

**Homily for the 19th Sunday in Ordinary Time  
St. Thomas the Apostle Church – West Springfield, Massachusetts  
August 11, 2019**



Scripture Readings: Wisdom 18:6-9 ✕ Psalm 33:1, 12, 18-20, 22 ✕ Hebrews 11:1-2, 8-19 ✕ Luke 12:32-48

A few years ago, CBS' *60 Minutes* told a story that brings home the lesson that few things are more satisfying than going back to the old neighborhood after you've done well, then giving something back to the people there.

For retired Atlanta Hawks center, Dikembe Mutombo, the old neighborhood is Kinshasa, the capital of the Democratic Republic of the Congo in central Africa. What he has given back is a 29 million dollar, 300-bed hospital, the culmination of a dream that began after Mutombo watched too many of his people die. 15 million of those dollars came from his own pocket.

As a high school student, Mutombo dreamed of going to medical school in the United States and returning home to practice medicine. He only learned to play basketball in his senior year. Then Georgetown University heard about the seven-foot basketball star and gave him athletic and academic scholarships. After three years at Georgetown, he abandoned his plans for a medical career, realizing that he could do much more with a paycheck from the NBA — a paycheck that totaled more than 11 million dollars a year.

In Mutombo's homeland, one out of five children die before their fifth birthday; one in fourteen women do not survive childbirth. Diseases like measles and polio — diseases controlled and eradicated years ago in most countries — still kill and cripple thousands every year. Mutombo says, "Whatever you accomplish in your life, your heart still stays here."

In addition to building the hospital, Mutombo has established a foundation that recruits and trains medical staff to work in the African Continent. It works to eradicate polio throughout the continent, to build elementary and technical schools in the Congo, and sponsors

exchange programs for medical students and professionals. Mutombo travels around the world raising money and awareness of his people's plight.

Asked by the *60 Minutes* correspondent about his work, Mutombo said simply:

"We have an obligation to give something back to the place where we come from... [My mother] gave me a strong faith to believe that God would help you no matter what you try to do. God will give you strong courage to keep going forth. She told me 'Do whatever you can do, as much as you can do, and God will give you more.'"

Mutombo continued, "I'm investing in my people so they can have a better life, because I have a better life already."

Before God, the actual gifts we possess mean nothing; before God, what we *do* with whatever talents or wealth we possess to build the kingdom of God is the measure of our faithfulness and greatness. Some of us may possess the intellect to unlock the secrets of medical science — and some of us may have a great hook shot. The fact is that God has entrusted each one of us with our own gifts, talents, and blessings not for our own uses and aims but to selflessly and lovingly use them for the benefit of others, without counting the cost or demanding a return.

The faithful disciple will take the time to assess his or her gifts and talents and then discern how to best use them for the glory of God; that God's reign of peace, justice, compassion, and love, may be brought forth by our use of the gifts that we have received from God. ✕