

LESSON 63: VOCATIONS AND CHARISMS

Revision from previous lesson:

In the previous few lessons, we looked at how we each are given an obligation to be witnesses of our Catholic faith by virtue of our Baptism and Confirmation. In this lesson, we will explore another aspect that is necessary for your Christian life, that is, your vocation (calling) and charisms. Your vocation and charisms are what determine how exactly you will spend your lifetime witnessing to your Catholic faith.

Current lesson:

1. Vocation is how God calls you to serve Him in the world. God calls you through Baptism and Confirmation to serve Him in a specific way of life. You can follow God's call as a single person, married person, ordained priest or deacon, or a vowed religious. It is important to first determine which way of life God is calling you to. This process of determining God's call for your life is known as discernment. One has quite a number of options upon which to discern.
2. **Priesthood.** The priest should be a man of faith and prayer who has responded to God's call to bring the people to God and God to the people. He is a man rooted in the Sacraments, especially the Eucharist, which is the source and summit of our faith. He is an extension of the local bishop; living a life of service, celibacy, and obedience to the bishop. Priests are called to proclaim and celebrate the Good News among God's people.

Men who are interested in studying for the priesthood would attend one of the seminaries that the diocese utilises in the formation and education of its priests. A seminarian studies two years of philosophy and four years of theology, usually spending a total of seven years in the seminary (including a year of initiation).

Upon ordination, most priests serve in parishes of the diocese. They should be an active and loving presence of Christ among the people, sharing their faith and participating in the struggles of the people they are serving. Some priests serve as teachers and chaplains in schools, while others serve in various diocesan institutions. Wherever they serve, priests work in bringing peace, love, and justice to those around them.

3. **Permanent Diaconate.** A permanent deacon is a man, married or single, 35 years of age or older, who is ordained to the Sacrament of Holy Orders to serve in the ministries of Word, Altar, and Charity. He serves as an official representative of the Church and, aided by the sacramental grace of Holy Orders, is a witness to all the world of Christ Himself who "came not to be served, but to serve." The permanent deacon is sensitive to the many needs of men and women of Christ's Church and boldly faces up to the challenges of meeting those needs. Deacons, for the most part, are married men who support their families by holding regular jobs. They contribute several hours a week to their ministry and usually receive no monetary compensation.

Deacons preach at Mass, baptise, witness marriages, teach, participate in ministry to the sick, aged, youth, imprisoned, minority communities, and many other areas of ministry. Justice and advocacy for the poor are the main purpose of the diaconal ministry.

The permanent deacon must be a man of deep faith. He must be willing to commit a considerable amount of time to study in preparation and be willing to spend many hours of his life in service to people who are troubled, lonely, and powerless. If he is married, his wife and family must be willing to support his ministry.

4. **Religious Life.** Whether a person enters religious life to become brother or sister, monk or nun, this person is responding to a call of living the life of Christ. While their expression of this life may differ depending upon gender, community, charism, and apostolic work, in essence they have been called to give their life to Christ in service to his Church. No one job or career defines the life or work of the man or woman who discerns this vocation. More aptly, the defining character is the witness of joy and holiness they gain through Christ's love.

In his life of celibacy, poverty, and obedience, a religious brother challenges us to be responsible with our use of power, love, and material goods. In consecrating her life to Christ, and making vows of poverty, chastity, and obedience, a religious sister gives her life entirely to the Lord so that He may draw her deeper into a relationship of more perfect love and devotion.

Often times, brothers and sisters live in community. Together they draw strength and support for their life of sacrifice and service. They are bound together by a deep desire to live as Christ, thus witnessing to the world that the Lord is present. While each community models themselves after a particular spiritual leader, charism, and service to the church, all communities seek to give a face to the person of Christ in the modern world.

5. **Married Life.** The vocation that most people discern is the sacramental union of marriage. In this sacrament, man and woman commit themselves to each other and to God until death parts them. Their two lives become one and in essence reflect both the image of the Holy Trinity and the Church. During the wedding ceremony, they seek the Church's blessing upon their love for each other and publicly seal their promise to live together in intimacy, love, and faithfulness.

