

“...throw this useless servant into the darkness outside...”

In the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit.

Imagine if you would ...that you have a younger brother, who was born without a right hand and only half of his right foot. Furthermore, suppose that when he was six years old he asked you:

“Do you think I’ll be able to play sports in school?”

What do you tell him? Would you build up his hopes? Or would you be realistic with him?

Suppose, a few days later, you and your little brother are watching the Steelers on TV. He asks:

“Do you think I could ever play pro football someday?”

What would you tell him? Suppose, a few days after this, paging through the NFL record book, he asks:

“Do you think, someday, I could play football well enough to get my name in the NFL record book?”

What would you tell him?

Well—once upon a time, in 1953, a six-year-old named TOM Dempsey (not JACK Dempsey) was asking these exact, same questions. Like your imaginary, little brother, he too was born without a right hand and only half a right foot.

Tommy went to school and played football. He even played on a junior college team in California. In time, he began to placekick for the team. He got so good at it that, eventually, he was signed by the New Orleans Saints.

On Nov. 8, 1970, the Saints were trailing Detroit 17-16 with two seconds to go. The Saints had the ball on the Detroit 45-yard line. New Orleans coach, J.D.Roberts, tapped Tom on the shoulder and said:

“Go out there and give it your best shot.”

The holder set the ball down 8 yards behind the line of scrimmage, instead of the normal seven yards, to give Dempsey a split second more to get the ball off. This put the ball 63 yards from the uprights.

The rest of the story is history. Tom’s half-right foot made perfect contact. Later in Newsweek, he said:

“I couldn’t follow the ball that far with my eyes. But... when I saw the officials’ arms go up, and I can’t describe how great I felt.”

What in the world does that story have to do with today’s Gospel, especially Jesus’ point about talents & responsibility, of which I just read to you from St. Matthew?

Well—recall the parable Jesus told: A wealthy man, before going on a long journey, gave three workers a certain amount of money, each according to his own ability. They were to use the money to make a profit for the man during his absence. (One talent = 75 lbs; in gold, @ \$1,200/ounce = \$1,440,000.00)

What is the deeper meaning of the parable?

What point was Jesus making through it?

Who does the wealthy man stand for?

What is the journey he went on?

Who do the three workers stand for?

What does the money they were given stand for?—you ask.

Well—I am glad you asked those questions!

The wealthy man, who went on the journey, stands for **Jesus**, who **ascended to heaven**, post-resurrection. He will return at the end of the world if you live to see it. If not, you'll meet him at your own death.

The three workers stand for you and me, **us**. In his absence, Jesus expects us to use the talents God has given us to work for the spreading of God's kingdom on earth, each according to his/her own vocation. When Jesus returns, he will judge us on how well we used our talents for the good of the kingdom.

It is most interesting to note that **the man with the least ability** was the one who made no effort to do anything with the money he had been given. He ended up inventing an excuse for his laziness. He seemed to have reasoned that he had so little money that he could excuse himself from doing any work.



I need to step back here. There seems to be a similar tendency in us to reason this way. We tend to reason that, since God hasn't called us to any high office in the Church, we can concentrate on saving ourselves and leave the work of spreading the kingdom to those in high office. In short, we tend to behave **like the third man** in the parable.

And here's where the story of Tom Dempsey comes in. Tom Dempsey had very few, if any, talents for playing football. Yet, he used the very few talents he had to accomplish a great deal. He not only played pro football, he set a pro football record ...that stood ^(40 + yrs.) until 12-8-13, 64 yds. by Matt Prater.

So, here's my point. If Tom Dempsey used the few talents he had to work so hard for an earthly crown that fades with time, how much more ought we to use our God-given talents to work for a heavenly crown that lasts forever ...and will never fade or tarnish?

It is this all-important question that today's readings place before us. It's an especially fitting question as the current liturgical year comes to an end. St. Paul explains why in today's second reading:

“Brothers (and sisters) ...you yourselves know very well that the Day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night. So then, we should not be sleeping...; we should be awake.”

I now close with this prayer—a prayer you've heard me use before:

**“Lord, teach us to be generous.
Teach us to serve you as you deserve;
To give and not count the cost;
To fight and not heed the wounds;
To toil and not seek to rest;
To labor and not ask for reward;
Except to know ...that we are doing your will.”**

May our all-knowing, all-seeing God, our Abba, bless you
...the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.