The risk of faith

Every January I make the same resolution: “This year, I will take more risks.” This time of annual looking back and reflection sometimes finds me pleased with the limbs onto which I’ve climbed (having children, leaving jobs), and sometimes finds me clinging fearfully to the trunk, not having moved much from the previous January’s perch. Still, each year, I vow to risk more. It’s what the early Christians did. They feared the constant risk of persecution and death. Even our symbol of the “Jesus fish” is a holdover from the days when Christians hid their faith from the Romans. This January, resolve to risk being more fully rooted in our faith.

Give.

In difficult economic times, charity can feel like a risk. Even when we’re reasonably secure, there is a temptation to cling to what we have in case of that inevitable rainy day. Take the chance that your generosity will pay unforeseen dividends.

Include.

Being part of something – a family, a church, a group – can be the best feeling of all. Being included is a feeling of being special, which few things can match. Often, though, the inclusion we feel comes at a price; we exclude others. It is as though we believe that our inclusion is dependent on keeping others out. This year, take the risk that your security in your beloved institutions is made richer by the inclusion of others.

Forgive.

Perhaps the greatest risk of all, forgiving, makes us vulnerable. The power that withholding forgiveness allows us

is alluring. Forgiveness is frightening. It gives away the power of the grudge and unburied hatchet. Forgiveness is risk. This January, resolve to take the risk of mercy.

Laugh.

Having just come through a divisive election year, many of us spent a lot of time clinging to our politics as tightly as we could. This year, risk opening up to joy. Not sarcasm. Not biting wit. Not zingers. Throw your head back, expose your throat, and risk laughter.

Learn.

Just hours before I sat down to write this article, my son taught me that there are only two types of alligators in the world. I’m 40; I never knew that before, and likely would not have known had he not taught me. This year, resolve to risk learning things from unexpected (and perhaps even unwelcome) sources. You will be surprised at what you learn. Of course, learning about our Catholic faith is a lifelong process for believers of every age.