

## **A Reflection Matthew 25: 14-30**

- I am a N.Y. Jets football fan. I have been for a long time. This year the Jets record is 0-9. That's right, lost every game we have played so far this year.
- If you watch Jet games for a long time you notice that most Jets games look the same. They play hard the first half of the game and usually are leading by half time. In the first half of the game they "play to win".
- But in the second half of most Jet games the team is not aggressive. They try to protect their lead rather than add to it. And they usually end up losing the game.
- They seem to forget the purpose of the game is to go after the win, keep working to earn it. Rather than "play to win" they play "not to lose". And this is never a good strategy.
- We see a similar mistake being made by one of the servants in today's Gospel reading.
- In today's Gospel Jesus is telling His disciples, His closest friends, a parable – a story that teaches an important lesson.
- In the parable a master is going away on a long trip. He calls three of his servants together and delegates the management of his wealth to his servants. He gives varying amounts of talents (a large unit of money) to each servant.
- Two of the servants put the talents to use and earned a profit for their master. They realized the master put his trust in them and they realized the master counted on them to use talent to try to increase the master's wealth. So they took the talent given to them and "played to win". And they were rewarded.
- The third servant didn't understand the trust being placed in him, didn't understand the expectation. He operated

from a place of fear or laziness or both – he did nothing with the talent given him. He hid it. He played “not to lose”. And we see the penalty that resulted from choosing this strategy.

- Why did Jesus tell this story to those close friends of His?
- Jesus knew He would not be with them much longer, not be in this world much longer. He wanted them to know that a special trust was being placed in them. They would be counted on to spread the Gospel and build up God’s Kingdom here on earth until Jesus returns. Jesus was giving them teachings, and truths and examples on how to live as members of God’s Kingdom.
- And they were being given special talents (not the money type) so that they could take and put these teachings and truths and examples to use in leading others to God. In short, Jesus was telling them to “play to win”.
- So what does this parable mean for us today?
- Pretty much the same thing it meant for Jesus’ early followers.
- God entrusts each one of us with talents, talents to put to use to serve Him. To build up God’s Kingdom here and now. To bring His love and care into this world so that others will know Him and love Him.
- God expects us not to take and hide the talents He gives us. God doesn’t want us to “play not to lose”.
- But sometimes we *do* forget, or get little lazy with our gifts and we do “play not to lose”. You know what I mean. How many times have we thought: “I’m not going to bother, this is too much trouble” or “It’s not my responsibility” or “I did enough, let her/him do something” or “I say my prayers – I’m good with God” or “let them apologize first”.

- God wants us to take that chance and spread His love even when it seems difficult to do so. Lend that hand. Make that call first. In other words “play to win!”
- One of the first steps in “playing to win” when it comes to our faith life, is realizing what talent we are given and expected to use.
- Each one of us is given one or more talents. The Church calls these special talents “Charisms”.
- Charisms, spiritual gifts, are special abilities, a special empowerment, given to a Christian by the Holy Spirit to enable them to be powerful channels of God’s love and presence in the World.
- A charism is always deeply connected with our faith and is an expression of our relationship with God. In this way it differs from a natural or learned ability. A charism, exercised correctly, draws other people to God. For instance, we can take art courses and learn to paint a picture. The ceiling of the Sistine Chapel, however, draws people to God.
- There are three ways to know you have a Charism:
  1. It is an unmistakable inner experience of peace, energy and joy when you are using the gift. It energizes you!
  2. You see effective and successful results in what you’re trying to accomplish.
  3. Other people directly or indirectly recognize the gift’s presence.
- When you are using your charism there is a natural flow and ease about the whole experience, a sense that we “fit” that we have found our place, that we can be most truly

ourselves and, at the same time, an agent of a Goodness that far exceeds our natural abilities.

