All the works of God regarding the salvation of men and of angels are attributed in a particular manner to the Holy Spirit, inasmuch as the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and of the Son. God is but one in essence; yet the Divinity is in three Persons, Father, Son and Holy Ghost, Who are one only true God. Consequently, it is impossible that what one of the Divine Persons does, the other two should not also do. As the Athanasian Creed teaches, the Father is Creator, the Son is Creator, the Holy Spirit is Creator, and all the works of creation,—and others,—have been and are equally performed by the three Divine Persons. Nevertheless, since the Holy Spirit is the love of the Father and of the Son, the acts which proceed from the goodness of God, such as justification and sanctification of souls, are attributed to Him. Likewise, the acts which proceed immediately from omnipotence, as those of creation, are attributed to the Father; this is why we say: “I believe in God, the Father Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth.” But the acts of wisdom are attributed to the Son, since He is the Word of the Father, this is why the work of redemption is ascribed to Him; because like a very skillful doctor, He knew how to cure human nature of its ills.

The works, then, that proceed from the goodness of God are attributed to the Holy Spirit because He is the love, that is to say, the loving breath of the Father and of the Son. Now, on this feast, some, considering the works of the Holy Spirit, regard them as fruits, because they are described as such by the Apostle Saint Paul in the Epistle to the Galatians: “The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, longanimity, goodness, benignity, mildness, faith, modesty, continence and chastity. Others, by reflection, divide
them into gifts of knowledge, interpretation, and the like, as the same Apostle relates in his first Epistle to the Corinthians. But, collecting them, I am satisfied to consider them under the seven gifts of which Isaia speaks.

It is said in the Book of Numbers, the eighth chapter, that God commanded Moses to place a large golden candlestick, with seven lamps perpetually burning, near the tabernacle. Saint Isidore, and before, Saint Cyrillus, the Jeromite, have said the candlestick and seven lamps represent the Holy Spirit and His seven gifts: and it is true all knowledge, fervor, enlightenment, and grace proceed from the Holy Spirit, that is to say from God, because He is love; but this enlightenment, knowledge and grace is divided into the seven gifts of the Holy Spirit.

A virgin will come from the root of Jesse, said the Prophet Isaia, that is, the Blessed Virgin; and from the Virgin a flower, that means her Son, Our Lord, and upon this flower the Holy Spirit will repose: the Spirit of Wisdom and of understanding, the Spirit of counsel and of fortitude, the Spirit of knowledge and of piety, and the Spirit will fill Him with the fear of the Lord. Thus, the Sacred Humanity of our Saviour has been like a divine flower upon which the Holy Spirit reposed to communicate to Him His seven gifts. This is very well represented to us by the golden candlestick with its seven lamps, which was before the tabernacle in the old Law, and which could be called a flower because its vases were made in the form of an iris.

Let us now see what these seven gifts are. The Prophet records them according to the order of their dignity, and, inasmuch as the gift of wisdom is the most excellent and the most exalted, he places it the first, the least excellent he puts at the end. But we, who are seeking instruction, shall start at the lowest to rise to the highest, and since we are on earth, we shall begin at the first degree; when we shall have attained the heights, I mean Heaven, we may draw treasures from the bosom of the Eternal Father.

Now, beginning to climb this divine ladder, we see the first gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of fear of God. But what fear? For there is a double fear of God, inferior and superior. The beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord, says the Psalmist, and in another place; Fear the Lord, O all you saints and elect. In Ecclesiasticus, the Wise Man says; They may write as many books as they wish, but the epitome of them all is the fear of the Lord.

But, some will say, what do you call inferior and superior fear? Explain what it means. Now, it is necessary to know that this fear is double; for one fears God either because He punishes the wicked or because He rewards the good. But this (first) fear is servile and like that of galley slaves, Who will not row but by compulsion, and who would never work the oars if they did not fear a terrible punishment. In the same way, many people would never leave their evil life if they did not fear death, judgement, and the pains of hell. This fear is the most general among men, as experience shows us every day, for, of ten thousand penitents, perhaps there is not one who is not converted except by this fear of death, of judgment and of hell. This is what the Holy Prophet David meant speaking
to God in Psalm CXIIX (149): You will subject kings and nobles to your dominion and imprison them with manacles of iron.

