

My friends in Christ, in our Gospel text from Saint Luke, the Lord speaks to us of prudent stewardship; “who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward?” So, that is the *first* question for each of us today: who is the steward? Well in very truth, that question is rhetorical in the wider context of this parable: the Master is God; the household is the Kingdom; the return of the Master “on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour” is the end of time – either for *all* of us *at once* (that is, the Second Coming) or for *each* of us on our own (which is death).

And the *steward*, then...is *us* – *each* of us is a steward in the household of God.... And then we have the *next* question: who is the *faithful* and *prudent* steward? But to answer *that*...we need to understand *this*: we *are* stewards in the household of God...but stewards of *what* exactly? Exactly what is it that we are supposed to be (and *called* to be) prudent caretakers of vigilant stewardship?

We are stewards of *lots* of things, of course: the many various duties and responsibilities of daily life; our property and possessions; our families; our parish; our community; our city; our state; our nation; our world; our Church.... That...pretty much covers *everything*!

But there is such a thing as the hierarchy of needs. Similarly, there is a hierarchy of what is important, our priorities. The house is burning down – quick! Should I save my child, or should I save my favorite video game? (...I hope you chose the *child*, or else you are in *dutch* with the wife!)

Just so, there is a hierarchy of prudential stewardship. What is my *highest* priority – my *most* important job – as a steward in the household of God? Let me rephrase that question: what is the *most* important thing...*ever*? Is it my favorite video game? If my favorite video game gets stolen or whatever, is my life over...? Is it a favorite *sport*? If I suffer a career-ending injury and never again will I get to play that sport, is my life over...?

Well, all of *that* is just stuff, right? Clearly the most important thing ever *has* to be our **family** and friends, right? But what if your spouse dies unexpectedly? Or your child? Or what if your **best** friend betrays you? Is your life over *then*...?

But maybe we are cosmopolitan enough to realize that the most important thing is none of that small, personal, individual stuff, so we think bigger. Is the most important thing ever...saving the environment? Solving world hunger? Curing cancer? World peace?

The answer is this: *none* of that. Fact: *none* of that is the most important thing ever, and do you know how I know that? Because all of that is just going to end anyway! And some day (maybe tomorrow, maybe a trillion years from now, who knows?), some day, *all* of this...will be gone. The world entire...and yes, even your favorite video game.... And so how can it *possibly* be the case that the most important thing *ever* is something that is just going to end *anyway*, no matter *how* important it is, no matter *how* much we may love it or take care of it? How can something so *finite*, so *frail*, so *weak*, so *terminable* be the *most* important thing *ever*? The answer: it *cannot*.

So what *is*? What *is* the super-important mystery-thing of which we are all of us called to be faithful and prudent stewards? It is this: our *Relationship* with God...our *Identity* as beloved children of our loving Father, chosen friends of Jesus Christ, treasured temples of the Holy Spirit...and what flows from *that*, our *Mission* in life to safeguard all of this and to share it with others.... In short: life eternal in the Kingdom of Heaven is the most important thing ever.

The inspired author of the Letter to the Hebrews summarizes it even *better* for us: faith; *that* is the most important thing ever. And “faith is the realization of what is hoped for and evidence of things not seen.” God and the Kingdom are hoped for but because of our sins and a fallen, broken world are as yet not seen.... Faith – in the love of God...in the grace of Jesus Christ...in the power of the Holy Spirit.... Faith is what *sustains* us, empowers us to *survive* after we die – after all of this is ended. Because life is great, and it *is* worth living (Archbishop Fulton Sheen said that)...and *eternal* life is just *way* better. And the world is a fine place and worth fighting for (Ernest Hemingway said that)...and life in the world *to come* is just *way* better.... And faith is what gets us there.

What is faith? By “faith” we generally tend to mean two different things. The first is what we mean when we speak of “*the*” faith: the *content* of the faith; what Jesus and His Church teach us

about discipleship, communion, right religion, proper morals, and so forth. It is *this* understanding of “faith” that we mean when we consider *what* we know *about* Jesus.

But it is the *second* meaning of “faith” that is at issue here. If *the* faith (that is, the content of our Catholic Christian faith) is *what* we know *about*, then *faith* is *Whom* we know...*period*. Not nearly enough to know *about* Jesus – I must *know* Him, I must have *faith* in Him, I must put my whole and entire belief *into* Him. When we profess the Creed, the first words of the Creed are, in Latin: *Credo in unum Deum*. Now, the connotation of that Latin grammar is not some abstract “yeah, I put some thought in it.” In fact, the Latin grammar (which, as usual, is lost in translation whenever we try to translate *anything* into English – *ahem!*).... The Latin grammar of this phrase *actually* connotes a very concrete, physical, tangible activity and motion – something that is deliberately, intentionally being moved *into* a particular location. I drove my car *into* the garage; I deposited my cash *into* the safe; I poured my spicy-hot ghost-pepper sauce *into* my food and then I stuffed my food *into* my gullet.

