

33rd Sunday
11/15/2020

TAKING RISKS

Born in England in 1801, he was a very intelligent man who had a deeply religious experience at the age of 15. In time, he studied at Oxford, was ordained an Anglican clergyman and became the pastor of St. Mary's Church at Oxford University. And so he held a leading position at the leading university of the world power at that time. But something began to happen.

Through his study of history and through the controversies of his day, he began to become more and more convinced that the truth of Christ was found in the Catholic Church. Now he didn't know any Catholics, he didn't like Catholics, in fact he was somewhat anti-Catholic, but his conscience pushed him on and in 1845 he was received into the Catholic Church. He took a risk. This risk meant losing his position at his beloved Oxford; it meant losing friends; it meant becoming somewhat of an outcast and, as for being a Catholic in Victorian England, it meant being a second class citizen. He took a risk.

He took a great risk and despite not always being treated well in the Catholic Church, he did not regret his decision. Before his death in 1890 he was named a cardinal and just recently was declared a saint by Pope Francis. His name is St. John Henry Newman and he knew about taking a risk.

What we find in this parable is something powerful, challenging and let's be honest, a little scary. It calls us to accountability for what we do with what has been entrusted to us. But there's a clue in the parable that can help us: *to each according to his ability*. The master didn't ask any of his servants to do what they couldn't do but he did expect them to do what they could do. The problem was that this third servant had the ability but he didn't use it. He did nothing.

As Mass started today, we asked for forgiveness, *in my thoughts and in my words; in what I have done and in what I have failed to do*. So we can sin not only in what we do but also in what we don't do. Laziness, idleness, complacency and minimalism can all tempt us to sin by what we fail to do.

And there's another clue in this gospel as to why: Out of fear, I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Fear can be destructive. Fear can be paralyzing. Fear closes us off. Fear can keep us from taking risks or fear can make us take foolish risks. It's been said that after sin, fear is the most destructive thing we can face in life. Fear turns us in on ourselves and, in extreme cases, fear results in violence. People react with violence to others because they are afraid of them.

One author has put it something like this, *Faith is like the stock market*. It's a place where nothing is gained without some risk and effort. The same author compared it to our muscles. As we use our muscles, they grow stronger and as we don't use them, they weaken. The weakened or even passive disciple, can face the same exclusion as that of the active, terrible sinner and that's a sobering thought. To say, *I didn't kill anyone. I didn't rob a bank, isn't enough*. There's more to being good than not being bad. Instead, the gift of our faith that we've received is something, we're called to share with others. We're called to move forward in faith, to move forward with lives of intentional faith, active intentional faith; lives where our faith in Christ, rather than fear, is the rudder that guides the ship of our lives.

St. John Henry Newman knew about risks and about loss and gain. He even wrote a semi-autobiographical novel entitled, Loss and Gain. We ought not to see this simply as a risk but also as a great adventure, a great adventure of faith and ultimately, a great adventure of love. Speaking about this St. John Henry Newman described it as a venture of faith saying, *It is a strange venture which has nothing in it of fear, risk, anxiety or uncertainty*. He adds, *Our duty lies in risking upon Christ's word, not rashly or lightly, still without knowing accurately what we are doing...in all respects...trusting in Him*.

There you have it. Faith and for that matter love calls us to step out in risks, not foolish or thoughtless risks, but risks nonetheless. When a man and woman marry, they take a risk, hopefully a well thought out and even calculated risk, but still a risk. The same holds true for ordination, religious profession and other life commitments.

We are called to rely on the guidance and wisdom of the Holy Spirit to lead us both when we need to avoid risks and when we need to take risks. God doesn't ask us to do what we can't do but he does ask us to do what we can do, *to each according to his ability*. Don't kid yourself. Faith makes demands of us. Love makes demands

of us and Jesus makes demands of us. Our responses make the difference. Faith and love both call us to take risks to bear fruit for the Kingdom of Heaven and the Glory of God.

What we have, has been entrusted to us that we might share it with others. Informed by the word of God, strengthened by prayer, encouraged by one another and nourished with the sacraments, especially the Eucharist we now celebrate, and free from fear, may we live lives of intentional faith and intentional love. May that faith and love permeate all the actions of our daily lives, big and small, so that we may be found good and faithful servants, ready to take a risk that will bear much fruit.