

Archbishop Joseph E. Kurtz

Jan 23, 2019 at St. James Catholic Church

Stewardship as a Way of Life

Thank you all for being out here. I want to thank Father Casey, the Sisters, the teachers, Jennifer for organizing this whole thing. So listen, it's great to be with all of you. I did ask Father Martin what I should talk about-- and I thank you for the invitation by the way, thanks. He's a good friend of mine and I've asked Father Martin also to serve as Vicar General for the archdiocese, and so I know it's not easy to do a couple of things at once but thank you-- I really appreciate that. I want to thank all of you also for being here tonight. He said let's talk about stewardship.

I said, "Now wait a minute. I know that like many other schools and parishes you are in a big year because you're moving from a stewardship model to a tuition model for school-- are you sure you want me to talk about stewardship?"

And rightly so, he said, "We need to be committed to stewardship now more than ever."

Now I did find out when I was growing up, mistakenly I thought, well stewardship is about raising money. But someone took me to a fancy restaurant one time and they introduced me to the wine steward. Does anybody know what a wine steward is? The wine steward is the person who doesn't own wine but takes care of the wine. Ah! I said, so a steward as a bishop is supposed to be a good steward of God's mysteries-- when I was ordained a bishop-- that was what was in the book-- the ritual. So, a steward is meant to be someone who doesn't own the things that we're talking about but rather is given them to take good care of. Believe it or not, you know who are good stewards? How many of you are parents--raise your hands if you're a parent. Guess what you're supposed to be? You're stewards; you don't own the child. As that child grows, your job is to help care for the child so that that child can become a full, happy, and productive adult. So, you're caring for it. Well, what's a good steward? A good steward is someone who understands that all that we have, all that we are is gift-- just think of all that you have. Now if you're counting up how much is in your bank accounts or your stock folders or whatever then you're my kind of person-- that's what I do--but all that you have is gift from God because on this earth-- you and I know this--I know this is not popular to necessarily talk about, but our life on earth is only so long.

This coming Monday, the 27th, I'll be remembering my dear brother George. Some of you have heard me talk about my brother George who had Down syndrome. Georgie died on 27 January 2002. Gosh, I can't believe it-- 17 years -- if you have a loved one who died you know how fast that is. How quick. You think, "Gosh, could it be, could it really be that long?" Well, my job, my last 12 years of my brother Georgie's life, was to take care of him. And if you asked him what his job was, you know what he would say? My brother George, by the way, had Down syndrome. You know what he would say his job is? To take care of his brother (Archbishop pointing to himself). We take care of each other. That's not a bad definition of Church-- Christ taking care of each one of us-- one at a time and together.

Now I'm going to talk a little bit about stewardship as a way of life, because you have to remember first of all, that all we have is gift. And what do you do with a gift if you're really a good

person? You appreciate a gift, don't you? I don't care how old you are, but if you take a gift, never say thank you-- when I was growing up, you know what we would call that-- you are ungrateful. You are just ungrateful. So a gift is appreciated. Now if you're really good, you know what else is done with a gift? A gift is shared. The word *charism* is a Greek word that means *gift*, but it's a gift given to us by God. Not for our own sake, but for the sake of others.

Someone said that you can take your money to heaven. I said, "Really? You can't take your money to heaven!" They said, "You can take your money to heaven, you just have to give it to some poor person to carry it there for you." I thought that was pretty good, wasn't it? That was a pretty good way to talk about it.

So here's the scene I want to paint. A famous artist from the Middle Ages, from the Renaissance really, 16th-century: Caravaggio. Many beautiful paintings. But he had one painting which I was especially impressed by. How many have heard of Caravaggio? There was a movie about Caravaggio. How many have heard of his painting? It's called, *The Call of St. Matthew*. So you go to Rome. How many of you have been to Rome? So you were in Rome and maybe you got to the Trevi fountain. Maybe you got to the Pantheon. Maybe you got to the place where they have that gelato-- the famous ice cream-- most people say yeah, they forget the churches, but they remember that gelato-- but right near there is the church of St. Louis of France. You go into the church of St. Louis of France. And what you do when you go to Rome or any other place, you look for a place that is a light that is coin-operated. Because if you're at a place if you put a coin in and a light goes on, that means that there's something famous there. On to the left side-- no to the right side, when you're walking in it's to the right-- there's this beautiful image of the call by Jesus of St. Matthew. Remember the story? Matthew, his name was Levi, he was a tax collector. In the picture of him you have the famous beckoning of Jesus-- he's pointing like this-- but then you have the astonished look of Matthew going like this-- if it were a cartoon he would be saying, "You mean me?" See Matthew, Levi, if he had died before he met Jesus and he had to have a tombstone (he was a tax collector), that tombstone would say, "He's great at collecting other people's money." He's great at collecting other people's money. After he answered the call from Jesus, it changed his life. He'd have a tombstone, but the tombstone would now read, "He inspires others to share." You see the difference? One is, he's good at collecting money. The other-- he inspires others to share. Stewardship is your ability to witness, not just one at a time, but as a parish community, not only to share but to inspire others to share.