(...And then I checked myself *into* the hospital – ha!)

To know *about*...and to *know*. In English, we have *only* that: “to know.” But our brothers and sisters south of the border, they get it; the Spanish language has *two* words for our one English verb “to know.” *Saber* and *conocer*; to know *about* someone and to *know* someone.... And the first is merely informational, but the second is relational. Do we want mere information *about* Jesus? Like factoids on a dating website? Long brown hair, shaggy beard, dark complexion, holes in His hands and feet (“Extreme body piercings!”).... Do we want *that*, to settle merely for *that*? Or, do we want to *know* Him? Because a *lot* of people know *about* Him – even the *demons* know *about* Him. And if I might paraphrase Saint James: the demons know *about* Him...and they shudder. But *obviously*, they do not *know* Him insofar as they do not have *faith* in Him – they do not *put* their faith *into* Him; nor will they *ever* say – and sadly (yet quite frankly), lots of people *will* never say: *Credo in unum Deum*...I *put* my faith *into* the one God, *into* the one Lord Jesus Christ, *into* the Holy Spirit.

This is the most important thing ever: faith...to *know* Jesus. This is Divine Intimacy. This is why I keep harping on that absolutely fundamental, inescapable, and unquestionable importance of daily prayer, daily conversation with God – because intimacy with *anybody* (God or otherwise), it just requires – it *requires* – conversation and communion.... Faith: to *know* Jesus – which is known also as *Divine Intimacy*.

And Divine Intimacy is very *personal*, and thus are we made *disciples* of Jesus Christ – in that very *personal* relationship with Him.... But remember: if all of this pertains to faith...and if faith is the most important thing ever...then it stands to reason that we *want* to, and *should*, and *must* share this with *others* – with *everyone*! And that is *missionary* discipleship. Discipleship, as such, is *embracing* my faith in Jesus Christ; *missionary* discipleship is *sharing* my faith with *others* so that they, *too*, can get to *know* Jesus, enjoy Divine Intimacy with Jesus, and thus embrace *their* faith in Jesus. Hence, what needs to happen *next* (the sharing of my faith with others) is *Authentic Friendship* with others.

Friendships of *utility* are those friendships that really only exist because of a common thing between the friends. A buddy of mine has a swimming pool. But if it were not for the fact of that swimming pool, he would *not* be my buddy because to be quite frank...I just cannot *stand* the guy!

And then there are friendships of pleasure; if friendships of *utility* are all about this common *thing* that the friends enjoy (like a catalyst that the friends need to have in common in order for their friendship to exist at all), then friendships of *pleasure* are all about the enjoyment that friends have in each other, with no need for some sort of social catalyst; they enjoy each other's company, and they have many of the same interests, and they can have a conversation about many different things.

And then there are friendships of virtue, or what we may call “Authentic Friendships.” And by the way, I use the phrase “Authentic Friendships” in a specific and technical manner: friendships in their uttermost highest and most exalted expression, the fullness of friendship-love – or, what the Greeks call *philia*. They are friendships which bear the *authenticity*, as it were, of that highest form of friendship, into which Jesus Himself entered with His Apostles, and into which He *continues* to enter

with all of *us* – if His disciples we would be. And these Authentic Friendships, these friendships of virtue...they are friendships that we have with others who inspire us to be better people, who hold us accountable whenever we screw up, who help us to grow in our faith in Jesus Christ and whom we help grow in *their* faith, *too*.

And if our Divine Intimacy with Jesus – our *faith* in Jesus – is such that we *want* to *share* our faith with others, thereby forming Authentic Friendships with the people around us who inspire us to grow in our faith *even* as we share our faith with them and try to help them to grow in their faith, too...if we strive to engage in *that*, that glorious, God-given *Mission*...then we will discover that, all of a sudden...just like this...lo and behold...we are *evangelizing*. We reflect upon our own personal encounter with Jesus...we put into our own words our own testimony of faith...and we recognize that this encounter was Jesus laboring to enter into Divine Intimacy with us, and our testimony of faith is us sharing that encounter with others. “Back *then*, I was *one* way. But *now*, I am completely different, so much *more*, so much *better*. And what happened between *then* and *now*...was Jesus.”

So small a thing, such a little thing, to be able to tell our faith story to others like *that*...but so *powerful* a thing...and, *truly*, the most *important* thing *ever*: faith.... And thus is the holy work, the great and glorious God-given Mission...of the faithful and prudent steward of the household (the *Kingdom*) of God.... May it be, then, that by the grace of God, we *will* be the good stewards whom God is calling us to be...the stewardship of faith: embracing Divine Intimacy with God, entering into Authentic Friendship with others, and then sharing our faith with them so as to inspire them likewise to know, *truly* know, Jesus Christ. And, by the grace of God, may it be that we engage in such faithful, prudent stewardship all the days of our lives...for the salvation of souls and for the glorious majesty of God.