

33rd Sunday of the Year
St. Mary Catholic Church, Richmond VA
Fr. Michael A. Renninger

It's all gone. The chairs, the snack bar, the changing rooms. It's all gone. When I was growing up, there was one swimming pool in our township, and we had a membership there. I spent happy summer afternoons, splashing in the water, and working on my tan.

But that old swim club has been torn down, and the pool has been filled in with dirt.

I'm sad about this, because this means that I will never be able to finally face my fear.

What do I mean? Well, our pool had a high diving board. But I just couldn't get myself to jump off of that thing.

My little brother, Karl, had no trouble doing the high dive. My dad was a very good diver. Most of my peers had been diving off it for years.

But I couldn't. I was afraid. One day, my dad said, "Mike, let's see if you can do the high dive today." My brother went first, jumping off without fear. As bobbed up out of the water he stuck his tongue out at me.

My dad stood by the pool, speaking words of loving encouragement: "You can do it, Mike." But as I got to the top of the ladder, my heart was racing. And I heard the old, fearful voice.... "You can't do this. You're too afraid."

I walked to the end of the board and felt woozy. I heard my dad's voice: "you can do it!" But I heard the voice of my fear even louder: "No you can't." And I couldn't.

And now that they've torn down the old diving board, I may never have a chance to conquer my fear.

Today's Gospel parable is a word of loving encouragement from Jesus. It is a word to every disciple of Christ who has ever felt woozy and afraid.

It is a word of hope for every man, woman or child who has ever heard the loving voice of God the Father saying, "Yes, you can," while within us we hear the roaring voice of our own fear saying, "No you can't."

This parable has been misinterpreted over the years. I think I understand why. Jesus uses the language of 'talents,' interest rates and investment dividends. You might think that this parable is intended as investment advice from the Son of God himself, telling you how to get a good rate of return on the Dow Jones roller coaster.

But that is not the point at all. Yes, Jesus does tell a story about three servants, each of whom are given certain amounts of money by their master.

Notice that they are not given the *same* amount! As so often happens in human life, some people seem to get more than others, some get less.

In Jesus' day, currency was not measured in dollars and cents. One measure of money was called a 'talent.' And a 'talent' was a *huge* amount of money. It represented what an average worker would earn over DECADES of work. Yes, it was worth DECADES of wages.

So please remember: none of the servants EARNED the vast fortunes the master gave them. It was a generous act by a generous master.

But the master's generosity gets trumped by one thing in this parable. **Fear**. When the first two servants are given gifts by the master, they immediately put those gifts to use, and are able to return to him even more than he had given them.

The third servant is the patron saint of every child who has ever stood on the end of a diving board saying, "I can't. I'm afraid." Even though the master had been generous to this servant, the servant is unable to do anything with the gift he had been given. Because he is afraid of the giver... afraid of what might happen... afraid of trying.

He says to his master: "out of fear I went off and buried your gift in the ground."

Out of fear.

Please remember – this is a parable about the 'Kingdom of God.' Jesus tells this parable to remind us that God has a task for each of us to do. God has given each of us the unique gifts that we need to accomplish our small portion of building up the Kingdom of God. God wants us to do the works of the kingdom.

But so often, the works of the Kingdom don't get done, because we listen to our fears. Even when our heavenly Father is standing by our side, saying, "Yes you can," we listen to the voice of fear as it shouts, "No you can't."

The easiest way for Satan to tear us down is...our fear. The surest way for Satan to interrupt the work of the kingdom is to speak to us through our fears. Most of the time, the voice of our fears is a voice which is lying to us. Don't listen to it when it says "You can't." Listen instead to Christ who says "Yes you can."

For instance - God has given you the ability to make a difference in the life of the poor. But in an uncertain economy, you begin to fear whether you can be as generous as you used to be. You know you're supposed to make a difference for the poor. Your fear is saying, "You can't." But don't listen, because Christ is saying, "You can."

God has given you the ability to be an effective voice for justice in our country. A voice for the unborn. A voice for the abandoned. A voice for the outcast. A voice for the prisoner. The task seems so daunting. Your fear says, “You can’t make ANY justice happen.” But don’t listen, because Christ is saying, “You can.”

God has given you the ability to stay faithful to your promises. Faithful to your relationships. But you and your spouse have hit a rocky patch, and since you cannot figure out how to fix your marriage, you fear that it’s over. You *want* to fix your relationship, but your fear says “You can’t.” Don’t listen to that voice, because Christ is saying, “You can.”

God has given you the ability to forgive; God has given you the ability to deal with your addiction; God has given you the ability to be chaste, to be a peacemaker, to be a person of integrity. In Baptism God has given you the gifts you need to do the work of Christ in your daily life.

But the voice of our fear says “You can’t live the Christian life nowadays.” Don’t listen to your fear, because Christ is saying, “Yes you can.”

You have been given the gifts and abilities you need to do the work of the Lord. Your gifts are different than the person sitting next to you, because your task is different too.

Satan doesn’t want you to get to work, so he lies to you. He lies through the voice of your fear, telling you that you can’t possibly do what God asks.

But *you can*. Because *God said so*. Don’t wait until it’s too late. Don’t wait until the diving board is torn down. Jump. Start. Go.

Can you do it? Yes, you can.