The embodiment of the married couple's love is a child; the fruit of their physical and spiritual unity. A child is God's gift and blessing to the marriage. It should be cherished and welcomed into a loving environment. Sometimes, although they desire children, couples are unable to have children. This does not mean that God does not bless them or that they were not listening correctly in their discernment of their vocation. God might be calling them to be a witness to the vocation in other ways.

Managing a household; guiding, educating, and providing for their children; and meeting their own spiritual, intellectual, and social needs calls forth the very best in each couple. A deep faith in God's love for them is the foundation of a married couples' life. Their faith is expressed through prayer, devotion, and service to their family, church, and community. Faith gives them greater wisdom, patience, and hope when the inevitable struggles occur and more intense joy when they celebrate the blessings that God has given them.

6. **Single-Celibate Life.** The beauty and burden of the vocation of the single person is often overlooked in today's world. The single vocation can have a spiritual dimension, just as all other vocations do. While it is sometimes said to be the hardest vocation to accept, it is definitely not meant to be a life of loneliness and solitude.

Most of us exist, to a certain degree, within this vocation for some transitional amount of time, prior to our discernment and entrance into other vocations. It is an opportunity and a freedom to give themselves completely in service to others. Singleness as a vocation is not an end in itself, but is directed in self-giving and life-giving generosity and activity.

The single person has no bond of commitment to a community of persons like other vocations do. Thus, there is not a built-in support system for them. Living this call thus presents an opportunity to nurture a strong relationship with God. The solitude of being single can be a blessing that allows the individual to discover the incompleteness of life without God.

(Above adapted from <http://www.sfcatholic.org/vocations/what-is-a-vocation/> and <https://rcsj.org/vocations/what-is-a-vocation>)

7. A person who is neither ordained into the Holy Orders nor professed into Religious Life is called a lay person. A lay person can either be married or single.
8. Being laity does not mean having “no vocation”. In fact, the Church considers the lay life as a special vocation. The laity, despite not being ordained into the Holy Orders, are a very important part of the Church because they too share in the priestly, prophetic, and kingly mission of Christ by virtue of their Baptism (CCC 897).

CCC 1268: “The baptized have become ‘living stones’ to be ‘built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood.’ By Baptism they share in the priesthood of Christ, in his prophetic and royal mission. They are ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God’s own people, that [they] may declare the wonderful deeds of him who called [them] out of darkness into his marvelous light.’ Baptism gives a share in the common priesthood of all believers.”

On the one hand, the Church has the *ministerial priesthood*, that is, those men who are ordained into the Holy Orders. On the other hand, the laity are all members of the *common priesthood* and they share in the priesthood of Christ because of their Baptism.

9. While men who are called into the Holy Orders are mandated to govern the Church, the domain of the laity is the *secular* life.

CCC 898: “By reason of their special vocation it belongs to the laity to seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and directing them according to God’s will...It pertains to them in a special way so to illuminate and order all temporal things with which they are closely associated that these may always be effected and grow according to Christ and maybe to the glory of the Creator and Redeemer.”

The Church expects the laity to be actively involved in “social, political, and economic realities” always with a Catholic mind (CCC 899). Their faith and their being part of the Church should propel them to make the Church present in the world, in every sector of society so that their Christian values permeate the whole of society.

10. Without the laity’s active involvement in the mission of the Church in the world, the work of the bishops and priests “cannot be fully effective”, because it is only through the presence of the laity in the world that people can have an opportunity to know Jesus Christ (CCC 900).

St John Henry Newman: “...the Church would look silly without [the laity].”