Now, there really are three stages in the notion of stewardship of sharing what you have and are with others. By the way, you know what the greatest act of stewardship is? Your vocation. The most consistent act if you're married, you have a family. And you've agreed through vows to consistently share your life with another and to give that other the first 100%. You know it's not a 50-50 deal. When marriage is a 50-50 deal you know what happens-- I want my 50% first. But no, it's 100% because there are times when someone who is in love needs to give 100% of themselves because there will be other times when they are so desperately in need, they need their partner to give 100%. And if you're a parent you know what that is to do so with children. To be a priest or deacon or bishop or women religious, it's very similar isn't it? It's spend your life for others because of the love that Christ gives you. Here's the three steps, if you would.

The first is to allow your attention to focus on another. Simone Weil, a great philosopher, a Jewish philosopher, she died in 1941 I think, she once said that attention is the rarest and purest form of

generosity. How many of you multitask? One of our biggest problems in our culture is we do not give undivided attention-- undivided attention which Kierkegaard said is the ability to do one good thing-- undivided attention to even the ones we love the most. They strapped some gear on some fathers and asked them how much time do you spend with your kids. Most said on average probably 20 minutes a day. So they strapped on the gear and were able to monitor it, and they did it for a week or so. Do you know what the average per day was? Something like a minute and a half. Cause we're always doing multi-things. So stewardship begins by first of all, giving your attention-- it's why the Eucharist is so important-- to Christ, and then to another person. I'm talking about family, but couldn't you also picture a stranger being there? To be able to notice another person that's why in the Scripture passages when Jesus was talking about Dives-- the rich man and the poor man-- Lazarus the beggar-- the only thing that the rich man did is that he never noticed the beggar. He was so occupied with himself and what he was going to eat. So the first thing we do is we notice-- we give attention.

The second thing we do if we're good stewards, is we show gratitude. You know what I have here? (He removes paper from his suit coat). By the way, you all are heroes as far as the Catholic Services Appeal, you know that don't you? St. James is unbelievable in your generosity as a parish. I thank you for that. One of the things that we did about three years ago is to put a little card in with the donation for the Catholic services appeal, and it was a prayer intention. This was the thing that somebody can fill out with their own prayer intention, and I take this to my chapel which is in my apartment next to the Cathedral. And every morning for my holy hour-- did I say holy hour-- sometimes holy 15 minutes-- I try to get a holy hour-- but I always read and pray about 30 of these (prayer intentions). I got about 3600 of these and takes me through a good bit of the year—3600. So here's just a few. It's what gives me attention-- this is this morning's. I'm not going to mention who wrote it or etc. so you won't know much other than the thing—" Please pray for healing of my beautiful wife who is dealing with cancer." Now if that doesn't stop you in your tracks-- if that doesn't make me think-- I don't care what problems I brought to the holy hour—I'm praying for this man and his beautiful wife who has cancer. Here's another one. "I would like to pray a prayer of thanks for the health improvements of both of my parents over the past year. One battled cancer the other CHF" —I don't know what that is—"Both are doing much better. Please give a prayer of thanksgiving." I don't get too many asking for thanksgiving. In fact, if I am writing them, I'm writing all kinds of petitions-- help me with this, help me with that. "Please pray for wisdom and direction in my life." "Please pray for a return to the church for my family, for an end to drug addiction, for more priests, for peace within my family." "Please pray that my daughter and family return to church." "I'm requesting prayers for my son who has been facing tremendous problems for the last 10 years or so. I made a similar request last year and I have noticed an improvement in his situation over the past 12 months. Include his wife in your prayers. Also, she is a source of some of the problems and I think she has improved since this time last year."

You know it made me think, I wonder if God heard my prayers? When you pray for someone else you never know, you know? You're going to say, "Well, what does this have to do with stewardship?" Everything. Because it's moving you away from self-preoccupation to the rest of the world. Here's just one more. "Please pray for my son. Pray that he leaves his reckless and unhealthy life behind him and turns to God. Pray for him to be a responsible adult and father." You know, you kind of form a picture in your mind of what people are going through, and they're going through terrible problems. And the Church is meant to accompany them. When I say the Church, I don't just mean the Bishop and priests, I mean all of you—we're all meant to accompany. Here's the last one. "Pray the

Catholic Church will heal from sex abuse" -- you know all the problems we're having -- I'm dealing all the time with trying to make sure we're purified as a church. "And we grow stronger. That victims may be healed, and they may forgive. And please pray that the way I am Catholic may grow." For some reason that struck me-- pray that the way I am Catholic may grow. Now that was just this morning (putting away prayer intentions) -- just a few things. If you want to really become stewards as a way of life, find a way to pray for others. Somebody told me that they are a parent, and when they put their children to bed, that's the most beautiful and spiritual moment-- it gives them a chance to say thank you to God.

