The seven gifts of the Holy Spirit are wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety and fear of the Lord. While they are not specifically associated with the descent of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost, the gifts exemplify virtues of those who are filled with the Spirit.

The philosopher William James once said that “wisdom is knowing what to overlook.” By that he meant knowing when and when not to use your knowledge. Not exposing a liar because you know they are on the verge of a change of heart might be an example of the gift of wisdom.

Understanding means seeing beyond a person’s exterior to their heart. Once I flew back from Europe next to a guy who looked like someone I would normally steer clear of. It turned out he was an engineer with Boeing, and we had a great discussion on aircraft manufacture… and his spiritual life!

Counsel or right judgment is conscience; knowing between right and wrong. Fortitude is hanging in there when things are tough. Knowledge understands God’s revelation as expressed in Jesus’ teaching. Piety is behavior that leads to holiness. Fear of the Lord is the wonder and awe you feel before the glory and majesty of God.

The truth is, all of us have received all the gifts of the Spirit to varying degrees. It’s up to us to figure out which ones are our strengths and actualize them. Humbly living out the gifts we excel in, and asking for guidance with our weak ones, is the essence of spiritual growth. The gifts of the Holy Spirit are tools to guide us on our spiritual journey.