11. *The laity share in Christ’s priestly office* (CCC 901-3). The laity, in their own way, are “anointed by the Holy Spirit” to offer “spiritual sacrifices” to God, although in a different way from the priests. They do this through the works that they do, the prayers that they make, and the very lives that they live on a daily basis as they are guided by the Holy Spirit. Even the sufferings that they go through in life, when “patiently born”, are sacrifices offered to God. Married couples share in Christ’s priestly office by being faithful to their spouses and raising their children responsibly in the Christian faith. All these daily experiences are to be brought to the Eucharistic celebration and “offered to the Father along with the body of the Lord”. Laity are called to offer worship “by the holiness of their lives”.
12. *The laity share in Christ’s prophetic office* (CCC 904-7). The laity live prophetically when they stand on the side of truth and righteousness even in ordinary circumstances of life. They prophetically witness the Gospel life to their own families, their neighbours, and their co-workers in the secular life. As they do so, they are given “the sense of the faith” (*sensus fidei*) by Christ and “the grace of the word”. Their mission is “accomplished in the ordinary circumstances of the world”. However, more than just witnessing the Gospel through their lives by action, the laity are to look out for opportunities to speak directly about Christ “either to unbelievers... or to the faithful”.
13. *The laity share in Christ’s kingly office* (CCC 908-11). The laity share in Christ’s kingly office by exercising leadership in the secular domain. They are called to govern their spheres of influence in the way that Christ would. In areas of the secular world that they lead, where practices have become sinful, they are to bring correction to those aspects by restoring their moral values. In the domain of the Church itself, laity can also be appointed to leadership positions in cooperation with their pastors. Such appointments should be based on the charisms that the Lord has given to each of the laity.
14. In order for us to serve the Lord and His Church effectively, we need to recognise our specific charisms. Charisms, spiritual gifts, are special abilities, special empowerment, given to Christians by the Holy Spirit to enable them to be powerful channels of God’s love and redeeming presence in the World. Whether extraordinary or ordinary, charisms are to be used in charity or service to build up the Church (CCC 2003).

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. Stained glass windows in a church do the same. A charism must be exercised in the context of the Christian's overall discipleship in submission to Jesus Christ and His Church.

15. There are some experiences you could get that may possibly be signs that show you what your charisms are:

- A) An unmistakable inner experience of peace, energy, and joy when you are using the gift. You feel energised when using it.
- B) Unusually effective and successful results in what you are trying to accomplish.
- C) Other people's direct or indirect recognition of the gift they observe in you.

When exercising 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.

16. The Catholic Church explains in detail what charisms are and what their purpose is in connection with the saving mission of the Church.

- A) Charisms are given by the Holy Spirit in order that the Church might fulfil her mission.

CCC 767: "When the work which the Father gave the Son to do on earth was accomplished, the Holy Spirit was sent on the day of Pentecost in order that he might continually sanctify the Church. Then the church was openly displayed to the crowds and the spread of the Gospel among the nations, through preaching, was begun. As the 'convocation' of all men for salvation, the Church in her very nature is missionary, sent by Christ to all the nations to make disciples of them."

CCC 768: "So that she can fulfil her mission, the Holy Spirit 'bestows upon [the Church] varied hierarchic and charismatic gifts, and this way directs her'. Henceforward the Church, endowed with the gifts of her founder and faithfully observing his precepts of charity, humility and self-denial, receives the mission of proclaiming and establishing among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God, and she is on earth the seed and the beginning of that kingdom."

- B) The faithful of the Church, through their charisms given by the Holy Spirit, are enabled to build the Church, the act for the common good of men, and to help fulfil the needs of the world.

CCC 798: "The Holy Spirit is 'the principle of every vital and truly saving action in each part of the Body.' He works in many ways to build up the Body in charity: ...by the many special graces (called 'charisms'), by which he makes the faithful 'fit and ready to undertake various tasks and offices for the renewal and building up of the Church.'"

CCC 799: "Whether extraordinary or simple and humble, charisms are graces of the Holy Spirit which directly or indirectly benefit the Church, ordered as they are to her building up, to the good of men, and to the needs of the world."

CCC 951: “Communion of charisms. Within the communion of the church, the Holy Spirit ‘distributes special graces among the faithful of every rank’ for the building up of the Church. Now, ‘to each is given the manifestation of the Spirit for the common good.’”

- C) Charisms should be accepted with thanksgiving and used in submission to the pastoral authority of the priests and bishops.

CCC 800: “Charisms are to be accepted with gratitude by the person who receives them and by all members of the Church as well. They are a wonderfully rich grace for the apostolic vitality and for the holiness of the entire Body of Christ, provided they really are genuine gifts of the Holy Spirit and are used in full conformity with authentic promptings of this same Spirit, that is, in keeping with charity, the true measure of all charisms.”

