

## **How is your meal – August 8, 2010**

*<sup>35-38</sup>"Keep your shirts on; keep the lights on! Be like house servants waiting for their master to come back from his honeymoon, awake and ready to open the door when he arrives and knocks. Lucky the servants whom the master finds on watch! He'll put on an apron, sit them at the table, and serve them a meal, sharing his wedding feast with them. It doesn't matter what time of the night he arrives; they're awake—and so blessed!"*

*<sup>39-40</sup>"You know that if the house owner had known what night the burglar was coming, he wouldn't have stayed out late and left the place unlocked. So don't you be slovenly and careless. Just when you don't expect him, the Son of Man will show up."*

*<sup>41</sup>Peter said, "Master, are you telling this story just for us? Or is it for everybody?"*

*<sup>42-46</sup>The Master said, "Let me ask you: Who is the dependable manager, full of common sense, that the master puts in charge of his staff to feed them well and on time? He is a blessed man if when the master shows up he's doing his job. But if he says to himself, 'The master is certainly taking his time,' begins maltreating the servants and maids, throws parties for his friends, and gets drunk, the master will walk in when he least expects it, give him the thrashing of his life, and put him back in the kitchen peeling potatoes."*

*<sup>47-48</sup>"The servant who knows what his master wants and ignores it, or insolently does whatever he pleases, will be thoroughly thrashed. But if he does a poor job through ignorance, he'll get off with a slap on the hand. Great gifts mean great responsibilities; greater gifts, greater responsibilities!"*

The day Jesus spoke this parable, he was continuing to build a foundation on which to build His Gospel message – building the foundation for those who would be telling the Good News. He was demanding involvement, enthusiasm and dedication to the task at hand. Thus Peter’s question; “are you telling the parable for us (the disciples) or is it for everybody?”

I realize as I read the parable that Jesus’ words are indeed meant for each of us – not just the immediate disciples, not even the modern day disciples, but the hearers of His word. The question becomes, ‘how do we respond to His challenge?’ ‘How do we accept the challenge of our Lord and how is this challenge reflected in our lives as seen And I must tell you, when I read the passage, especially towards the end of the passage, I see a mirror being placed in front of me, and I do believe in front of all of us, challenging us to be better stewards with His message.

Jesus, you may have noticed, when He taught, did not rely on quoting scripture from the Old Testament, rather, He told a story – parable of everyday occurrences that His hearers could relate to.

Today, I am going to retell His parable – but use an example I believe we can all appreciate. It is about a restaurant and their efforts at service one when the owner is present and the second when the owner is out of town.

A family goes out to a restaurant. They are celebrating a birthday, and they are all pretty excited. As soon as they get inside the restaurant, they are immediately greeted by a host who seats them at their reserved table. Almost immediately, a waiter appears, bringing birthday greetings on behalf of the restaurant and then asks who wants what to drink – bringing the order promptly. Soon they are back, asking you about your order. They answer questions about the various items on

the menu – and even offer their own recommendation. When the food is brought, their hospitality does not end – indeed both the waiter and the host check up on you as the evening continues. The owner is very pleased!

Next month, they again return to the same restaurant to celebrate another birthday. This time the owner is not present. When they enter, they see their table, but are told to wait to be seated. The host is busy chatting on the phone with a friend, and while everyone is anxious to start the celebration, you are stuck in the lobby, waiting to be seated. Finally you are seated – your server comes over, obviously not overjoyed to be working that day – just stands there – does not respond to the obvious good mood at the table – just takes the orders and disappears. After the food has been served, you have to flag them down to get the cheque.

Tell me, which of the two descriptions would be worthy of your tip? Which gave the family the better service? It was the first restaurant, wasn't it? They gave the better service because they were accountable. And I would think the owner would be very displeased to hear and see that his staff only gave good service when he personally was present.

It may seem hard, at first, to be the faithful servant. After all, much is demanded of you. However, if you talk to any successful employee, they will tell you the secret of their success is not that the job is easy, but rather, that they enjoy what they are doing – and it shows. The successful employee does not need the owner looking over their shoulders to do a good job – they do a good job because they want to – they do a good job because they want to – and in doing so, their task does not seem like a chore.

This is so very true with our proclamation of the good news – for this parable is asking us to be the faithful stewards in proclaiming the good news of Christ. We proclaim it effectively, not by words, but by actions. And it is hard to let actions speak instead of just words, for words are so much easier.

This lesson has never been lost on anyone who has travelled to a foreign country – even one who speaks the same language. Customs vary, words may have different meanings – and if the language is different – it becomes our attitude by which we are judged – not our words. Our attitude often defines on how well we are received or not.