Saint Augustine says these manacles and chains of iron signify the fear of being damned, and this fear is good at the time of conversion to make men realize it is impossible God should not avenge Himself against sinners who have offered Him. They fear and dread chastisements, and this apprehension is natural; for as nature teaches us there is a God, so, says Saint Chrysostom, it is impossible to think He rules and governs the world by His Providence, without exercising His justice to castigate sinners. That is why philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, and others feared and thought that after this life, God punishes offenses.

David, himself, made this prayer in Psalm CXVIII (118): Pierce my heart with your fear, for I dread Your judgments. I am afraid and my heart is seized with terror. And do we not read in the Acts of the Apostles that Felix, President of Judea, trembled and was struck with a great fear, even though he was a pagan, when he heard Saint Paul speak of the last judgment, --yet he was not converted? Thus, many fear the divine judgments, but their heart is not changed thereby. They have a certain dread, which is only in the inferior part and in the senses, but which in no way animates their souls; whereas the gift of fear from the Holy Spirit enters and penetrates the heart, and produces fruits worthy of penance. This is why, ordinarily, those who have this fear in the inferior part alone, are, after sermons, saddened and depressed; on the contrary, those who have the gift of fear from the Holy Spirit are converted and penitent.

This is the subject for which David said: “O Lord, I ask that an arrow from Your hand may pierce my heart.” Saint Jerome said the fear of the judgments of God so forcibly touched his heart that he seemed to have always in his ears this terrifying voice of the Angels: “Arise, ye dead, and come to judgment.” My God: how many have forsaken sin by this fear of judgment: It is, then, very reasonably called the beginning of wisdom, and the perfecting of love, helping us to reach Heaven to unite ourselves to God; but to attain this happiness, we must abandon it, we must fear. Now, this explains inferior fear.

The other part of this fear that I call superior is the fear of losing Heaven; this I say, because there are people so carnal, they act as if Paradise did not exist, but only the pains of hell. They seem unconcerned about losing Heaven, appear well content with this worldly paradise, earthly, unhappy, insecure, and make no pretension to aspire to the celestial Paradise. Now, the fear of God includes not only apprehension of the pains of hell, but still more, that of losing Paradise. Moreover, generosity impels our hearts to desire these eternal goods, and makes us say with the Psalmist: “O Lord, I have inclined my heart to keep Your commandments because of the great rewards You will give to those who observe them.” These works are remarkable; they imply simply this: we forsake our evil ways because we fear to lose Paradise which will be the recompense for the labor of the workman. This is why generous souls, with a view to eternal glory, exert themselves, after the example of David. Why should I not toil, they say, to obtain the possession of this celestial heritage? “I have inclined my heart to keep Your
commandments because of the rewards.” Oh! Is it possible I may lose Paradise? Could I be so cowardly as to lose the portion promised me in this heavenly country?

You see, then, very well, this fear is called inferior and superior because it is composed of these two fears: the pains of hell and the loss of Paradise. Now, this fear which makes us abandon sin is a gift of the Holy Spirit, He alone can give it. This is why it is called the beginning of wisdom, because ordinarily, it is the groundwork of our salvation. Although the heretics say it is evil, the words of Jesus Christ absolutely condemn them. He says, in Saint Matthew: “Fear not those who kill the body, and cannot harm the soul, but rather, fear Him who can destroy both body and soul in hell.” Consequently, we see this fear is good, that God is its Author, and He places it in the heart as the foundation of our salvation.