CCC 801: “It is in this sense that discernment of charisms is always necessary. No charism is exempt from being referred and submitted to the Church’s shepherds. ‘Their office [is] not indeed to extinguish the Spirit, but to test all things and hold fast to what is good,’ so that all the diverse and complementary charisms work together ‘for the common good.’”

- D) There are different types of charisms, and the Holy Spirit gives different charisms with different characters to different members of the Church, and they are all to be used actively.

CCC 2003: “Grace is first and foremost the gift of the Spirit who justifies and sanctifies us. But grace also includes the gifts that the Spirit grants us to associate us with his work, to enable us to collaborate in the salvation of others and in the growth of the Body of Christ, the Church. There are sacramental graces, gifts proper to the different sacraments. There are furthermore special graces, also called charisms after the Greek term used by St Paul and meaning ‘favour,’ ‘gratuitous gift,’ ‘benefit.’ Whatever their character – sometimes it is extraordinary, such as the gift of miracles or of tongues – charisms are oriented toward sanctifying grace and are intended for the common good of the Church. They are at the service of charity which builds up the Church.”

CCC 2004: “Among the special graces ought to be mentioned the graces of state that accompany the exercise of the responsibilities of the Christian life and of the ministries within the Church. Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; he who teaches, in his teaching; he who exhorts, in his exhortation; he who contributes, in liberality; he who gives aid, with zeal; he who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

17. Different types of gifts/charisms are found in at work in Sacred Scripture:

- A) **The Traditional Gifts** (Isaiah 11:1-3): These are all gifts that are given to you at your Baptism and Confirmation to enable you to live a moral life as a Christian. It is up to you to stir these gifts up proactively.

Wisdom - an understanding in our inner being, which enables us to see God's viewpoint or vision of the world. It helps us develop the ability to make judgments about everything in our lives on the basis of a deep, personal union with the Lord and his abiding love.

Understanding – enlightenment of our minds and hearts with divine truth so that we can grasp the mysteries of the Lord. This gift enables us to see the Lord more deeply. It also illuminates the Holy Scriptures as we read them and gives us knowledge of God and his ways. Signs of this gift are new insight into the Scriptures, increased depth in prayer, and renewed appreciation of the sacraments.

Counsel (Right Judgment) – the ability to receive and/or give good advice. It empowers us to make decisions in the Spirit in practical life situations and allows for maturity as we grow in our Christian walk. Sometimes it takes place in the sacrament of Reconciliation. The Holy Spirit helps us discern good from evil, right from wrong. We grow in this gift by humbling ourselves to seek help from others when faced with a difficult situation.

Fortitude (Courage/Strength/Zeal) – enables us to face with strength the trials and dangers we encounter in our Christian life. It empowers us to choose consistently the right way to live in spite of disappointments and difficulties. We can grow in courage by resisting the temptations of the world: money, power, self-centeredness, and self-righteousness. It is often seen as the root of the charism of evangelisation.

Knowledge – is having a deep trust and sureness about the Lord and knowing the truths of Christian revelation. This gift of the Holy Spirit produces in us a deep trust and sureness about the Lord. We grow in the gift of knowledge through daily study of the scriptures and the teachings of the Church.

Piety (Love) – called in Romans 8:15 the “spirit of adoption” produces in us a loving and worshipful consciousness of God as our Father. Piety leads us to a true image of our Father as merciful, faithful, abounding in steadfast love, slow to anger – but also firm and just. It also helps us to see God's holiness reflected in other people and to love them. We grow in piety through the practice of justice, attitudes of cooperation with authority, truthfulness, friendliness, and humility.

Fear of the Lord – an attitude of reverence and awe in the presence of God. It is not to be confused with the emotion of fear. However, fear of offending God is a manifestation of our reverence and respect for Who God Is. This gift enables us to reverence all life as a reflection of God's life. We grow in reverence by praying to God often, by being thankful for God's gifts, and by respecting God's name. Fear of the Lord is the spiritual door to the full Christian life, a great aid in overcoming sin in our lives. (See Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 9:10; Psalm 34:12-15)

- B) **The Motivational Gifts** (Romans 12:6-8): These gifts are talents given to you when God formed you in the womb. These talents are referred to as gifts because they are freely given to us by God so we can contribute to our society and bring glory to Him as

we utilise them. These gifts help us to develop our personalities, character, and often our vocations. These are gifts that in some measure are present in each of us, even though one may be more prevalent than another. We are to “use [these gifts] to serve one another as good stewards of God’s varied grace” (1 Peter 4:8-11).

