

## THIRTY THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME - A

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I bet each and everyone of you in here is guilty of the question I'm about to ask you. How many of you either did it yourself or know someone who took their money and hid it under the mattress or in a coffee can somewhere in the house?

I have to say, I'm guilty of it too. I remember once when my sixth-grade teacher called me out of class because the priest wanted to see me. Of course I was nervous, but then eventually, I went over to the Church only to find out that he needed an altar boy for a funeral mass. I didn't mind missing an hour or two of class, but I was even more thrilled when the priest gave me a crisp \$20.00 bill – a huge sum of money for me at the time. I remember all the rest of the day at school having my hand shoved in my pocket, checking every two minutes to make sure that no one stole the money. I was afraid that someone was going to steal it or I was going to lose it. And when I got home, what did I do with it? I hid it in my piggy bank that was concealed in an undisclosed location at my home.

It's all about what you do with what you have. As we approach the end of another liturgical year, might our Scripture readings be challenging us to take risks with what God has given us so that we might bear much fruit in our spiritual journey?

In the first reading from the Book of Proverbs gives the traditional praises of a good wife. Though at first the reading might look nothing like the Gospel reading, I think the image is a good contrast to the one talent man. Her husband has entrusted his heart to her. And what does she do with it: she takes risks and she doesn't just sit on it. She "brings forth good and not evil." She "reaches her hands to the poor and extends her arms to the needy. She fears the Lord, and because of that reverence, she is moved to action.

Paul's command to the Church in Thessalonica contains a similar message. He reminds the community that they are children of the light, and because of what has been entrusted to them, they should remain vigilant for the Lord's return in glory! In other words, those who sit around and "play it safe" will be most surprised when the Lord actually shows up.

We arrive at today's Gospel readings and we might feel a bit of sympathy for the one-talent man who hides his gift. The Gospel tells us that a rich man gives incredible sums of money to his servants before he leaves on a trip. To the first, he gives 10 talents, to the second 5, and to the third one. Keep in mind that one talent was equivalent to an ordinary man's work for 20 years! And with no instruction, he leaves. The first two guys double their gifts while the third puts his money under the mattress. When he comes back, the rich man asks what happened to his money. The first two are called "good and faithful" because of what was given them, and they're placed in charge of more money.

The third guy says that he was scared of what the rich man might do to him if he lost the money. The master's outburst to the third guy is shocking. He calls him wicked and lazy and tells him that he should have invested the money with bankers (which was contrary to Jewish law). He takes the talent away and gives it to the one who has ten. And he sends the man away in exile. That seems

unfair. He didn't lose it nor did he have any instructions!

That guy was just like me with that \$20.00 bill – scared that he would lose it or that someone else would steal it. He is a victim of his own fright. The Gospel today seems to be challenging us to not be full of fear, but to take risks. It's a challenging message to a world full of stock market and financial fears. It's a risk to invite someone back to Church who hasn't been in a while. It's a risk to try a new form of prayer that you're uncomfortable with. It's a risk to stand up to injustices in our world like abortion because of what others might think. But we have to be willing to take calculated risks because our salvation depends upon it.

An ethics professor at Princeton Seminary asked for volunteers for an extra assignment. Fifteen students showed up. He divided the group of fifteen into three groups of five each. He instructed the first group of five to proceed immediately across the campus to a certain spot; if they did not get there in fifteen minutes their grade would be affected. A minute or two later he instructed the second group to also proceed across the campus to the same spot; but they were given forty-five minutes to get there. After they left he instructed the last group to go across the campus to that spot too; but they were given three hours for the trip. Now, unknown to any of these students, the teacher had arranged with three students from the Drama Department to meet them along the way, acting as people in great need: the first one they met covered his head with his hands and moaned out loud as though in great pain; the second, a little bit further along the way, was on some steps lying face down as if unconscious; the third, on the very steps of the destination, acted out an epileptic seizure. You know what the ethics professor discovered? Not one of the first group stopped, two of the second group stopped, and all five of the third group stopped. Guess who got the 'A.'

It's all about what you do with what you have, and we will be judged according to that standard. Remember my \$20.00 and the piggy bank? I saved it and sat on it all right. But when it came time to use it, guess what, I forgot where I hid the piggy bank! Take the risk and use what God has given you and I promise, you will receive a good return.