

**Homily for November 17, 2002  
33rd Sunday in Ordinary Time A**

**By Father Charles Bowes**

**Proverbs 31:10-13, 19-20, 30-31  
1 Thessalonians 5:1-6  
Matthew 25:14-50**

## *It's safe to risk everything.*

One day in the sixth grade, Sister Thomas Raymond called me out of class and said that the pastor wanted to see me. In fear and trembling, I went over to the church, only to find that a server was needed for an unexpected funeral. After Mass, Monsignor Cloonan gave me \$3, a huge sum in 1950. Going home on the bus, I checked my pocket every two minutes to make sure the money was still there, and once home I quickly hid it in my secret place, tucked in a book on a shelf beside my bed.

I've always felt a certain sympathy for the battered, one-talent man in the strange story presented in Matthew 25, today's Gospel, who hides his unexpected gift. So the story goes that once upon a time there lived a wealthy businessman. One day he needed to leave town on an extended business trip, so he singled out three of his servants. He handed his funds over to them, or as the New Revised Standard version has it, "entrusted them with his property." One of his servants was given five talents, another, two talents, and still another, one talent. No matter how you look at it, the

businessman handed over an enormous amount of money and a lot of trust. In those days a single talent equaled the wages of an ordinary worker for 20 years. This businessman was an A #1 risk taker of the highest degree to entrust so much to so few.

The first two servants traded, took some risks themselves, invested, and doubled what had been entrusted to them. But the one talent servant was different. He dug a hole in the ground and hid the master's money.

Right about now, the people around Jesus hearing this story for the first time would have been nodding their heads in agreement. Wise fellow, they would have been thinking, good planning. Prudent, careful, safe – that's the way to go. In Jesus' day, burying money in the ground was a perfectly acceptable method of safeguarding valuables. According to the Rabbinical tradition, anyone who buried money that had been put into his or her care would no longer be liable for its safety. The servant had protected the owner of the money by keeping it safe. He had protected himself by removing responsibility in case anything should happen. Simply by doing nothing!

And right about now, I am nodding my head in identification with the story. That's me. Play it safe. The

favorite words out of my mouth are, “watch out” and “be careful.” Heaven forbid I get caught in a mistake, or worse yet, fail!

Certainly, the servant didn't deserve what the businessman did to him upon his return. He called for an accounting and then blasted the servant as wicked and lazy, took his talent away and gave it to the servant who had 10. It is not fair. It is not as if the servant squandered the money. He didn't embezzle a little off the top. He wasn't foolish or wasteful or disloyal. All he did was play it safe and return the money that he was given, not a penny more and not a penny less.

Or is that the problem – that he simply did nothing? Whether it was out of concern for the safety of the money or fear of failure or punishment, the servant did nothing. He buried the trust. He hid it under the mattress. The irony is that by being so cautious not to lose the talent, in the end he loses everything. Use it or lose it. Invest it; don't bury it or stuff it under a mattress. We get the impression that the servants who gambled boldly would have been rewarded even if their attempt came up short – that's how present the kingdom of God is to us and how much faith God has in us to live life to the fullest.

We have been entrusted with a treasure: God's life and power flowing through us. It comes from the one who made an awesome investment in us, the investment of God's own self in Jesus Christ, poured into us through the Holy Spirit. It comes from the one who is the great risk taker. If ever there was a risky thing to do, it was the risk God took in Jesus Christ, revealing himself in flesh and blood and showing us the way to be faithful and pass through death to life.

God does not play it safe. God risks all to gain all – all of me, all of you, all of creation. Can we who had the risen Christ given to us as source of our salvation do less than take in hand the treasure entrusted to us, boldly investing it, knowing that the one who is over us has every confidence in us? That God loves us unstintingly and always and forever? This great giver says to us: “I trust you, I risk all for you. Trust me in return to love you, to forgive you, to be with you, to work with you. Be bold. Be strong. For the Lord your God is with you.” So, let us pray: Lord, what was it like for you to hear the Father's words: “You are my beloved child; with you I am well pleased?” What fearlessness did that instill in your heart, Lord?

**It's safe to risk everything.**