

Gospel: *Luke 12:39-48*

Jesus said to his disciples:

"Be sure of this:

if the master of the house had known the hour
when the thief was coming,

he would not have let his house be broken into.

You also must be prepared,

for at an hour you do not expect, the Son of Man will come."

Then Peter said,

"Lord, is this parable meant for us or for everyone?"

And the Lord replied,

"Who, then, is the faithful and prudent steward
whom the master will put in charge of his servants
to distribute the food allowance at the proper time?

Blessed is that servant whom his master on arrival finds doing so.

Truly, I say to you, he will put him

in charge of all his property.

But if that servant says to himself,

'My master is delayed in coming,'

and begins to beat the menservants and the maidservants,

to eat and drink and get drunk,

then that servant's master will come

on an unexpected day and at an unknown hour

and will punish the servant severely

and assign him a place with the unfaithful.

That servant who knew his master's will

but did not make preparations nor act in accord with his will
shall be beaten severely;

and the servant who was ignorant of his master's will

but acted in a way deserving of a severe beating

shall be beaten only lightly.

Much will be required of the person entrusted with much,

and still more will be demanded of the person entrusted with more."

Homily: *We are Made for God's Kingdom*

Today's Gospel is a tale of two stewards: the faithful, prudent steward; and the unjust, unwise steward. Prudence in the Middle Ages was considered the queen of all virtues because prudence is the capacity to be able to see within a particular situation what is required, and to do it.

Sometimes that virtue is also translated as wisdom but wisdom is different than prudence.

Wisdom is the wide perspective. Wisdom is looking at things from a mountaintop. Wisdom you might say is looking at it from God's perspective. When you put those two virtues together, prudence—knowing what's needed in a particular situation—and wisdom—the ability to have

the wide picture—that's a full complement of virtue. A complement of knowing what is required and being able to do it.

Jesus praises that faithful steward in today's Gospel and in fact goes on to say that the master of the household will wait on that wise steward. The master becomes the servant of those who exercise that kind of virtue. What is critical, is to realize that we all are stewards. We are entrusted with gifts. We don't own those gifts, we use those gifts for a particular time and then eventually they're given back to the Lord from whom all good gifts come.

Last week I was in Cincinnati celebrating the funeral of a dear friend. She had been married to her husband for 47 years. As I was talking to him, naturally he was filled with grief at the loss of his wife, but his life goes on. This 47 years was a chapter in his life, but he is relatively young and still healthy and there's a new chapter unfolding in his life. While I was there I was talking with some other friends who just became empty-nesters. They've raised their kids and for the first time their home is empty. A chapter in their life of raising their children; a new chapter opening up. Recently I was talking to a gentleman who was facing the challenges of retirement. What do I do with my time now that I'm retired? You can only play so much golf; drink so many martinis; have so many card parties. What do I do with this new chapter of my life?

If we think of ourselves as stewards of the gifts that God has given, marriage is a gift, children are a gift, employment is a gift, health is a gift. Eventually, the steward will have to return all of those gifts to the one from whom they came. That's the great prayer of St. Ignatius Loyola. Every day pray: Take Lord, receive all that you've given me: my memory, my intellect, my will, my imagination; everything that I have, Lord I want to return it to you. If we pray that prayer every day, returning our gifts to the Lord, asking: *May they only be used for your greater glory. Give me your love and your grace. That's what I need to sustain me.* Then we go through life with open hands; not clutching, not living in fear of when are these gifts going to be taken away, because we put them in God's hands—God, who is the giver of all good gifts—to be used according to God's design.

Whether we're living a long life or a short life...Whether we're living in sickness or in health...Whether we're living in riches or poverty...Whatever life will bring us, we pray that we might use the gifts for the time that they are given, prudently, wisely, and without fear. But if we abuse those gifts and we think, "I own these gifts." Or, "I'm gonna live forever." Then we are going to be that unwise steward in today's Gospel who will be punished. Don't think that God's mercy is not available to us at every stage of our life, we can always call on the name of the Lord. As the Responsorial Psalm says today, "Our help is in the name of the Lord."

We're never outside the realm of God's mercy. But if our hearts are hardened and we become totally self-focused, then we lose perspective of that mercy, and there is no mercy in hell. Make no mistake about it, Jesus' parable is quite clear today: Satan is not merciful. Satan is brutal. Hell is a kingdom for those who are self-focused; for those who only think of themselves. There is great agony in that because we're made for love. We're made for God's kingdom.

There's a beautiful confluence today between our gospel and our first reading from Paul's letter to the Romans. Paul says you have to serve somebody. Who are you going to serve? Are you

going to serve selfishness and yourself? When that happens, we eventually end up degrading ourselves. Or are we going to serve the Lord in righteousness and freedom? With that comes great beauty; great harmony; great peace.

So there's this contrast and there is this choice. If we think of ourselves as God stewards, then we pray for the grace to serve the one who gave us those gifts and with that comes great joy. That's God's design for us. That's God's prayer for us. How do we do that? Today's Psalm points us in the right direction: Our help is in the name of the Lord. Let's call upon His name and ask for that grace to remember who we are, what's been given, where were headed. Amen. Amen.