Prophecy (Prophet / Perceiver) – one who clearly perceives the will of God – not to be confused with the function/position of “prophet” who is one in that role due to anointing of the Lord.

Serving (Doer) – one who loves to serve others and manifests hospitality.

Teacher – one who loves to research and communicate truth – a person of faith who leads others to grasp and hold on to the truth.

Exhorter – one who loves to encourage others to live a victorious life - one who moves others to achieve or accomplish or be what God calls them to be and do.

Contributor (Giver) – one who loves to give time, talent, energy and financial/material means to benefit others and advance the Gospel; a person of faith who knows that God supplies every need, and is willing to put themselves and their resources at the service of others.

Administrator (Facilitator/Leader) – one who loves to organise, lead or direct, knowing by faith that any project can be accomplished by bringing together the right people to do it. A person of broad vision, the administrator grasps the overall picture and sees all that is involved.

One who shows mercy (person of compassion) – one who shows compassion, love, and care to those in need; one who readily recognises the pain people experience and reaches out to bring healing and love into action; as a person of faith, helping others to work together in love.

- C) **The Manifestation/Charismatic Gifts** (1 Corinthians 12:7): These gifts are supernatural abilities bestowed upon individuals by the Holy Spirit. They are not natural abilities. These manifestations are for the common good of the Church and are not to be used to promote the importance of the person bearing the gift. – see Catechism references above. We do not ‘possess’ the manifestation gifts. We are the vehicles the Lord uses for the outpouring of His blessings upon His people. We are the ‘gift bearers’ and must function “with humility, willingness to take risks, trust in God, and love for our brothers and sisters in Christ”.

I) Gifts of Insight/Revelation

Expression/Word of Knowledge – a supernatural revelation of facts past, present, or future which we did not learn through the efforts of the natural mind – this is not to be confused with the knowledge we have acquired through the study of Scripture, Christian writings or other sources of information, including our own experiences. This is a supernaturally imparted Word. If we proclaim a healing or promise of

salvation because of what we have studied, we are being presumptuous, not faith-filled. True supernatural knowledge starts with knowing God personally, through Jesus Christ. Jesus and the disciples received many ‘words of knowledge’ from the Holy Spirit. Some examples of these are found in John 4:17-27, Matthew 17:27, Mark 5:36-40, Acts 5:1-9, and Acts 3:1-10.

Expression/Word of Wisdom – a supernatural insight given to the members of the Body of Christ which reveals God’s timing and method of ministry in a given situation. It explains or illuminates a given revelation such as a word of knowledge, discernment of spirit, or the communication of revealed prophecy. This is not the same as wisdom we gain from our experiences in life or intellectual pursuits. It is not to be confused with the virtue (Baptismal gift) of wisdom. The ‘virtue’ of wisdom given at Baptism and affirmed at Confirmation is a lifelong gift which increases in us as we submit to those who instruct us on our spiritual journey. But a ‘word of wisdom’ is a supernatural revelation of God’s timing and method of ministry in a given situation.

Discernment of Spirit – a supernatural ability to recognise whether a person or situation is being motivated by the Holy Spirit, their human spirit, an evil spirit, or a combination of these spirits. The discernment of spirits is not everyday discernment used for making decisions, nor an insight into human nature that one might naturally possess, nor an adept ability to suspect something wrong in the motive of others. It is not the natural ability to assess situations. The discernment of spirits is a supernatural gift of revelation given for a specific situation. This revelation can come through a vision, a sense, or a specific word similar to a word of knowledge. The gift of discernment of spirits is essential in ministry to people who have been involved in drugs, premarital sex, witchcraft, and other habits of grave sin, when they seek to change their lives. It is also important to pray for the gift of discernment when we listen to teachings or prophecies, read Christian or secular publications, and watch Christian or secular TV programs, movies, videos, or view websites. Discernment of spirits and Wisdom help judge and validate healings and miracles as well as prophecy and words of knowledge. As with the other gifts, a word of wisdom should be sought through quiet prayer before bringing forth what is being revealed. Prayer ministers should expect this manifestation of the Spirit to come forth during prayer / healing ministry. Discretion and compassion to insure the dignity of the person receiving ministry are required. This manifestation gift requires commitment to deep prayer and maturity in the Spirit.

