

28th Sunday, 2021—

Today's Gospel could go down as one of the New Testament's great "unsolved mysteries". We never hear what happens to one of its main characters. It's the one Jesus is talking to. It's the flush and fortunate young man. We never find out what he does after he leaves Jesus. We never hear the rest of HIS story. So, maybe you've done some assuming about him—as I have. Maybe you're assuming he's simply too attached to his STUFF—to his belongings—to never give them up—to give up ANY of them.

And he lives the rest of his life buying more things—even things he doesn't need—and probably building up and hoarding his money, and not deeply caring about his inner life—his spirit—spiritual life—and not really caring about others very much.

But if we ARE assuming something like that, we may be defining and dismissing this rich, young man too quickly. And that's because if the Gospels teach us anything, it is this: an encounter with Jesus—in his OWN time, as with the young, rich man, but also in our time—a true encounter with Jesus changes people—and keeps changing us.

Blind people see. People who are paralyzed get up and walk. It's entirely possible this pleasant—and even thoughtful—young man—in a sense living with a different kind of blindness and paralysis—is also changed.

I think St. Mark, who wrote what we just heard, is purposely leaving this story

open-ended. It's his way of telling us our lives are also open-ended. We have choices. And our question continually is: What will we choose?

For those who have many things, Jesus is saying, the choice may be especially hard. But all things are possible for God, right? Consider, for example, the story of young man whose last name is, "Desme." He belongs to the Catholic Norbertine Order of priests and brothers. He goes by the name—Brother Matthew Desme.

If you find yourself in southern California, you might drive about 20 miles south of Los Angeles to St. Michael's Abbey. It's run by the Norbertine Order. There you will see a number of men in white robes doing the ordinary work Norbertines do. They get up at 5 a.m. every morning to pray.

They chant at celebrations of the Catholic Mass. Then, in work clothes, they dig trenches for their vegetable gardens, they mop their floors, they mow their lawns—they help out at Salvation Army soup kitchens and the local homeless shelter. They also observe something they call The Great Silence, which means they refrain from speaking for peaceful hours at a time. Then, at the end of the day, they retire to small rooms with a single bed, nightstand, and sink. Personally, they own nothing. And one of them is this—Br. Matthew.

Just a few years ago, his name was Grant—Grant Desme. He wasn't a monk. At that time, Grant Desme was one of the topmost, rising stars in American baseball. He was a center fielder playing for a farm team for the Oakland California Athletics.

During a recent, minor-league season, he hit 31 home runs. Then, in November of that year, he was voted the league's most valuable player. Soon, the Oakland Major League team offered him an opportunity to play in the Big Leagues. To induce him to play, they offered him nearly a million dollars. He was looking at a future many young men dream about, where people could see him on cereal boxes and line up for him to sign bats and caps.

But just two months after signing that contract, Grant Desme announced he was quitting. People all over were stunned. His family was stunned. They knew that since the age of four, all he'd ever wanted was to play Major League Baseball.

But he told them: "I'm realizing—I want something else more." He wanted to be a Norbertine monk—that is, a brother, or maybe a priest.

The next fall, he entered St. Michael's Abbey in Silverado, California. The rising baseball star who seemed destined to be a household name in southern California, and maybe across the country, changed his name. Or, rather, he had his name changed for him. In a naming ceremony,

he was to be given the name Matthew. He asked his superior why. I heard why in a recent podcast I listened to. In the podcast, Br. Matthew said:

“My superior explained it was because Matthew the Apostle had been a rich tax collector, and I was going to be a rich baseball player.” Br. Matthew took a breath. “You know, I had gotten everything I had wanted,” he said. “But it still wasn’t enough.”

In the podcast, I heard one of his former teammates put it this way: “Grant’s love of God and others took over his love of baseball.”

People who know about the business of baseball and about the dreams of young baseball players say what Grant Desme did was unheard-of. Players with his kind of talent just don’t do what he did. They just don’t. It’s...unthinkable—or IMPOSSIBLE!

But what did the Lord say in our Gospel today? “For human beings, it is impossible, but not with God. All things are possible with God.”

The blind see. The paralyzed walk. Grant Desme becomes Br. Matthew. That’s one big reason I think the rich, young man in today’s Gospel didn’t do what we might have been assuming. Maybe it didn’t happen overnight. Maybe it took a lifetime. But I’m suspecting he must have come to understand—as Grant Desme did—that he had all he wanted...but it just wasn’t enough. A genuine encounter with Jesus changes everything.

While our Gospel is clearly about having—and owning—and possessing—things that just might dominate our lives and get in the way of our freedom and spirit—spirituality—and dedication to God and others—I think there may be another message here, too.

Besides tangible, acquired possessions and money, there can be other things that get in the way of following the Lord—other things we possess—INSIDE ourselves. Maybe it’s a fear of change—an inability to trust—or to love—or love well.

Maybe it’s a stubborn attachment to a way of doing something—or a way of thinking and feeling and expressing ourselves.

How hard it is for us sometimes to give up those things—to let them...go-o. So often the things we possess aren't tangible things at all. And, often, like tangible things, we don't really possess them. They possess us.

Today's Gospel asks us to let go of what we don't need—those things that keep us from following Jesus and loving others and life more wholeheartedly. Can we...do it? WILL we do it? Are we courageous—or reckless enough—to try? Grant Desme did. And, today, as Br. Matthew will tell you:

“All things are possible with God!” Our restless hearts will find rest if we put our trust where it belongs—not in things...not in habits and patterns of thoughts and feelings—but...in the Creator of all things.

Please give it some thought.... In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit!