

"Risk"

Homily of November 17, 2002

by Fr. Brian Timoney

Last spring, as many of you already know, I went sailing for two weeks with my brothers and a sister along the south coast of Turkey. My youngest brother was the skipper and so he laid out the course and decided what little villages we would go in to visit. Now, there were two fairly sizeable towns on the list, and they were chosen, not only because we would find a supermarket there, but I think, more importantly, that he would find an internet cafe there. You see, he was playing a board game with people who were scattered all over Europe, playing on the internet. The board game was called "Risk," and this was really serious stuff.

Well, reading the gospel today, it occurs to me that the gospel is about risk, and not about a board game, but about really serious stuff. It is about real risk, risk in a real world situation. The man in the story risks his money with three of his servants. Two of them risked money that was not their own and the risk paid off. The third was not willing to risk. He feared the consequences if an investment failed and he really did not trust his own abilities, and so he just went and hid the money. And, in his reluctance to risk, he lost everything.

Well, the Master in the story obviously is God. He takes a risk with humanity, his servants. We might say that God is a gambler, who takes a risk on you and me. He gives us wealth, our own talents and abilities, a share in His creative power, His life-giving power, His power to love and forgive and build-up. And, then, He challenges us to be like Him, but leaves us totally free as to how we live our lives, how we use our talents, how we exercise our creative power, our power to love and forgive and build up. He takes a risk on us. And, yes, we, of course, are the servants in the story. As you know very well, for us just to be alive is a risk. In daily living, we take all kinds of risk, without really knowing what the future will be. If we don't, we are only half-alive. To quote two very famous athletes: Wayne Gretzky said, "You miss one hundred percent of the shots that you never take," and the race car driver, Mario Andretti said, "If everything seems under control, it means you are not going fast enough." (I don't think that will wash with the Highway Patrol, by the way.)

To love is to risk. To live humanly is to risk. And to live in a Christian way is to embrace the great unknown, what is only dimly understood. We call it "faith." We express it in the Creed. We believe and commit ourselves to a God that we cannot see. We proclaim truths that simply boggle the mind, that God is One in three, that the Son of God took flesh and died for our salvation, and that we will rise from the dead and live with Christ forever. And we risk everything on the proclamation of these truths.

The stories of the Christian saints are stories of risk, giving up everything for the sake of Christ, like St. Francis of Assisi, trusting totally in the love and goodness and providence of God, or like a Teresa of Calcutta. And our Christian story, too, is an everyday one of risk. God leaves us free, and so we are constantly making choices, not always between what is clearly right and clearly wrong, but indeed more often between the better and the merely good. We risk. Jesus said, "Pick up your cross and follow Me." And we say, "OK, Lord!" without really knowing how big or how heavy that cross is going to be. We are willing to risk it because we love.

In recent months we have seen the human weakness of the Church exposed in the daily newspapers. Day after the day, the criminal actions of priests, the incompetence and duplicity of bishops has been splashed all over the papers. It has been laid bare for all to see. Our Church has been shamed. And, yet, we say, "I believe in one, holy, Catholic and Apostolic Church." Is not this a huge risk that we take? Isn't this faith in its finest form?

In the gospel story, two of the servants take big risks. The third did nothing, took no risk at all. And, worse still, he refused to take personal responsibility for his lack of action. He blamed it on the master, said the master was a hard man, a demanding man, and so, he was afraid to take any risk. Well, I believe that we have no excuse for not reaching out in Christian love and compassion, no excuse for not using all of our talents to build up the kingdom of God, no excuse for not risking all on the word of Jesus Christ. Why? Because ours is not a hard master. Ours is a God Who genuinely loves us, Who genuinely wants us to succeed in being better human beings. Ours is a God Who supports and encourages us in all our efforts, a God Who says, "Come to me all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will refresh you." Will we take Him at His word? Will we risk it? Amen.