

CONNIE CLARK

Spirited
LIVES

20 STORIES
of SAINTS
and their
AMAZING
& GIFTS

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HOW WILL YOU CHANGE THE WORLD?

If you'd met any of the people on these pages before their thrilling adventures began, they'd probably tell you they were nothing special. Most were poor. Many couldn't read or write. Some had done things they weren't proud of. And then a funny thing happened. God called them to do great things. They did their jobs so heroically and against so many odds that we remember them to this day. None of them did it alone. They had help from the Holy Spirit who brings us incredible gifts at baptism and confirmation.

These gifts show up in our actions, which we call the Fruits of the Holy Spirit. But they're not symbolic. They're very real. And to prove it, just look at the people on the following pages—ordinary folks like you and me. They just grabbed those superhuman, supernatural gifts and ran with them. Sure, they struggled and even doubted, but in the end, they accomplished great things.

So what about you? You may not believe it right now, but with the help of the Holy Spirit, you really can change the world. The gifts you've been given, or will receive, will get you there.

The Gifts of the Holy Spirit

A GIFT CARD WITH NO LIMITS. EVER.



The Holy Spirit's seven gifts aren't like special powers that God zaps you with. They're not like superhero qualities that you can call on in emergencies, either. To understand them a little, imagine you're one of Jesus' apostles. Jesus has died and risen from the dead, and he's about to return to the Father. You're worried about what's next for you.

But Jesus knows exactly what you need. He promises that you won't be alone, because he will send a helper, an Advocate. That's the Holy Spirit, the third Person of the Holy Trinity, who comes to the apostles at the feast of Pentecost. They go out and change the world with the Good News of Jesus.

But back to you. You receive these same gifts at baptism and especially at confirmation. They are:

*Wisdom ■ Understanding ■ Counsel ■ Courage
Knowledge ■ Piety ■ Wonder and Awe*

Now there is one teensy catch. You have to allow these gifts to grow in you. You have to put them into practice. Sound tough? Take a look at how these ordinary people—whom we call saints, blesseds, and venerables—did it. They changed the world, and so can you.

1

Mary

ALL GOD'S GIFTS WRAPPED IN ONE PERFECT PACKAGE

So you're living your life, doing your best to be a good person, when suddenly everything gets turned upside down. Pregnant? The angel who brought the news never said anything about how you'd explain this to the man you're marrying. He didn't seem concerned with little details like what you'd say to your parents. Or how you'd raise a child as a single mom in a small town.

But you still said yes. Calmly, firmly, and with confidence in God's plan, you gave up all your plans and your future in the space of a minute. No resentment, no complaints. You didn't just put your life on hold. You gave it all, lock, stock, and barrel, to God.

How did Mary do it? The answer is wisdom. Not Albert Einstein genius-y kind of wisdom. Mary's is the kind of wisdom that recognizes another way of seeing things. The kind of wisdom that sees with God's eyes.

God's eyes? How can anyone presume to do that? Good question. We may not always understand God's plan, but like Mary, we always have a choice. We can say, "I don't get it, so I won't accept it." Or we can be like Mary and say, "I don't

get it, but there's more to all of this than what I see." (OK, maybe she didn't exactly say it like that, but you get the picture.) Sure, Mary probably got scared—imagine seeing your grown son hanging on a cross! But through prayer and holy pondering, she glimpsed something much bigger at work.

Wisdom: Not about your SAT score

It's hard for us humans to grasp God's grace, so God gave us a young girl named Mary to help. Mary is an example of all the Holy Spirit's gifts at work, but that's really a lot for us to chew on at once, so we give her titles to help us understand one or two of her qualities at a time. One of those titles is Seat of Wisdom. You often see images of Mary seated on a chair or throne, holding baby Jesus, who basically *is* Wisdom, on her lap. You also see her, the sorrowful Pietà, holding her grown Son, who has just died on the cross, in her arms. For Mary to carry, bear, raise, and support the Son of God, she needed to see with God's eyes. She needed wisdom.

That kind of wisdom is the most important kind you can have. It doesn't come with a diploma; it comes with faith. In fact, theologians say wisdom is the *height* of faith. But don't worry: your faith doesn't have to be ironclad every minute of the day. You might have doubts. You might feel weak. It's OK. You just have to let the Holy Spirit in.

You can ask God outright for wisdom, the way King Solomon did. You can talk to Mary about it too. She knows exactly what you mean.

Something to think about

Have you ever been in Mary's shoes? Suddenly something happens that you can't understand? Write about it here—

what happened, how it made you feel, how it changed you. Then ask God to help you see it with his eyes, which are always the eyes of love.

Prayer

God, send me your Spirit and give me your wisdom so that I might learn to see with your eyes, feel with your heart, and speak with your words. Help me ponder Mary's life in the light of faith, that I might find true wisdom.

2 André of Montreal

ALWAYS AT THE DOOR

When you think of someone with great understanding, you might think of someone with a lot of education, like a doctor or a lawyer or a nuclear physicist. How about a man whose job was answering the door?

Brother André had little formal schooling, but he had an uncanny understanding of his fellow human beings. Maybe it came from the fact that he found himself alone and an orphan at age twelve. Maybe it was because he knew from experience what it meant to be hungry and afraid.

Searching for work in Quebec and New England throughout his teens, he couldn't hold down a job because of poor health. When he appeared at the door of the Holy Cross Brothers, he carried a note from a priest friend that said, "I am sending you a saint."

The brothers took one look at this sickly youth and turned him down, giving him another hard lesson in disappointment and rejection. But eventually they accepted him, and he took vows in 1874 as a professed brother. Brother André was sent to a high school in Montreal to basically be the

janitor and answer the door. He quipped, “When I joined this community, the superiors showed me the door, and I remained there forty years.”

Brother André always knew what to say (or not to say) to visitors. People loved him. And there were the cures. Inspired by a devotion practiced in France, Brother André used plain lamp oil for the sick and wounded. He would tell people to pray to St. Joseph, and as a gesture of their faith, they should rub the oil on their wounds. But as word spread about cures and healings at the hands of Brother André, he refused to take any credit. “I do not cure,” he said. “St. Joseph cures.”

His own father’s death when Brother André was a boy might explain his special connection to St. Joseph. And he wanted others to feel that connection too. So when Brother André had saved 200 dollars from nickels he’d collected for giving haircuts, he built a simple, one-room shrine to St. Joseph—a place where people could pray. Over time, Brother André watched his little room grow and expand. Today it’s a huge basilica church in Montreal—St. Joseph’s Oratory of Mt. Royal—where millions of people come to pray.

Understanding: When you just “get it”

Have you ever noticed that when you suddenly “get” something, it can come to you in a flash, almost out of nowhere? Pope Francis says the gift of understanding allows us to come into an “intimacy with God,” which helps us understand things “as God understands them.” That flash is the power of the Holy Spirit within you. When you see Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection as part of a personal relation-

ship, and you want to express that by loving others as Jesus did, that's getting it. Brother André radiated joy as he spoke words of hope and cared for the sick. The man who said "My only ambition is to serve God in the most humble tasks" had true understanding. You can't study for that. You just have to let God in the door, just like Brother André did.

Something to think about

Do you know someone who gets you? Really and truly sees through it all and understands you? Hopefully, this person is a good, unselfish person who can see your many good qualities even when you can't. Jot down some of the good things this person might say about you.

Prayer

*Lord God, give me the gift of understanding,
that I might see you in everyone.*