Jesus was oh so aware of this. His great condemnation was of the religious leaders who placed so much importance on words and empty ritual – and sought to dismiss anyone who attempted to make God and His teachings – accessible.

Stewards – Stewards of God’s Grace – it is by what we do –not by what we say that we make the difference.

Allow me to tell you a story that will, quite possibly illustrate this – for our actions must not only demonstrate a belief that Christ is all around us, but also show that we are responding as His stewards with the great gift He has entrusted to us – the gift of love that is meant to be shared.

*Now there lived in the city of Marseilles, a hundred years ago, an old shoemaker, who was loved and honored by all his neighbors, who affectionately called him “Father Martin.” One Christmas eve he sat alone in his little shop, reading about the visit of the wise men to the infant Jesus, and of the gifts that they brought*

him. So the cobbler said to himself, "If tomorrow were the first Christmas, and if Jesus were to be born in Marseilles this night, I know what I would give him!" He rose and took from a shelf two little shoes of the softest snow-white leather, with bright, silver buckles. "I would give him these, my finest work. How pleased his mother would be!" But then, as he turned around to place them back on the shelf, he thought to himself, But I'm a foolish old man. The Master has no need of my poor gifts.

After replacing the shoes, he blew out his candle and retired to his bed. He had barely closed his eyes when he heard a voice softly call his name. "Martin!" Intuitively, he felt that it was the Lord who was speaking to him. "Martin," the voice said, "You have longed to see me. Tomorrow I shall pass by your window. If you see me and bid me to enter, I shall be your guest and sit at your table."

Father Martin was electrified. He didn't sleep that night in anticipation of what was ahead. Before it was dawn he got up and tidied up his little shop. He swept the floor and put boughs of holly and fir along the rafters. On the table he placed a loaf of freshly baked bread, a jar of honey, a pitcher of milk; and over the fire he hung a caldron of hot chocolate. His simple preparations were complete.

When all was in readiness, he took up his vigil at the window. He was sure he would know the Master when he came. As he watched the driving sleet and snow, he thought about how cold it was outside, but how warm and joyous it would be when the Master finally came.

Presently, he saw an old street sweeper pass by, blowing upon his thin and gnarled hands to keep them warm. That poor fellow! He must be half frozen. Opening the door, Father Martin called out to him, "Come in, my friend, and get warm, and I'll give you something hot to drink." No further urging was needed, and the man gratefully accepted the invitation.

Another hour passed by, and Father Martin then saw a poor, miserably clothed woman carrying her baby. Stung by the cold winter blast, she paused, wearily, to rest in the shelter of his doorway. Quickly, he flung open the door and said, "Come

*in from the cold. My shop is warm, and you can rest.” She replied, “I am going to the hospital. I’m hoping that they will take me and the baby in. My husband is away at sea, and I am ill, with no other place to go.”*

*“You poor child!” cried the old man. “You must eat something while you are getting warm. And let me get a cup of warm milk for the little one. Ah!. What a bright and cheerful little fellow he is! Why, you have no shoes on him!” “I cannot afford to buy him anything,” sighed the mother. “Then he shall have this lovely pair I finished yesterday,” the cobbler said. And with that Martin took down from the shelf the soft, little snow-white shoes with the silver buckles he had looked at the night before, and slipped them onto the child’s feet. They fit perfectly. Shortly thereafter, when mother and child had been rested and refreshed, they went their way full of gratitude for what Father Martin had done for them, and Martin returned to his vigil at the window sill.*

*Hour after hour went by, and one by one, many other needy travelers shared the meager hospitality of the old cobbler, but the expected guest, the Master, did not appear.*

*At last, when night had fallen, Father Martin retired to his cot with a heavy heart. “It was only a dream,” he sighed. “I did hope and believe, but the Master did not come.”*

*Suddenly, or so it seemed to his weary eyes, the room was filled with a warm, glorious light; and to the cobbler’s astonishment, there, in a vision before him, appeared the street sweeper, the sick mother and her baby, and all the people whom he had given comfort to that day. One by one, they all smiled at him and said, “Have you not seen me? Did I not sit at your table?” And suddenly they vanished.*

*Then softly out of the silence and the glorious light he heard again the gentle voice that he had heard the night before, saying, “Whoever receives one such child as this in my name receives me.” (Matt 18:5) “For I was hungry and you gave me food; I was thirsty and you gave me drink; I was a stranger and you took me in.*

*Verily I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it also to Me.” (Matt 25:35-40).*

Today, as you reflect on the Gospel, as you eat of the body and drink of the wine, allow the challenge go to your heart of how important our actions are in reflecting the love of our Lord and being faithful to him.

Amen.