Attention. Gratitude. And then from that, generosity. You know what Scripture passage I was thinking of-- remember 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15. I was in Meade County 10 years ago and I said to somebody-- it was 2008-- I said we're 200 years old as a diocese-- if anybody remembers who the Pope was 200 years ago, I'd love to give that person \$50. And in the back of church a hand went up and my heart sank. And I said, "Yes ma'am," and she said, "Archbishop, I believe it was Pius VII." I thought who the heck would know?! So I said, "Did you notice I said I would love to give"... So I think I gave her 20 bucks-- I negotiated down.

2 Corinthians 9: 6-15 it's worth looking at-- God loves a cheerful giver. Whoever sows sparingly will also reap sparingly-- in other words, if you think not great things will happen in your life, you're right. If you truly believe that God is going to bless you, you're right, because what God does too is not necessarily the prosperity gospel -- that you give to the church and somehow you win the lottery-- no, it means our priorities change. Plato said that the rich person is not the one with much money but the one with fewer needs. Our priorities change. Our priorities get straightened out. That Scripture is worth reading, 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15.

So if you're going to have a stewards life, I'm going to explain that piece of paper that I gave you. Here's a couple of things that a good steward does. A good steward wants everybody to succeed. I'll tell you one other story. There was a little child in first grade. The child had a disability, but she was mainstreamed with the rest of her class. Her parents were a little overprotective of her. So she came back at dinner and announced one night, "Oh by the way we're going to have a Christmas play, and we get to try out on Friday for parts." The parents thought, "Oh my gosh, our poor daughter is going to be crestfallen. She's not going to make it. She's not going to be able to do a part in the play, and she's going to be hurt." So they thought they wouldn't let her come home on the bus. They were going to pick her up at school. So they went that afternoon on Friday after the try-outs and here she comes bouncing down the pavement toward their car. "Mom and Dad! Guess what! I got a part!" And they thought, "Oh my gosh, what the heck is going on here?" She said, "Sister said that I get to sit in the first row and I get to clap and cheer for my classmates." Her parents were so relieved. They put the child to bed that evening, and the wife looked at the husband and she said, "Our daughter tonight learned a lesson that many adults will never learn in their whole life-- the capacity to cheer for someone else."

C.S. Lewis said that when you have a great success in your life you're exhilarated. When you receive a success, when you make a team, when you get an award you're exhilarated-- you're like walking on cloud nine. He said when you're in heaven you'll have that same sense when someone else succeeds. When you're in heaven you'll have that same exhilaration when someone else succeeds. So that's the first thing. Someone said it to me this way: I want to go to heaven, but I don't want to go by myself. I want you to come with me. Church is about all of us, through Christ's salvation, together going to heaven. Helping one another succeed-- by the way, that's the biggest quality for priests and bishops--

not to be competitive, but to let your neighbor succeed. Secondly, to really have confidence that God will provide. 1 Kings 17:16 you remember, it was the poor widow that was asked by Elisha to feed him and she said she only had so much oil and so much flour, but she did it. She made him a little cake, and the oil never ran dry and the flour never went bare. People say when someone comes into our family for dinner, there's always room for one more person. A hospitable family is a family that practices stewardship.

Having confidence in God. And then the final one, is we are not the prosperity gospel. People sometimes look on TV and they say if you buy this or you pay this, this is what's going to happen. God's going to reward you a hundredfold and they think that means in actual money. But it doesn't mean that. Christians can go broke, you know that, don't you? Sure. Good Christians can go broke. The difference is that we have no fear because God will always provide. Somehow there's a plan there. If we are generous with others, God will always take care of us. That's a commitment. And if a family can't make that commitment every day, that family is going to shrivel up and die. The commitment to trust that God will provide.