The second gift of the Holy Spirit is the gift of piety. The gift of piety is a particular virtue that depends upon justice, which is nothing else but the honor, the respect and the love we give not only to God as to our Sovereign Creator and most loving Father, but likewise, to those who are our superiors, whether spiritual or temporal, as our fathers, mothers, prelates and magistrates. The Holy Spirit, the, coming into the heart, infuses the gift of piety, by which the soul pays to God a very great honor and respect, accompanied by a filial love and a loving fear. Do we not see His Divine Majesty complains of this omission of fear, of love, of honor, and of respect by His Prophet Malachi, saying: “If I am a Father, where is My honor? And if Lord, where is my fear?” If I am your Father, where is the honor you owe me? If I am your Lord, where is the fear you ought to have of offending Me? The son acts as son, and is not fearful of being punished as a servant, nor rewarded like a mercenary; he is impelled by the love of a filial heart. When the soul has experienced the fear of losing Paradise,—of which I have just spoken,—it goes further and says: If there were no Paradise, God is my Father; He has created me, nourished me, and given me everything: this is why I want to love, honor, and serve Him. O gift of piety: precious boon God gives a heart: Blessed is he who corresponds with a filial heart to the paternal heart of the celestial Father. It is for this God wishes us to strive, when in the Lord’s prayer, He desires us to call Him: Our Father Who art in heaven; a name of respect, of love, and of fear.

To prove to us this gift of piety, that is to say, this filial fear, is given to us by the Holy Spirit, the Apostle Saint Paul, writing to the Roman’s, tells them: Do not take the spirit of bondage in fear, but accept the spirit of adoption of the sons of God, by which we cry: Abba, Father. This means we should act as little children towards Our Lord. Little children live in great confidence, never giving a thought if their father will disinherit them or leave them a rich portion; they just love him without thinking or anything else, since they are borne in his arms, nourished, cherished, and supported by their good father. Thus, my dear Sisters, we ought to act towards God, revering Him as Our Father, serving Him with love, without fearing chastisements or expecting rewards, allowing Him to carry us in the arms of His Holy Providence, as it pleases Him.

The third gift of the Holy Spirit, in succession, is the gift of knowledge, not for acquisition of human learning, as Aristotle, Plato, Homer, Virgil, and the philosophers
who had this knowledge, but to no profit. Now, the knowledge gift of the Holy Spirit is necessary in order that we may well exercise the first two gifts, to be aware how we should comport ourselves towards Him Whom we desire to fear and love, to discover and learn how to discern the evil we must avoid and the good we must do. “Turn away from evil and do good,” said the Prophet. This is the science of sciences, conferred by the Holy Spirit, of which the children of the world have not even heard, for although they were great philosophers, yet they did not learn either to glorify God or to follow justice, because they held the truth of God in injustice, as the Apostle says.

Clearly, they had truth intellectually, but not practically, since they did not have Christian humility, which makes us prostrate ourselves before the Holy Spirit to receive this gift so necessary to work out our salvation. The knowledge of good and of evil is naturally sought by all, that is why Eve curiously desired it. God knows evil, but to detest it, and good to practice it. You will be as gods: knowing good and evil, said the serpent to our first parents, deceiving them miserably, by contriving to make them commit sin. Saint Augustine, is a sermon for this day, said philosophers spoke magnificently of virtues, but to despise them, and of vices to practice them, because they were blind, and did not have true knowledge which the Holy Spirit imparts only to humble hearts. Have we not also seen many eminent theologians, who have said marvelous things about the virtues, but not to practice them; on the contrary, so many holy women, who, although they did not know how to speak of virtue, they very well knew how to practice it? We behold some with an extreme care to preserve their virginity, others with a heart pure and blameless in their widowhood and others in conjugal chastity.

Who has given them this gift of knowledge to discern good and evil, vice and virtue, if not the Holy Spirit? But, you will say, I am at a loss to know how virtue must be practiced. Put yourself in the presence of the Holy Spirit, humble yourself, He will teach you and give you this knowledge.

Certainly, there are saints admirably learned in their ignorance and admirably ignorant in their learning. The bane of knowledge is presumption, which elates and inflates minds. This is ordinarily the case with the worldly-wise. O what ignorance in this knowledge! Saint Catherine, the martyr, was very intellectual, but her knowledge was humble at the foot of the Cross. Others have been ignorant, and in their ignorance, they have been admirably learned, as Saint Catherine of Genoa. The presence of the Holy Spirit imparted this learning, and because they had fear, piety and humility, God bestowed upon them this precious treasure of the gift of knowledge that Eve so much desired, but through pride, in order to be like God.