- Charisms differ from natural talents in several important ways. Charisms are not “in-born,” that is, inherited from our parents, but are given to us by the Holy Spirit, whom we received through Baptism and Confirmation
- There is also a difference between the seven “gifts of the Holy Spirit” which we receive at confirmation (Wisdom, understanding, counsel, fortitude, knowledge, piety, fear of the Lord) and the gift of particular charisms.
- “There are gifts of the Holy Spirit that we are given to keep and gifts we are given to give away. The traditional “seven gifts of the Holy Spirit” are gifts given to us to keep. They are part of our inner change and strength as Christians and provide the inner “Christ-likeness” we need to use our charisms. Charisms, on the other hand, are the gifts we are given to share.
- So what exactly are these gifts, these Charisms that we may have one of more of? Here is the list:
- 25 of the identified Christian Charisms are:  
Administration, Celibacy, Craftsmanship, Discernment of Spirits, Encouragement, Evangelism, Faith, Giving, Healing, Helps, Hospitality, Intercessory Prayer, Knowledge, Leadership, Mercy, Missionary, Music, Pastoring, Prophecy, Service, Teaching, Voluntary Poverty, Wisdom, Writing, Public Tongues and the Interpretation of tongues.
- A short explanation of each charism appears below after the close of this reflection.
- As followers of Jesus, there are several reasons to read over and spend some time discerning our particular Charism(s).
- First, God is calling each of us to a work of love that will fill our life with purpose and joy. Discerning our charisms can help us discover that call. Knowing our God-given

charisms can greatly clarify our decision-making. In particular, if we are wondering how we are to fulfill the mission God has for us, or navigate a life transition (entering retirement, changing jobs, re-entering the job market, etc.), we might find our charism helps us decide what turn to take next.

- Understanding our charisms can also help us simplify our life and avoid burnout. It is unusually energizing and fulfilling to exercise a charism, you are much less likely to burn out if you are working in your area of giftedness.
- Understanding our charisms can free us from the need to compare ourselves to others. We can be freed by recognizing that our giftedness and calling are different from theirs.
- Understanding our charisms can make a big difference in family life! It can enable us to understand and cherish our spouse's gifts and help us recognize and nurture the emerging gifts of our children.
- God is calling each of us to build His Kingdom here and now by spreading the Faith through our relationships at work, in our families, and among friends. Our charisms are tools given to us to help others know Jesus and to be a sign of God's loving presence in the world. Or put simply, we are expected to use our Charisms to "play to win"!

### **List of Charisms with short explanations**

**The charism of Administration** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's wisdom by providing the planning and coordination needed to accomplish good things.

**The charism of Celibacy** empowers a Christian to be most fulfilled and spiritually fruitful by remaining unmarried and celibate for the sake of Christ. (The charism of celibacy does not stand on its own. Christians with this gift are being “freed up” for something else.)

**The charism of Craftsmanship** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God’s goodness to others through artistic or creative work that beautifies and/or orders the physical world. More than just enjoying creating, it is the outpouring of love of God and an expression of faith.

**The charism of Discernment of Spirits** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God’s wisdom by accurately perceiving a divine or demonic presence in certain people, places or things.

**The charism of Encouragement** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God’s love – nurturing others through his or her presence and words of comfort, encouragement and counsel.

**The charism of Evangelism** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God’s love by sharing the faith with others in a way that draws them to become disciples of Jesus and responsible members of His Church. True test of this charism is what happens when one shares the faith – are others drawn?

**The charism of Faith** empowers a Christian to be an effective agent of God’s purposes through an unusual trust in the love, power, and provision of God and a remarkable freedom to act on this trust.

Mother Teresa of Calcutta left her convent with 5 rupees (about \$1.00) and walked into the streets of Calcutta. Those with the charism of Faith routinely tackle big visions with little or no visible means of support.

**The charism of Giving** empowers a Christian to be a cheerful channel of God's provision by giving with exceptional generosity to those in need.

**The charism of Healing** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's love through whom God cures illness and restores health when healing is unlikely to occur quickly or to happen at all. This charism is relatively rare. Sometimes this gift is granted on once and done basis.

**The charism of Helps** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's goodness by using his or her talents and charisms to enable other individuals to serve God and people more effectively. The charism of helps is very personal. The helper is committed primarily to enabling the individual being helped, rather than to the particular task being done. Our Blessed Mother is the Queen of Helps.

**The charism of Hospitality** empowers a Christian to be a generous channel of God's love by warmly welcoming and caring for those in need of food, shelter, and friendship. "Whoever welcomes the stranger welcomes Jesus".

**The charism of Intercessory Prayer** empowers the intense prayer of a Christian for others to be the means by which God's love and deliverance reaches those in need. In intercessory prayer, the pray-er offers one's self

and one's prayer as a channel through which God's deliverance can reach those in need. Christians with this charism love to pray for others and can do so for hours without tiring.

**The charism of Knowledge** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's truth through diligent study and intellectual activity that enables us to better understand God, ourselves, and the universe.

