

November 19, 2017 The Stolen Base Homily: In the game of baseball, America's pastime, one of the most exciting and oftentimes game changing plays is the 'Stolen base'. Players with speed and agility have the necessary natural gifts to 'swipe' a base and give his team an advantage in the game. Still, attempting to steal a base can be an enormous risk. If caught stealing, the player is called out and the team may lose an opportunity to score a run. Perhaps the greatest embarrassment for any player is to be picked off at first base as he anticipates breaking for second or third base just prior to the pitcher delivering the ball to the plate. The manager may reprimand him for his bad base running and single him out as a detriment to the team. The press may single him out as the "goat" of the game.

Not all players are willing to take such risks in a game. They prefer 'playing it safe' and to stay very close to the base. A manager would be shocked if one of the slower players broke for second base in an attempt to steal a base. Such a reckless base running blunder would never be tolerated.

God's gifts are like athletic skills—Use them or lose them!

The parable of the talents (Mt.25:14-30) is the second of two parables of judgment in Matthew's twenty-fifth chapter. In the parable the unnamed man going on a journey for an unspecified period of time represents Jesus Christ. Undoubtedly, we have here a reference to Our Lord's Passion, Death, Resurrection and Ascension. The return of the master is a reference to Our Lord's Second Coming in glory. The three servants represent the disciples of Jesus. The talents are the gifts Jesus entrusts to them. In Christ's absence, He has placed his confidence in them. "He entrusted his possessions to them", (Mt.25:14) writes Matthew. They are called to make good on the gifts God gives them and be watchful and vigilant awaiting the Master's return.

The tragic figure in the parable is the third servant. A timid soul, he avoids taking any risks. His chief affliction is the fear of failure. The very thought of losing his master's money paralyzes him. And so he plays it safe... he buries the talent. He fails to take courage from his fellow servant's behavior. Instead of seizing the reign of God and going for broke, he stays close to the place where he buries the talent. He fails to leave first base! Indeed, a wasted life is a wasted talent! The important lesson here is not whether we receive much or little, but that we work zealously with what we have received. Wasting away our life in amusements and idleness is not recommended!

What further lessons can we glean from today's parable? The third servant's rather harsh view of his master is short-sighted inasmuch as the master put his confidence in him. In addition, he gives him a sufficient amount of time to make the best possible use of his master's money. The master is patient. But the foolish servant behaves as if the master would never return... as if there would never be a day in which he would be asked to account for all his actions.

A second point to consider is that whoever comes to the judgment empty handed with nothing to show will surely go away empty handed. "Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away".(Mt.25:29)

In 1980, Pope John Paul went on a pilgrimage to the once great Christian nation of France. Sadly, it has been ruthlessly secular and anti-Catholic in past decades. The Pope challenged the Baptized by asking them what they had done with the gifts entrusted to them at baptism.

Evangelizing in our secular culture requires a bold vision, unflagging energy and a fearless approach to transmitting the Good News revealed By Our Lord. I am reminded of a popular Latin expression, "carpe diem", which means "seize the day". We must not remain tied to first base. We must show the initiative and the wisdom to swipe a base for the sake of the Gospel! Only then will we be guaranteed a win by the captain of our team.

Amen!