

### 33<sup>rd</sup> Ordinary (A)

I have a friend who recently resigned from his job. He used to work in what he called the wealth management industry. He managed other people's money and took risks with it. He didn't resign because of the recent 'Paradise papers' scandal, which let us know that lots of famous people have money stored in offshore accounts as a way of avoiding huge tax payments. He resigned because he believes too many of us are quick to take big risks when it comes to doubling our money. And it is his opinion that we are now fast becoming a society where the levels of inequality are as bad as they were at the French Revolution. My friend wants to do something about this injustice which is why he has resigned his job and gone to work for one of those NGOs that do a lot of good in dangerous parts of the world.

It was this friend who told me about something called the Rule of 72, which I'd never heard of. According to this rule, if your investment has a guaranteed interest rate of say 2.5%, you divide the interest rate into 72 and the answer will be the number of years it will take you to double your money. Two and a half per cent into seventy-two equals twenty eight years. If you want to double your money more quickly you have to take a bigger risk and my friend reckons that in the world of venture capital, nine out of ten people will take the bigger risk and lose just about everything.

We may not have realised it but when Jesus told the parable in the gospel this Sunday he was in the middle of his own high-risk investment scheme. He told this parable when he was days away from the events of Good Friday. He told it having chosen to risk leaving the safety of rural Galilee and embark on a journey to Jerusalem, where he knew the authorities would see him as a threat. As we heard, his parable is about a wealthy man who goes away on a long journey. Before he goes he distributes his wealth to three servants. The first takes the money to a wealth management firm and invests in high risk ventures. The second does the same thing. Both of them do well, reaping the rewards we might say of Rule 72. On his return their master is thrilled with them both and promises that they will soon be trusted with even greater responsibility.

We of course are not supposed to be interested in them. We are supposed to notice what the third servant does. What did he do? He dug a hole and in it put his share of the money, his one talent. He put it there for safekeeping. We might think him a prudent, cautious investor, not about to take chances with another person's money. When his master returns he hands it back safe and sound but for his efforts he is treated harshly; *as for this good-for-nothing servant throw him out into the dark where there will be weeping and grinding of teeth. Did you ever hear someone grind their teeth?* One of my sisters used to do that and when we were children the rest of us hated that sound and here is Jesus saying this servant will endure that fate forever!

I can't help wondering how it would have turned out if the first two servants had put their shares in the high risk ventures and lost the lot. What would Jesus have said to them? I reckon he would still have applauded their efforts. The point he's making by telling this parable is that when it comes to the kingdom of God, disciples must risk everything. The greatest risk is not to risk anything, to play safe, to live cautiously when it comes to the kingdom of God. We might say that when we are like this, not caring about God's kingdom we are committing the sin of sloth, which is still one of the Church's seven deadly sins. Jesus does not want us to be slothful, to play safe with his values; he wants us to take risks with them.

Would we say our faith is a high risk venture? I don't think so. Most of us I reckon would think of our faith as more like a comfort zone, advising us how to live a good life and providing us with security both here and in the life of the world to come. My friends, this reduces our faith to a rather timid, non-risky thing. Today's gospel tells us to think again about this. How appropriate we should hear this gospel today on this first World Day of the Poor. Pope Francis has given us this day and in his message for it (a part of which is on the front page of our parish newsletter) he has asked us to use it to 'draw close to the poor.' And by poor he means

materially poor but also intellectually poor and spiritually poor. Draw close to them, he says and in them encounter God. Around the cathedral today and throughout this week are displays of some of the groups and charities who already do this well. Street Pastors, Aid to the Church in Need, the Red Cross, CAFOD, the Roberts Centre, all of these and the others with displays are Christians willing to take risks in the adventure of faith. All of them would be delighted if you would choose to share that risk with them. Go and see the ones which interest you after Mass and in them encounter God.

This Sunday by means of his parable Jesus invites us to live our faith as fully as possible, taking risks with it. He hopes we will apply gospel values in our homes, in our places of work and in our British society where, as one of my friends recently realised, to be a Christian often means holding values which lots of people do not share. Let us think where this week we may have to take a risk when it comes to being a disciple: at school perhaps with someone in our class or maybe at home or work. And let us not leave Mass today without asking Jesus to help us in that risky venture. *O blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways!* So sang the psalmist. Let's pray that with God's help we can truly be those people, who whether young or old, male or female, rich or poor really do believe that when it comes to being a disciple of Jesus Christ the risks are high, because the adventure is worth it.