I want you to look at that piece of paper there (the handout he brought and was passed out about the Stewardship Ladder of Motivation). And by the way, I gave this talk at a national group on Catholic stewardship, and I talked about Bob Zoller. You don't know Bob Zoller, he was from St. Lawrence Parish in Louisville. I remember when I first came about 11 years ago, visiting Bob and his wife Clara, and they lived in a very simple house by the way. I said, Bob, you're the most generous person in the whole archdiocese-- what's your secret? And he said I don't think I have a secret. He said I read somewhere where you're supposed to give a tenth of what you have away. And he said, "You know Clara and I started to do that, and we found that wasn't enough." I'll never forget that he said that. And he was saying it so matter-of-factly. In other words, what happened was he understands the rewards for being generous. He said that wasn't enough-- what did he mean by that? He meant that he so much was inspired by helping other people that his life began to change.

Have you ever heard of Maslow's hierarchy of needs? The first one (level) being survival-- like you're trying to survive this talk for 45 minutes without falling asleep-- and then it progresses up. Well this is what's called the Stewardship Ladder of Motivation (he is holding up the handout he brought). These are the reasons someone supports a church or an organization or another family. But look at them, look at the bottom rung. And there's a little bit of them in each one of us. The first (level) is we feel guilty. We feel guilty that somehow we're afraid we'll get punished for not helping others. It's about the lowest form of motivation. The second (level) is reward. Now I have to say this that this fits into the second one (he walks over to fish tank that holds the names for the surprise drawing), unless, -- and this is going to be the key-- unless someone who wins this gets creative. Don't be ashamed of being in level number two a lot of times-- I won an afghan one time and I ended up giving it away, but I was bragging about it for a week. You win things and you feel good and you get-- whatever—like a tax break.

The third one (level) is social approval. Your name is on a list that shows that you were in the top group of something. So you get social approval. It's still good, but it's kind of a lower-level. Let's go up one more notch—that's if you're really convinced that the need is great. You don't care if you are acknowledged. Just as long as there is a clear need-- you don't want to throw your money like the expression, "Don't throw good money after bad." So if the church needs a roof, and you're being hit by

the rainwater, you see there's a clear need. That's legitimate. That's up there, that's level four and there's only six (levels).

The fifth (level) is you feel there's a sacrificial duty. I was reading the Jerome Biblical Commentary on 2 Corinthians 9: 6-15, and the commentary said that almsgiving for the Greeks was pretty much charity. You give because you're just generous. But for the Hebrews it was what they call *restorative justice*. You know at the Mass when we say, "I'm sorry for what I have done and what I have failed to do," --*restorative justice* sometimes means I know that I hurt this person and for some reason like they died or they moved away-- there's no way that I can make up to them for what I've done-- and so sometimes my generosity to others is a way of doing that. In confession and in other things, a big part of that is that if someone has participated in an abortion. That's occurred for me-- I was just in Washington DC for the Right to Life March-- and sometimes they can't take back what they've done and they felt terrible about it, but they want to be able to help another person, to reach out and help. That's not a bad motivation, that's a good motivation. It's wanting to be sacrificial.

In the highest one (level 6) is I think the one Bob Zoller had. And I wish I could have it more consistently. It's the joy of giving to others. Now I'll share this with you. So growing up, I liked-- I don't know how you open Christmas gifts-- I was in favor of the process where one person opened one gift at a time and everybody watched. You understand what I'm saying? I was the complete minority. That has never happened in my life. I kept pushing for it thinking why can't I watch when so-and-so opens their gift and enjoy what they're getting, especially if it's something that I gave them. I want to see their reaction. When I was a priest in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania-- I was there from 1996 to 1999-- so it had to be around 1997 right before Christmas time, I went out to parking lot and there were three girls in third or fourth grade. They were waiting for one of their moms to pick them up. I said, "Girls, are you getting excited for Christmas?" And they all said, yes. There were four of them now that I'm thinking about it. And three of the girls told me exactly what they were going to get for Christmas, or at least they thought they would get. Now the fourth, fourth-grader said this, "I can't wait for Christmas. I can't wait to see the expression on my mother's face when she opens the gift I got her." Isn't that beautiful? Now I'll guarantee you this, you fast-forward-- that's about 24 years ago-- so these girls are maybe 35 or 36 years old. If I hunted them down and found out where they were and said, remember when I talked to you in the parking lot etc. about Christmas, some would remember, but if I asked what was that gift that you were all excited about, you know what they'd say: "I don't have a clue." Or something like that. But that fourth girl who had bought a special gift for her mother, she remembers. And I'll bet her mother remembers, because she captured what we call 'the joy of giving'. The good steward-- it's very simple to do, to know-- but it's not easy to live. It takes practice and it takes the witness and example of others. So when you are generous with your family or your parish or with others, know that other people are watching you. And you're an inspiration to them. Remember it was St. Matthew who changed his tombstone. It would have read, before Jesus touched his life: "I'm great at collecting money from others." At the end of his life it reads, "He inspires others to share."

The gift of stewardship is that gift of inspiration.

Thank you.