II) Gifts of Communication/Utterance

Tongues – a spontaneous, inspired utterance by the Holy Spirit in which we use our voice according to the Spirit’s prompting. To speak or sing in Tongues or “to pray in the Spirit”, as it is called, is what happens when a believer allows the indwelling Spirit to guide and form the words they utter. To pray, to speak or to sing in Tongues is to pray in a language that we would otherwise not be able to speak in or understand; a language current on the earth or one long dead, or it could be any one of countless dialects. Praying in tongues brings deliverance, inspiration, refreshment (both spiritually and physically), renewal, wisdom, and is a means to

victory in spiritual warfare. It is important to note that the gift of tongues is considered the “least” of the gifts even though many groups tend to emphasise it the most.

Interpretation of Tongues – a prophetic message given in response to God’s signal of ‘speaking in tongues’. If someone ‘speaks’ out in a tongue, there ought to be an interpretation for what has been spoken. This can be brought forth by the person who has given the tongue, or it can be given by someone else in the group.

Prophecy – a supernatural communication from God to an individual or a group of believers. Prophet is often misunderstood as a foretelling of the future, when it is usually a forthtelling about God’s will or a correction of a sin or injustice in the same way that the prophets used to bring God’s message of repentance to Israel in the Old Testament. A person yielding to this gift must listen and expect that God will speak, and always yield to the authority and order of the event and yield to the authority/body for discernment. It is necessary to discern the message that is spoken, not necessarily to accept everything that is said as ‘gospel-truth’. Prophecy should always be discerned and tested by the body of believers present, and especially, subject to the final authority of the Church. Prophecy is not an ability given to someone to prophesy at will, but rather a definite message given at a particular time by the Spirit for a distinct purpose.

III) Dynamic/Power Gifts

Faith – a supernatural outpouring of the Holy Spirit which enables us to confidently believe without a doubt that what is spoken or undertaken in Jesus’ name will be accomplished. Faith involves entrusting oneself wholly to God and to believe absolutely and completely what He reveals. It is a gift of God that is given spontaneously and lasts long enough for God’s purpose of the moment to be accomplished.

Gift of Healing – supernatural outpourings of God’s power which results in the healing of sickness and disease without the use of medical means. This can involve “sickness” of the body, soul and/or spirit. God is interested in healing our total person. Christ is the healer. Even healings that come to us through the intercession of Mary and the saints are through their intercession with Jesus the Healer. Healing may be physical, psychological, emotional, spiritual, or relational.

Miraculous Powers – Miracles are interventions into the course of events which seem to contradict the so-called laws of nature. Through ‘working of miracles’ the Holy Spirit manifests the power of God to produce works which go beyond the natural: overriding natural laws, such as turning water into wine, multiplication of the loaves and fishes; healing beyond the ordinary, such as healing the withered hand (Luke 6:6-10), the replacement of an organ that is not there, disappearance of a tumour without surgery, making the blind see without surgery.

D) **The Ministry Gifts** (Ephesians 4:11-12): The ministry gifts are gifts of function/position, or people being assigned to specific roles, within the faith

community. “And he gave some as apostles, others as prophets, others as evangelists, others as pastors and teachers, to equip the holy ones for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ.” It is worth noting that some Scripture scholars, in studying this passage, have commented that being “pastors and teachers” are one and the same role, which implies that a good pastor (priest/bishop) should also be a good teacher of the Word.

There is no indication anywhere in Sacred Scripture or Sacred Tradition that this list of charisms is meant to be exhaustive.

(Points on Charisms are adapted from <https://diolaf.org/gifts-and-charisms>)



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