

THIRTY-THIRD SUNDAY IN ORDINARY TIME–2017

A priest was at Walmart buying a few things he needed for his trip to Rome. A young couple came up to him, and learning that he was going to Rome, asked him, "When you get to Rome, Father, could you light a candle for us? We really want children, but the doctor just told us we might not be able to have any." The priest said that he would gladly light a candle for them at St. Peter's. Well, it happened almost ten years to the day that he was back at Walmart getting ready for another trip to Rome. By chance he ran into that same couple, this time along with their ten children. The priest said, "Oh, what a truly wonderful miracle!" When they found out that he was heading back to Rome, they asked him, "Please, Father, when you get to St. Peter's, would you please blow out that candle."

Does any one know what David Edgerton and James McLamore are famous for? What about Ray Kroc? I'll give you a hint: Their area of expertise is very closely associated with Dave Thomas' area of expertise. We all know that he was the founder of Wendy's. Well, Edgerton and McLamore started Burger King and Ray Kroc started McDonald's. What about Glen Bell, Jr.? He founded Taco Bell. Many such people grew up in poverty and had to overcome many obstacles before finding themselves numbered among Fortune's 500. Bell put it this way, "it is possible to have very humble beginnings and, through hard work, to succeed beyond one's wildest dreams."

And then there is Abraham Lincoln: what made him want to continue in public office after two business failures, after being defeated eight times at a run for public office, after having a nervous breakdown and the loss of a sweetheart to death? What would cause still another person to continue to follow studies in science even after being labeled a misfit by his teachers and "abnormal" by his parents because he had not learned to read by age nine? This same person continued on even though he miserably failed his college entrance exams. His memory was so bad that he couldn't even remember his phone number. Guess who? Albert Einstein.

Each in their own area and in their own way, was willing to take a risk and, as they say, put it all on the line and that's the only reason that we are talking about them today. Had they not done what they did, they would have gone the way of so many others. Their risk paid off. As we move over into the parable of today's Gospel, we see the two servants who were willing to take a risk with what they had been given, each according to his ability. Whether it was out of fear or laziness, the third servant took the route of the ostrich and buried the money, and, in the end, lost even that.

Again, the parables give us an idea of how things work in the Kingdom of God and how, as sharers in the work and ministry of Jesus, we are called to be risk takers who have chosen to commit themselves to God and to accept all people as brothers and sisters. We have all been given our talents and abilities to

use to build up God's Kingdom. As I have often shared with you, at the heart of what we are called to do as disciples of Jesus and members of our Faith Community here, is the risk-taking is the sharing of our ourselves with others. It means reaching out in love to all.

While doing so is very rewarding, sometimes it is very difficult and trying. As we look at the life of Jesus, he put it all out there and look what happened to him. Just imagine the sadness and hurt he experienced when those very people he loved and wanted to help rejected him and killed him. Jesus tells his followers that they too will be hurt by the very people they want to help.

And so, whatever our gifts and talents are, the real risk-taking is putting our hearts and who we are out there. Not that we do what we do to get rewarded, but, if we are willing to share ourselves, even though at times it hurts, we will be able to experience life to the full and experience that joy and blessedness that comes from being loved and loving.

Some of you might remember the story called *The Giving Tree*? It begins, "Once there was a tree and she loved a little boy." Every day from the boy's childhood to his teen years to his adulthood, he came to the tree. When he was a child, he came to climb her trunk, eat her apples and swing from her branches. And the tree was happy. As he matured, his requests for the tree's particular gifts and talents became more insistent, more costly. First, when the boy needed money, she gave her apples to sell, and she was happy. When he needed a home, she gave her branches; when he wanted to get away from it all, she happily gave her trunk for a boat. At long last, the boy, who was an old man by now, came back to the tree, who was no more than an old stump. Since all the man wanted now was a place to sit and rest, the tree offered her stump to him. And the tree was happy.

Such generosity, that is, the sharing of oneself with another, requires the type of risk-taking that is exemplified in the first two servants in today's Gospel parable. Each dared to risk investing all that had been entrusted him by his employer. Neither held back anything even though worldly prudence may have dictated for him to do so. From these risk-taking servants, and from the giving tree, we learn that who we are and all we have comes to us from God as a gift; therefore, all should be given as a gift without judging the worthiness of the recipient and being aware that at times, what we share, including ourselves, misused, undervalued or even abused. It is now our turn to be those trusted servants and disciples. Jesus continues to give it all over to us and he invites us to put ourselves out there for others. We do so remembering that we are not alone. Jesus continues on in our midst, and hopefully, we will remember that we are all in this together. And even if we are only a stump where another can find rest, the impact we can have and will have, will be beyond our wildest dreams. On the other hand, let us remember that the greatest of all risks, is to take no risks at all. May God's peace fill our hearts.