

## Without Some Risk, There is No Maturity

Proper 28A - November 13, 2011

Today, we are going to talk about the necessity of taking some risks in life in order to grow & mature. A Catholic Priest & a Rabbi were chatting one day when the conversation turned to a discussion of job descriptions & promotion. "What do you have to look forward to in way of a promotion in your job?" asked the Rabbi. "Well, I'm next in line for the Monsignor's job." replied the Priest. "Yes, & then what?" asked the Rabbi. "Well, next I can become Arch-Bishop." said the Priest. "Yes, & then?" asked the Rabbi. "If I work real hard, take some calculated risks & do a good job as Arch-Bishop, it's possible for me to become a full Bishop." said the Priest. "O.K., then what?" asked the Rabbi. The Priest, beginning to get a bit exasperated replied, "With some luck & real hard work, maybe I can become a Cardinal." "And then?" asked the Rabbi. The Priest is really starting to get mad now & replies, "If I really stick my neck out, take lots of carefully planned risks, work really, really hard & get really lucky & if I'm in the right places at the right times & play my political games just right, maybe, just maybe, I can get elected Pope." "Yes, & then what?" asked the Rabbi. "Good grief!" shouted the Priest. "What do you expect me to become, GOD?" "Well, why not?" said the Rabbi, "One of our boys made it!"

Every year about this time, the appointed lessons always include those which provide rectors & pastors with the perfect opportunity to do some teaching about the spirituality of giving; the connection between our choices regarding how we allocate our money, our time and our abilities & our relationship with God. This morning is one of those times. Today's Gospel lesson provides an ideal platform for a community discussion about the essential role of risk-taking in personal development. It also provides me with an appropriate context for some honest truth-telling about the financial health of our parish.

Are you a risk-taker? Taking risks can help someone grow, develop, learn, get unstuck, become a healthier, happier, more confident person. Often, our families did not encourage us to take risks. Do you ever remember your mother saying "go on out and take some risks today, dear?" Unfortunately, some studies show that a condition of "learned helplessness" can occur where any person, male or female, learns to depend upon others to do things for them & to take care of them. The central message of today's Gospel parable is that playing it safe, always hiding inside our comfort zone is the opposite of faith & the recipe for staying emotionally & spiritually stuck in immaturity. Normal, healthy human development requires, demands that we take risks. Think for a moment about some of the significant risks you have taken in your lifetime like: learning to walk, to ride a bike, to get an education, to get a job. Now think about how you grew & matured from each risk. What would your life had been like if you were so afraid of falling down that you could never bring yourself to stand up & try to walk? Where would you be right now if you were too afraid to climb onto that bike & take a spin around the neighborhood? And how would you feel & evaluate yourself if you were still living at home with your parents too fearful to go out into the world to get an education, a career, a family of your own?

By contrast, notice how it has been almost universally true that whenever you have taken the kinds of risks urged upon you by wisdom, the longing for maturity & the desire for personal growth & accomplishment, you were blessed & enriched by that risk-taking. In fact, the more risks we take, the more courage we have to take more risks. It's like developing a spiritual "risk muscle" that strengthens the more it's used. In his book, *Risking*, author David Viscott states: ***"If you want***

***to feel secure, do what you already know how to do. But if you want to grow, go to the cutting edge of your competence, which means a temporary loss of security. So, whenever you don't quite know what you are doing, know that you are growing."***

Laurie R. Geary, M.Ed. notes that risking takes us out of our Comfort Zone into a Learning-Growing Zone. Imagine a circle - this is your Comfort Zone - remaining in this zone too long can become stagnation. The outer boundary of this Comfort Zone is our Cutting Edge/ Growing Edge. When we take a risk, we break through this Edge into the Learning Zone. This zone can feel disorienting; it is the unknown, an area of transition; a temporary loss of security. However, if we can tolerate remaining in this zone, we eventually develop the knowledge or skills we need for personal growth. We expand our Comfort Zone & reap the benefits for the rest of our lives. For instance, remember how you felt when you learned to drive a car with a stick shift or to ski? I remember being very self conscious and aware of every movement. I made lots of mistakes, but that was the learning process. Now, when I drive or ski, I am completely comfortable & unaware of my movements. I am back in my Comfort Zone, but notice, it is an expanded, bigger, larger comfort zone because I took the risk to learn, grow & mature. Life is now fully. My possibilities have expanded.

In a recent book, *The Adversity Quotient*, Paul Stoltz identifies three types of people: Quitters, Campers, & Climbers. His premise is that the most successful people are those who not only tolerate, but benefit from adversity. They learn & grow by the challenges & opportunities that the inevitable challenges in life give us. He uses the analogy of climbing a mountain. Quitters don't even try to climb; they give up & quit when they experience any fear or anxiety. Campers climb a little way up the mountain; they deal as best they can with their worry thoughts, but then they camp out & stay in their Comfort Zone. Climbers keep on going; they are the risk-takers determined to avoid staying stuck, determined to grow, develop & mature. They go on to the top of the mountain. Today's Gospel invites us all to be Climbers, spiritual Climbers, men & women who take risks because we are determined to grow, mature & avoid getting stuck.

I cannot think of a more relevant message for our congregation here & now than this. We are facing a new & different challenge, that is, we are now in the first year of a five year process during which the financial support we receive from the Diocese of Utah will go from \$43,000 in 2011 to \$34,400 in 2012 down to zero in 2016. If we freeze up, if we play it safe, if we refuse to take the risk of gradually increasing the amount of our pledges; if we dig our heels in & refuse to trust God enough, we will, at best, live from one financial crisis to another during the next five years or, at worst, we will fail & move into decline. However, if we - and I mean ALL of us - are willing to trust just a little, risk just a little, increase our pledge amounts just a little each year, our parish will remain financially healthy & our mission to make a difference will continue.

How does one take a "controlled" risk? There are three steps: 1) Preparation: What is the risk you want to take? What are the desired results? What steps do you need to take? 2) Commitment: Take action. Take the risk. Go for it in! 3) Completion: What were the results? What did you learn? So who are we going to be; the servants who play it safe & fail to mature, or are we going to push ourselves a little for the sake of God's work in this place & our own personal growth & development? Today's Gospel: ***"So take the money from the servant who hid it in the ground & give it to the one who invested it. For to all those who have, more will be given & they will have an abundance, but from those who play it safe, even what they have will be taken away."*** AMEN.