After knowledge comes the fourth gift, that of fortitude, which is absolutely necessary, since it is not enough to know how to discern good and evil, if we have not the strength to avoid the one and to practice the other. Who has not seen people who know what is right, but have not the courage to do it? We see this, even today, and they are, for the most part, Christians.
But, you will say to me, since we receive the Holy Spirit and with Him, all His gifts, when we receive the Sacraments with the requisite dispositions, how is it we relapse so often into sin? This happens by indolence, because we do not attempt to combat vice with the steadiness and ardor necessary to subdue the enemy. For example: we come to Confession where we receive the Holy Spirit with the remission of sins; afterwards, how long is it until we repeat the offenses by the commission of the same sins! From whence comes this, except a lack of courage? One thinks: what will they say of me if I become devout, if I do penance, if I give up worldly intercourse? We fear a word vanishing in thin air, is not this to be altogether devoid of steadfastness?

It must be observed, although we have received the gifts of the Holy Spirit, if we are not carefully on our guard, we may soon lose them, as one depends upon the other, since we possess them only by an habitual exercise, and we use them as occasion requires. It is not the same with the spiritual heart as with the heart of flesh, which ceaselessly acts by beating, coursing through the veins, and sending its vital energy to the brain, no matter how long we sleep; whereas, with the spiritual heart, will, courage and generosity are essentially necessary to make it function rightly. This is why the Holy grants us the gift of fortitude by which so many martyrs vanquished tyrants and surmounted torments with so much constancy that nothing could terrify them, as one can see in reading the histories of a Saint Agnes, of Saint Agatha, and of an infinity of others.

Following in ascension, is the gift of counsel, without which courage is rashness, just as you see soldiers, who are certainly possessed of bravery, nevertheless, need a captain to direct them. Fear makes us desist from sin, knowledge enlightens us to discern it, but still, do we not need counsel to perform what knowledge makes known to us. We must discover the way wherein the Holy Spirit directs us. For example: you will see a person who wants to lead a life of devotion; she will say to herself: What counsel shall I follow to practice the good with which God inspires me and to avoid the evil He makes me know? What way shall I take? What counsel shall I observe? Will it be chastity or poverty? Will it be simple and blind obedience? Will it be widowhood or marriage? Shall I give an alms, or bestow all my goods upon the poor? The Holy Spirit, dwelling in our heart, guides and urges us by His inspiration to do what is most for the glory of God and our Salvation. Until now, I have been avaricious, sensual, given to frivolous conversation. I see this is evil, and I have the desire to withdraw from it; then what shall I do to free myself, little by little, from these vicious habits and to mortify myself? The Holy Spirit counsels the means to be used to overcome the vice and to practice the virtue.

You will see worldly people, subject to anger, engrossed in games, which usually lead them into occasions of blasphemy and the use of injurious language. What is to be done in this case? This amusement must be absolutely abandoned. Others delight in conversation rife with scandal, and they allow themselves this diversion. They make the resolution not to disparage anyone, but they are led imperceptibly to slander. What is to be done? The Holy Spirit warns them interiorly they must entirely forego these conversations. How many in the world are fully aware these are the ways to perdition, because the very air is infected, striking with eternal death souls who breathe it, or contaminating them with serious diseases? What remedy is there for this? Leave this
place, the Holy Spirit admonished interiorly, you know you are jeopardizing your salvation. He instructs us immediately by His inspirations, or He prompts us to take advice from those to whom He will impart light to guide us.

The following gift is understanding, spiritual understanding that the Holy Spirit encloses in our human understanding. It is none other than a certain clearness by which we see and penetrate the beauty and goodness of the mysteries of faith. We listen to sermons, we read much, and always remain in ignorance of these holy mysteries because we have not this gift of understanding. A simple soul, prostrate before God, will comprehend the mystery of the most Holy Trinity, not to speak of it, but to draw thence instruction regarding the means of salvation,—because the Holy Spirit has given it the gift of understanding. I always say, nearly all those who perish do so by failing to follow the principles of Christianity, such as these: Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven; blessed are the meek for they shall possess the land. But who will fathom the beauty of these maxims if not those to whom the Holy Spirit reveals them?

