

THE GIFTS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT FOR KIDS

We are bestowed with the gifts of the Holy Spirit at confirmation and tend to think of them in adult terms. But they apply to our children, too, even if they haven't reached the age of reason. The key to developing these gifts in little ones is to facilitate their awareness in an age-appropriate way.

Wisdom

What it is: Pope Francis explains the gift of wisdom best: "it is the grace of being able to see everything with the eyes of God." Rather than seeing the world and the decisions we make through the lens of our own brokenness, we look at them in the way of our Loving Father.

How we encourage it: To cultivate wisdom in children, we must teach them about the heart of God. Talk to your children about why and how God loves us. Explain that there are natural laws written on our hearts, then point out examples in your daily routine. Ask the Holy Spirit for the grace to model wisdom at home and your children will follow suit.

Knowledge

What it is: Wisdom gives us a window to the heart of God; knowledge gives us a glimpse of His mind by allowing us to understand our relationship to Him as creator and provider.

How we encourage it: To help our children develop this gift, we need only encourage a reliance on God through daily study and prayer. Make lists or draw pictures of God's blessings. Post them and review each night as you offer simple prayers of thanksgiving as a family. The repeated devotion will spotlight the ways in which God has cared for your family, developing an understanding of His relationship with you and your children.

Understanding

What it is: Have you ever read a passage from scripture or the catechism and been confused by what it said? Understanding makes plain the teachings of Christ and his Church.

How We Encourage it: For our children, understanding means exploring the whys and hows of the faith, helping them see the purpose behind the truth. To do this, try a matching game: connect each commandment to its corresponding natural law, then talk about why they go together. Also, when the inevitable "Why do I have to clean my room/take out the trash/play with my little brother" question arises, avoid the temptation to bark "because I said so!" Explain that it is an act of service instead.

Piety

What it is: Piety is reverence, or the ability to act with humility in God's presence.

How we encourage it: Our faith is full of signs and symbols that direct us toward that reverence. Consider a home altar with a prayer book, a crucifix, and a few pretty flowers. Take your children to visit Jesus in adoration; many parishes have holy hours set aside just for families. Encourage the simple act of genuflecting before entering the pew and when approaching the Blessed Sacrament. Modeling even the simplest acts of reverence will develop a sense of piety.

Right judgment

What it is: Also called counsel, right judgment is the gift that helps us discern good from evil. This can be difficult, despite the fact that a child's world is typically more black and white than that of an adult. That which is immediately appealing to children may not always be of God. For instance, "borrowing" the neighbor's soccer ball may seem like the right choice at the time. But the course of action is incorrect, and our children must know the appropriate way to handle such a situation.

How we encourage it: Try reading about the moral and theological virtues, then practice decision-making skills with role play or a game like Chutes and Ladders. The more opportunity they have to practice right judgment, the better their ability to put it into action.

Fortitude

What it is: This is the courage to stand up for what we believe in, a task that has become more frequent and complicated of late.

How we encourage it: Look for opportunities to praise the good behavior children model for their friends. At home, endeavor to set an example of charitable admonition when faced with difficult situations. Even if you're not always successful, at least they see you try.

Fear of the Lord

What it is: Fear of the Lord is the ability to recognize his awesomeness, to see that all of creation is beautifully and wonderfully made.

How we encourage it: Fostering this is as easy as reveling in the natural world. Lay out under the stars at night. Study snowflakes under a magnifying glass. Press flowers in a heavy book. Look at the children's baby pictures. More often than not, your children will be the first to point out the magnificence of God's creation.

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