

Tony worked hard. And he worked local. He was a concrete worker, an artisan. He worked on houses in this neighborhood, on the park, and on this church. It is an honor to welcome him home here, as we pray for the repose of his soul. Tony's work was his life. He was dedicated to it, put his muscle into it, and in spite of some illnesses, he stayed active with it up until the last couple of years of his life. He leaves no wife or children; he looked after his mother. But for most of his years, this was his life: He loved to work, and people loved him for it.

Jesus and his disciples followed a variation on this kind of life. They had to work with their hands as Tony did, but they traveled quite a bit during their years together, learning, talking, preaching, healing, and helping where they could. They were familiar with hard work, and it shows in the parables Jesus told. The one we hear today is a good example. He speaks about the servants of a house whose master has gone to a wedding. While the master is away, the servants were probably tempted to relax and enjoy themselves. If the master returned when they were not ready to let him in, they would be surprised. Not only surprised, they would probably suffer some punishment. After all, it was their job to open the door before the master would have to do it. For the good servants, the ones who were vigilant late into the night and opened the door at the appropriate moment, the master would reverse roles on them. Jesus describes the master's entrance back into the house this way, "Amen, I say to you, he will gird himself, have them recline at table, and proceed to wait on them."

So here is a lovely image to think about for Tony. He is a guy who worked all his life and strove to be faithful to the gifts that God gave him. Perhaps when he walks up to heaven's door, he's as nervous as any of us would be: "Did I do the right things? Did I have enough faith? Did God appreciate my efforts? Did God expect me to do more?" But image a guy - who worked hard throughout his life to make other people comfortable - now finding that God was willing to go to work for him, to give him comfort and rest - eternal rest. That's what we hope and pray for today - that Tony will find that kind of welcome on his journey from this life to the next.

My brothers and sisters, God has given each of us special gifts. We are expected to use them - not just when we want, but in a timely way. We should ever be ready to work, to see what needs to be done, and to assist others with the specific gifts that God has given us. If Tony's life inspires us to live the same way, we will be better for it. Today's funeral mass may invite you to reflect on how God made you and why. What did God give you to do? Have you done it? Have you done it in a timely way? Have you done it to satisfy yourself or to please others? Those kinds of questions will prepare each of us for the final judgment when we make the same journey that Tony makes today. As St. Paul says to the Romans, "each of us will give an accounting of [ourselves] to God." Let us be vigilant with the gifts we have received, so that we will be ready to greet our Lord and master on the day he calls us home.