When we see splendid golden palaces, pears and jewels: “Ah!” we say, “how beautiful they are!” But to whom? The eyes of worldlings. The world speaks thus, but our Saviour says: See this pearl of evangelical poverty, and beyond it, behold Heaven and the eternal felicity which is its reward. Because we do not resolutely imprint these precepts in our heart, we ruin ourselves miserably, the world masters and unhappily ensnares us by its false pretentions. We know full well the world with all its riches and vain pomp is worth nothing, nevertheless we center our affections upon it and yield to its destructive influence.

Become as little children, said Our Lord. Be simple as doves, but there is no candor and there is no simplicity. We wish to be prudent, but with a carnal prudence, which kills the soul, as the great Apostle says in his Epistle to the Romans: The prudence of the flesh is death. What causes this? We have not the gift of understanding to see and to penetrate the beauty and the goodness of the teachings of Our Lord. Ah! If we could effectually see and understand their fairness, certainly we would forsake and renounce forever the specious and worthless illusions of the world, to follow our Divine Master. But, religious souls, particularly, should found and establish their whole perfection upon these holy laws. They should so deeply impress them upon their hearts, that contrary directives may never gain entrance there, following the example of so many Saints, who, while they lived, chose tears rather than joy, tribulation than prosperity, poverty than riches.

Now, after the Holy Spirit has given us the gift of understanding, there follows that of wisdom, which confers the greatest blessing upon the soul. Many learned men are foolish, but wisdom is a science by which one savors, one tastes, and one discovers the goodness of the law and the most exalted teachings of the Gospel,—not to speak or preach,—but to practice them. Like the bee, the soul hovers over the flowers of the law, extracting the honey of the goodness of God. O Lord, how sweet are Thy words to my palate! said the Psalmist. They are more than honey in the mouth of my heart, inclining me to Your divine standards rather than those of the world. Oh! how happy is the soul
who has attained this degree; it is a sign she is filled with the Holy Spirit, and that He has bestowed His gifts upon her.

Now, it remains to say how we may savor these gifts. I say it in one word: we must be in health. Sick people do not relish food because of the disease in the parts destined to taste it. Those spiritually ill desire things harmful to their good; they have neither fear, nor fortitude, nor piety, nor knowledge. Who would receive the gifts of the Holy Spirit must purge himself of his sinful humors. Our tongue, that is to say, our soul, is coated from sickness. We must despise the gifts of the world to receive those of the Holy Spirit. The spirit of the world has its gifts: knowledge leading to honor, prestige, and riches; courage – for a duel; fear – of poverty and loss of a worldly paradise with its favours. We must renounce these gifts, they are incompatible with those of the Holy Spirit. We must yield our hearts to Him, and pray Him to bestow upon us these precious gifts, to preserve them in our souls, even to the exclusion of all other affections; to give us the gift of fear to effect our salvation and to banish from our hearts all other anxieties the devil may suggest to us. Let everything be lost, rather than lose God. What can the world do? Deprive us of two or three days of earthly existence? Ah! what does that matter, provided we do not lose eternal life?

Then, may it please the Divine Majesty to grant us the gift of fear that we may serve Him filially; the gift of piety to revere Him as our most loving Father, the gift of knowledge to know the good we ought to do and the evil we ought to avoid, the gift of fortitude to overcome courageously all difficulties in the practice of virtue, the gift of counsel to discern and to choose the true way of perfection, the gift of understanding to realize the beauty and benefit of the mysteries of faith and of the truths of the Gospel; finally the gift of wisdom to taste how good God is, to savor and experience the sweetmesses of His incomprehensible benignity. Oh! How happy shall we be, if we receive these priceless gifts, for doubtless, they will lead us to the summit of this mystical ladder where we shall be received by our Divine Saviour who awaits us there with open arms, to make us participants of His glory and felicity. Amen.