

**Thirty-Third Sunday in Ordinary Time – Cycle A**  
**Cathedral of the Immaculate Conception – November 19, 2017**  
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For many years when I was growing up, one of the annual events at St. Michael School was the Ice Cream Social and Talent Show. Though it meant selling tickets and decorating and rehearsing, we students always looked forward to this evening. Perhaps it was the opportunity to show off our school, the excitement of the show, or just the prospect of so much ice cream – whatever the reason, we enjoyed it. Yet somehow, the evening was not as eagerly anticipated by our parents – something we students never understood. True, they had quite a bit of work to do to make the evening a success, but surely they enjoyed the ice cream and the talent show as much as we did! It was only years later, having sat through a number of my brother's piano recitals and school plays that I realized why my parents were less than enthusiastic about one more talent show. While my own family was, of course, blessed with an abundance of talent – other families apparently were not. Some of the acts in those shows were not outstanding. A few of them were not even what you might charitably call good. While God has undoubtedly blessed everyone with an abundance of talents, some of them are very well hidden.

Faced with such a reluctant audience, it took a great deal of courage for students to participate in these talent shows. If you were really good, you got heaps of praise; if you were not especially good, well, polite but unenthusiastic applause can be deafening. Rather than putting yourself on the line, it was much easier to do nothing at all – which, as I recall, is why we stopped the annual event after a number of years. It grew increasingly difficult to find students brave enough to risk the silence that failure seemed to bring. Sometimes you feel that you just can't trust people enough to put yourself on the line.

In many ways, that is the message of the parable Jesus brings us today – trust. We must trust our own abilities enough to take calculated risks from time to time. We must have enough faith in God and in ourselves to use our God-given talents. Yes, it took trust on the part of the “good and faithful” servants who invested the talents they received – they knew that they had to risk losing the talents in order to increase their master's fortune – and they invested the talents anyway. The third servant provides us with the negative example of fear and mistrust. He demonstrates for us one unwilling to take a risk – one who was either paralyzed with fear or one who cared so little for his master that he could not be bothered with investing his money for him. The first two servants were able to trust God and trust themselves, the third was not. But these servants are not the primary examples of trust in this parable.

More than anyone else, it is the master who demonstrates trust. We think of talents as some sort of ability one is born with – but in ancient Palestine, a talent was a large sum of money. One denarius was a day's wage, and a talent was six thousand denarii. When the master gave his servants – not his bankers or his brokers or his investment advisers, but his ordinary household servants – when the master gave them such huge sums of money, he took a great risk. He could have made other investment plans. Yet he gave his fortune to his servants – undoubtedly knowing that he might never see one denarius of those talents again. But he gave them his fortune anyway because he trusted them, he believed in them – and he wanted them to believe in themselves.

That is the consistent message of God to be found in our Scriptures. God always goes first. He asks us to trust him because he first trusted us – with our very life, with our many talents and abilities, and ultimately with the greatest gift of all – with his Son. God invites us to love him because he first loved us. God loved enough to create us; loved us enough to forgive us; and loved us enough to send his Son to redeem us. We often hear of people who reject religion because they say that they could never bring themselves to have blind faith, to trust in a God they cannot see. Yet real faith is never truly blind. Though it feels like it at times, God does not send us forth on a search into the unknown. Instead, our faith and trust in God is always our response to his faith and trust in us. He has gone the way before us and asks us not to be trailblazers but humble followers. And our parable today reminds us that to be a follower, to be a disciple implies some movement. The servant who did nothing but bury his talent in the ground had it taken away from him. But a disciple never travels the way first or alone. God has always been there first and walks along the path. That is how you know if you are a disciple – if you are using the talents God has given you wisely. If you find yourself alone in uncharted territory, then you are following your own agenda, not God's. Turn around and look again for the path of Christ.

As we discovered in our talent shows, taking a risk, following Christ isn't always easy or pleasant or comfortable. Remember that the eternal Son of God assumed a human nature, walked the way of the cross and invites us to do the same. If we trust him enough to follow, then we too will be called good and faithful servants – we too will inherit the kingdom of God.