Not a natural love of learning. Usually manifests in a love to learn through books. Often accompanies other charisms such as teaching, writing, prophecy, encouragement, or leadership, which enable the "knower" to effectively share the knowledge they have been empowered to acquire.

**The charism of Leadership** empowers a Christian to be an agent of God's purposes by sharing a compelling vision of a better future with others and by directing the overall efforts of a group as they work together to make the vision a reality. They are great motivators. (can be confused with the charism of administration – administrators specialize in problem solving and efficiently meeting the already recognized needs – they make the visions happen)

**The charism of Mercy** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's love through practical deeds of compassion that relieve the distress of those who suffer and help them experience God's love. The charisms of encouragement and mercy are often confused because they both involve great sensitivity to the feelings of others. The response is different, however. For someone with the charism of Mercy, talking just isn't enough. They need to do something concrete.

**The charism of Missionary** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's goodness to others by effectively and joyfully using their charisms in a second culture. Like celibacy, the charism of Missionary never stands alone. The culture and language of childhood remains the "heart" culture, but those with this charism are able to enter into the hearts and minds of those from another culture with remarkable ease and grace.

**The charism of Music** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's creative goodness to others through writing or performing music for the delight of others and the praise of God. For Christians with a charism of music, music is always a powerful expression of their faith and an important way to nurture their relationship with God.

**The charism of Pastoring** empowers a Christian to be an effective channel of God's love and build Christian community by nurturing the relationships and long-term spiritual growth of a group.

**The charism of Prophecy** empowers a Christian to be a channel of divine truth and wisdom by communicating a word or call of God to individuals or a group through inspired words or actions. Christians with the charism of prophecy are not ecstatic visionaries. They are quite ordinary people who know that it is vital that God's people respond to His call TODAY with their whole hearts and will do everything they can to make this clear to others. This charism requires a great deal of on-going pastoral discernment and nurture if the community is going to fully benefit from this gift of God.

**The charism of Service** empowers a Christian to be a

channel of God's purposes by recognizing the logistical gaps or unmet needs that can prevent good things from happening, and by personally doing whatever it takes to solve the problem and meet the need. The eagerness of servers to move in and solve problems that others have not yet recognized can sometimes irritate others.

**The charism of Teaching** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's truth and wisdom by enabling others to learn information and skills that help them reach their fullest spiritual and personal potential. If you have a charism of teaching, others will learn. The joy of those with this charism is knowing that they have been a catalyst for the "ah-ha" experience in those they teach. Teachers are motivated to learn new ideas or skills and are constantly looking for effective ways to pass on what they learn to others.

**The charism of Voluntary Poverty** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's loving presence by living a life of cheerful, voluntary simplicity or poverty in order to identify with Jesus and the poor. It is important not to confuse the charisms of giving and of voluntary poverty. There is a significant difference between empowered acts of giving, which can be done by Christians with access to great wealth, and the call to a particular lifestyle.

**The charism of Wisdom** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's goodness through remarkable insight that enables him or her to come up with creative solutions to specific problems and make good decisions. The charism of Wisdom is the special ability to receive inspired insights that enable a Christian to come up with creative solutions to specific problems. The charism is

more than normal human intuition. Those with the gift of knowledge are focused on the big picture. Christians with a charism of wisdom are more interested in the specific and practical application of those big ideas.

**The charism of Writing** empowers a Christian to be a channel of God's creativity by using words to create works of truth or beauty that reflect the fullness of human experience and bring glory to God. Those who are seeking to discern between a charism of writing and a skill or natural ability might ask ourselves the following questions: Is writing a form of prayer or contemplation? Is it one of my favorite spiritual exercises. When I seek to express my love for God or serve the Kingdom of God, is writing one of the first activities that I TURN TO. Do others tell me that my writing has nurtured their faith and encouraged them to seek out the good and true, has brought them closer to God.

**The charism of Public Tongues** empowers a Christian to speak a divinely inspired message in a language he or she has never learned. The charism is different from the private prayer language enjoyed by many Catholics. When Catholics refer to "praying in tongues" they are usually referring to the experience of letting the Holy Spirit pray through them in a non-rational (but not irrational) manner. In miraculous tongues, which have been recorded throughout Church history, the speaker is enabled to speak a message in an existing human language that the speaker has never learned and which can be clearly understood by those listening.