

Proper 13, Year C

- I sat in front of my computer for several hours last night, thinking about the shooting in El Paso, Texas – trying to rewrite my sermon or even start from scratch to speak some comfort, perhaps, or help make some sense of that tragedy
- But I quickly realized that I was still processing this latest horror, still trying to make sense of it myself – and I find that there are few things less helpful than a preacher trying to work things out in the pulpit
- I ultimately realized that anything I could say would be at best unhelpful and at worst distracting from another message that I think God also wants us to hear
- And then I woke up this morning to the news about Dayton, Ohio, and I'm still processing that, too
- And while I don't have a sermon to help us heal from those tragedies, I just want to say that God weeps with us, is broken-hearted with us – and if you too are still processing and would like to talk about these tragedies in light of our faith, please give me a call, and we can struggle with it together.
- But just for this morning, I'd like to talk about a different topic from current events
- If you follow baseball closely, you know that this past Wednesday was MLB's trade deadline – time when teams who might contend for the World Series try to make some additions and address any shortcomings in their lineups
- And this year my Cleveland Indians appear as though they could make a postseason appearance, so they made a trade – sent out a talented but controversial pitcher and in return received a number of players, including a talented but controversial hitter by the name of Yasiel Puig
- Puig is controversial because he's something of a hothead: depending on who you ask he either plays with passion and a bit of an edge or has a problem controlling his emotions – as a matter of fact, he was involved in an on-field fight between the Pittsburgh Pirates and the Cincinnati Reds, the team he used to play for, on the night he was traded, and so is facing a three game suspension
- I tell you all that just to be honest about the fact that I am not here to tell you that Puig is the ideal all-around role model
- But there is something about Yasiel Puig that is rather exemplary, something that everyone who's played with him and been part of an organization with him will tell you: he is an incredibly giving human being – just as generous and kind-hearted off the field as

he can be temperamental and even hostile on it

- He's known for being involved in every community he's lived in, both personally and through a children's foundation that he's established, in Los Angeles and Cincinnati and now, it would seem, in Cleveland
- And part of why that's so remarkable is because of Puig's origin
- Yasiel Puig is the latest and one of the more famous baseball players to defect from Cuba
- Over the course of a couple short years, beginning as a teenager, Puig tried to defect from Cuba 13 times – the 13th time was the charm
- 13 times he tried to come to a country where he could do what he says he was born to do – play baseball – for more than the \$17 a month he was paid to play in Cuba
- 13 times he tried to come to a country where he could actually make ends meet and more
- And eventually, Puig had to turn himself over to a Mexican drug cartel, the only group with enough power to help him get out of Cuba and establish residency in Mexico, because Cuban ballplayers can't come directly to America, they have to become residents somewhere else first
- Eventually, Puig even signed away 20% of all his future earnings to the Miami businessman who was willing to pay the cartel to set him free and bring him to the US
- It is a wild and alarming story, one that will almost assuredly someday be a major motion picture
- And I think it must be partly because he had so little, because he was willing to give up everything, that he knows how little he actually needs to get by
- He is able to give of his time and money so generously because he knows what it means to have almost nothing – no money, no opportunities, no hope
- Puig is an interesting contrast, I think, to the rich man in our Gospel today – the man who seems to be under the impression that you can take it with you – the man who wanted to build bigger barns, so that perhaps someday he would have enough
- It's easy for us to beat up on that rich man – we have the benefit of distance and hindsight when it comes to his case – knowing not only that the new barns will all be for naught, since he won't live through the night – but also not feeling the sting of his particular desire to have enough, to be comfortable, to not have to worry
- It's a little harder to get enough distance to realize that most of us are the rich man, especially when compared to the rest of the world – we often have more than some other people can imagine

- It's a little harder for us to get past our own worries and questions, "Do we have enough? Will we ever be able to relax? Do we have to keep working just to be able to afford to live?"
- We all have a little bit of the rich man's "tear-down-your-barns-and-build-bigger-ones" impulse, I think
- When confronted with the story of the rich man, it's obvious – because we know his timeline
- After all, how silly would it be to try to hoard riches on earth if we knew for a fact we would not be here tomorrow?
- But it wasn't only the timing that made the rich man foolish – it wasn't merely that he was about to meet his maker that made his efforts to gather up treasure on earth fruitless
- "So it is," Jesus says, "with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God." – the foolishness of the rich man is in being more interested in gathering up possessions than being generous with them
- Being rich toward God is not a petition to increase your pledge to the Church – we are rich toward God, generous toward God, by being generous to those God loves
- And if God loves us all with reckless abandon, then the only way to be rich toward God is to give with reckless abandon – to do good recklessly
- To care for others without fear of being taken advantage of – to give without worrying about reciprocation – to love without limits or qualifications
- Because we can't take any of it with us, so it is foolish not to give it away
- That's the lesson that Yasiel Puig seems to know so well – how much a little bit of effort, a little bit of opportunity, a little bit of hope can mean to someone who has less of it than we do
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- So I hope that maybe, over the course of his time in Cleveland, his teammates and coaches will be able to help Yasiel Puig learn to control his emotions a little better
- And just maybe Yasiel Puig can help teach them, and all of us, how to be a little bit more generous – a little more rich toward God