2: on whom does the Spirit rest, and what is he equipped with? Who is this shoot from the stump of Jesse?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

On the coming Davidic king, Jesse being David's father, and the stump implying the dynasty cut down: hope growing out of apparent death. He is equipped with the Spirit himself, unfolded as wisdom, understanding, counsel, might, knowledge, and fear of the Lord. The Church reads the shoot as Christ, and the Gospels show the Spirit resting on him at the Jordan. The Gifts are first of all the Messiah's equipment for his mission.

2. If Jesus is God the Son, why does he need the Spirit to rest on him at all, and what does the answer mean for us? Connect Romans 8:14-17.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Jesus is eternally God the Son, and his humanity was anointed by the Spirit from the moment of the Incarnation; the Jordan reveals his identity and mission rather than making him divine or holy for the first time (CCC 727). He bears the Spirit as man and for us: "Christ" means Anointed One, and the head is anointed so the oil runs down to the body. Romans 8 names the transfer: all who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God, having received the spirit of sonship in which we cry "Abba! Father!" and become fellow heirs with Christ. Our baptism and Confirmation are a real share in his anointing (CCC 1266, 1303): the seven Gifts are family property, not merit badges.

3. Proverbs 9:10 calls fear of the Lord the beginning of wisdom. What kind of beginning do you think that is, and what do Augustine and Gregory do with the direction of Isaiah's list?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Foundation: the first stone, on which the whole house stands, never removed as the house rises. Augustine reads the seven as a staircase from fear up to wisdom, a spiritual reading of the list's order, not a sequence in which the Gifts are acquired one at a time, since Baptism confers them together; Gregory notices the list descends onto Christ from wisdom to fear and ascends in us from fear to wisdom. What rested on the head from above rises through the body from below. A Christian never outgrows reverence; reverence is what everything else is built on.

4. Read Exodus 20:20: "Do not fear... that the fear of him may be before your eyes." Moses uses fear twice in one sentence, once forbidden, once commanded. Untangle it.

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Rejected: the cowering terror that treats God as a tyrant. Commanded: the awe that will not treat the Holy One as common. Between them the tradition places servile fear, the imperfect fear of punishment: not sinful but salutary, able to begin a conversion (even attrition, sorrow born of fear, is a gift of God that disposes us to mercy, CCC 1453), yet made to be surpassed. Aquinas: servile fear flees punishment, filial fear flees separation, and only filial fear grows with love. Perfect love casts out the first (1 John 4:18) by perfecting the second: the saints fear sin more as they love God more, as a faithful spouse fears betraying, not being caught.

5. Piety in this tradition is not "religiosity." From Romans 8:15 and from the word's older sense, the devotion owed within a family, what does the Gift of piety actually incline us toward?

ANSWER · share after the discussion

Warmth toward God as Father: the instinct that prays "Abba" rather than approaching a distant power. And, flowing from that, tender reverence toward all who share the Father's house: the Church our mother, the saints, the poor in whom Christ waits, even fitting honor toward parents and homeland. Piety is the family affection of the household of God, the Gift that makes religion relationship rather than transaction.

Dig Deeper · Why these two are the ground floor

Fear of the Lord and piety together fix our posture before everything else the Spirit will give: God is God (fear), and God is Father (piety). Wisdom without that posture curdles into cleverness; fortitude without it into recklessness; counsel without it into self-will. The remaining five Gifts, taken up in the next two sessions, all stand on tonight's floor, which is why Augustine's staircase starts here.

Send · Closing Questions

1. What helps you remember whom you are addressing in prayer? What tends to distract you?
2. Do you relate to God more as employer, examiner, or Father? What formed that instinct, and what would piety ask of it?

Live It This Week

- Begin prayer each day this week with thirty silent seconds of remembering who you are addressing, before any words.
- Pray the Our Father once daily at walking pace, refusing to rush the first two words.
- Choose one act of piety toward the household of God: visit the Blessed Sacrament, honor a parent, or serve someone the Father loves.

Closing Prayer

Father, from the stump of Jesse you raised the shoot on whom your Spirit rests, and in him you have anointed us. Lay the foundation deep in us: reverence that never grows casual, and the cry of children, Abba. Through Christ our Lord. Amen.

Scripture Memory Verse

Proverbs 9:10

The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

Leader Reference Card

Every passage read or discussed in this session, in order of appearance, with key leader background.

- Isaiah 11:1-3
- Proverbs 9:10
- Romans 8:14-17
- Exodus 20:20
- Psalm 111:10 (leader background)
- 1 John 4:18 (leader background)