

## Homily for Nov. 15, 2020 – 33<sup>rd</sup> Sunday in Ordinary Time

Once again, there is a connection between the first reading (Proverbs) about the “capable wife” and the gospel about the slaves left in charge of their master’s money. For me, the invitation in both passages is to be a risk taker. I find that challenging, because my nature is not to be a risk taker. For the most part, being cautious has served me well. I always look before I leap. But other times, being overly cautious has meant that opportunities have passed me by, and so I lived with regrets of what could have been.

Speaking about regrets. If you are anything like me, I bet you 99.9% of all your regrets do not come from having tried something and failed. No. Almost all our regrets came about because we talked ourselves out of doing something in the first place. You may have pain from a failed relationship, a divorce, but you should not have regrets if you learned something about yourself in the process. In that case, failure was turned into learning, and learning is never regrettable.

So, while there is a connection between the first reading and the gospel, there is even a bigger contrast between the two. The capable wife, in the Proverb reading, is a risk taker. The slave, in the gospel, who buried his master’s money in the ground is not a risk taker. One is praised, the other is punished.

The capable wife **risks** doing her husband good with no guarantee that he will do her good in return. The capable wife **risks** working with willing hands with no guarantee her hard work will amount to anything at all. The capable wife **risks** buying a field and planting a vineyard with no guarantee that anything will grow. The capable wife **risks** helping the poor and needy with no guarantee that she will ever receive a “thank-you.” The capable wife **risks** giving away kindness with no guarantee others will be kind to her in return.

Why would someone do such a thing? Why would someone take such risks? I think the answer is--because of **faith**. And why would someone not take risks? I think the answer is—because of **fear**. The opposite of faith is not doubt. The opposite of faith is fear. Fear makes you recoil into yourself. Remember when you were younger and watched those horror movies? At the scariest moments you recoiled into yourself drawing your knees up to your chin. This is the gesture of a fearful person not a risk taker.

God is a risk taker, and because Jesus himself told us that he came to do only one thing, God’s will, that makes Jesus a risk taker as well. Jesus risked his reputation by drawing close to people who did not have good reputations. Jesus risked being considered ritually impure by touching lepers and even dead bodies. Jesus risked being thrown out of synagogue, and he was, by speaking God’s inconvenient truth. Jesus risked going to bed hungry by becoming a beggar. Jesus risked his life by spreading God’s love and mercy to everyone. Everybody here, in this house of worship, has done the same. You are all risk takers. If you have ever loved, forgiven someone, or shown compassion or kindness, you took a risk not knowing if your love, forgiveness or

kindness would be reciprocated. Fear, on the other hand, is the enemy of faith and instead of engaging the world it causes us to recoil from it.



What did the slave, who buried his talent, fear? I think he feared two things, the same two things that many people still fear today.

Firstly, he feared his master. He had an image of his master as being ***“a harsh man reaping where he did not sow and gathering where he did not scatter.”*** **“So,”** as he said, **“I was afraid.”** There is no indication that his master was a harsh man, but this slave had an image of his master of being harsh. The image he had of his master in his mind did not match reality.

How many of us have grown up with an image of God as one who is harsh, just waiting for you to do something you were not supposed to do so that punishment could be meted out. This servant, who buried his talent, had a relationship with an image of his master but he had no relationship with the master himself. What a shame so many people still, to this day, go through life with no relationship to God, only a distorted image of God! The image was that the master was harsh. But the master himself, was anything but that. The master was a risk taker, leaving his fortune not to a financial investment company but to simple slaves. That’s how much he loved them; that’s how much he trusted them. He was not harsh. He was generous to a fault. This is the first fear—fear of God, not the true God who loves us to a fault, but fear of a false image of God. This false image was in the slave, and, in some small way, it is in almost everyone I meet.

Besides fear of the master, what is another fear that made the slave recoil into himself and bury his talent? Fear of failure. This fear, again, is in all of us. It’s understandable on some level. This slave has just been entrusted with a talent. A talent was a huge amount of money, more like a mortgage rather than petty cash. I can sympathize with fear of losing a sum so large that it could never be paid back. It is the fear of being a disappointment to another, or a disappointment to ourselves, or even the fear that asks, “what will people think of me should I fail?”

Do good parents--and God is the ultimate Good Parent--show disappointment when a child tries something and fails? No, of course not. A good parent praises the child for simply trying regardless of the results and encourages the child to learn from their failures. Most of us, if we are not suffering from too little belief in God, we are suffering from something just as debilitating—too little belief in ourselves.

I remember, 18 years ago, when I went home to preside at my mother's funeral and give the homily as well. Before I left, a number of priests called me to express their sympathy. I appreciated that so much. However, not one of them encouraged me to preach or preside at my own mother's funeral as that would be too hard. They did not do it for their own parents' funerals and they discourage me from trying it at my mother's. Only two voices encouraged me otherwise, my father and my friend, Jeff Doucette. Each of them in their own way said, "Go for it. Take the risk. You might crash and burn, but go for it." For both these people, their motto in life is: better to have tried and failed than to have never tried at all. I took their advice, the advice of risk takers, although I am not a risk taker myself, and it all worked out. Had I not, I would be living with 18 years of regret, the regret of not having tried at all.

Fr. Ron Rolheiser writes about risk taking in his book The Restless Heart when he says, ***"Only when we risk enough to let someone hurt us, are we risking enough to let someone love us. When we make ourselves available enough to be hurt, we will finally be available enough to be truly loved..... It is risky to expose ourselves in friendship and love. At times we will make fools of ourselves, at times we will be rejected, and at times we will get hurt. However, most times our honesty and vulnerability will meet with acceptance, gratitude, and the counteroffer of a deeper friendship and a more satisfying intimacy."***

I think he's right. Taking risks might cause you to crash and burn, to make a fool of yourself, to experience rejection and hurt. But, it will also free you from regret, and in that moment of freedom you will hear God saying, "Well done...enter into the joy of your master."

***Fr. Phil***