

There's one question we ask ourselves before ever we take a risk, do you know what it is? "Is it worth it? Are the chances and the result worth the risk involved?" How do we handle our money? Should we increase our family? Should I get involved? These are risk questions. We weigh the odds. As the saying goes, "The race may not always be won by the swift, nor is the battle always won by the strong, but that's the way to bet."

The RENEW program returns to St. Regis this weekend to carry us through the season of Lent on the theme of our response to God's call. This week we reflect on the theme of taking risks. All our temporal risks can be spiritual ones if we see them in the light of God's call. When we begin Lent this Wednesday, God invites us into a risky season, a time to challenge our values, a time to change our behavior.

Now, no one likes to risk if it isn't worth it. So, to psyche ourselves up for Lent, let's look at a couple of people who took a risk and won. No, I don't mean Lee Iacocca and Pat Robertson, but Jesus and a leper. Each faced a difficult choice in today's Gospel.

A leper asks Jesus to cure him. In that simple request, the leper takes at least three major risks. The first is legal sanction. Laws required lepers to keep their distance. This one didn't, he could have been punished. The second risk is rejection. Jesus could have said no, and as we'll see in a minute, I think this was a strong possibility. The third risk is faith. Suppose he was wrong about Jesus, suppose Jesus couldn't cure him. He risked weakening his faith in Jesus. Now, with these three risks, he asks the question, "Is it worth it? Is it worth the result?" The result is health, and the chances are good. He decides yes, it's worth it, and he asks.

Then there is Jesus, who receives the request. I think this cure was risky for Jesus since immediately he asks this man not to tell anyone. Jesus risked misunderstanding. People might think he was just a miracle worker. He also risked privacy. If he were to cure this leper, hundreds more would come. So for the sake of enjoying privacy, for the sake of refocusing his work on salvation, I think Jesus had to decide whether or not he wanted to cure this man. He asks the question, "Is it worth it?" Faced with a decaying human being, he responds, but you can almost hear him rationalize the cure, "All right," he thinks to himself, "I'll help this one but only if he keeps quiet about it." Jesus takes this risk in spite of his better judgment. And he probably kicked himself all the way home; not even the Son of God can expect a former leper to keep quiet. Was it a good decision? I think we'd all say yes.

My brothers and sisters, we're on the threshold of Lent. What do you need to risk this year? Reconciliation? Renew? Tithing? Forgiveness? Charity? What will it be this Lent? Believe it, it's worth the risk.