

+ J. M. J.

There's nothing like an overtime win, and the bigger the stakes in a particular game, the more excitement and rejoicing there is to taste that victory. Perhaps this stems from knowing there was a real possibility that something we dearly wanted could have been lost. Somehow this is part of our nature because it is instinctive for us to celebrate in relation to how hard it was to achieve a victory.

If we could encapsulate today with one word, I dare say that word would be rejoice. We rejoice as a community. Today we rejoice as a Church because we have been given the share in a victory against seemingly all odds.

Jesus relates this story about a son who is called prodigal that returns to his father. It is in this same chapter that Jesus says "there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance" (Luke 15:7). To be prodigal means to be extremely lavish to the point of being wasteful. That is what we hear of the younger son who merely wants his father for his money and wastes it on a self-indulgent life of physical pleasure.

There's a saying, like father like son. We could say the father is prodigal. He too is extremely lavish and gives to the point of being wasteful, but here's the difference where the father is lavish is in his bestowal of gifts on another. He is lavish in his forgiveness. The son returns with his prepared speech ready.

"Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your son." I don't think the father even heard those words. He was too busy preparing the banquet ordering the ring and the finest clothes.

How are we prodigal, lavishly wasteful on ourselves? Why were we created? God created us to share his life. Our destiny is to be like God in heaven. How then do we use our inheritance? Do we treat the earth, creation, and our gifts as if they were our property to be spent on ourselves or are we cognizant of why we're here on earth, at all times preparing ourselves for heaven. At some point in our lives we have the conversion of the younger son be it in a prayerful experience that leads us to repent or after some

illness when we recognize that we need to return to God our Father. Then we experience the lavish forgiveness of God.

Then there's the older son. Remember this day is about rejoicing. We rejoice because right now Jesus is stirring in the hearts of sinners whatever is necessary to come back to be reconciled. But there's great cost for us. Because if Jesus forgives someone we must too. That means there are people in our lives right now, people that have seriously wronged us. There are those relatives that we can't get along with. There are those people who irritate us to no end. Do we want them to get to heaven perhaps even more than we want ourselves to be in heaven? That can be the hardest pill to swallow, but if some "jerk" repents and makes it to the glory of eternal life in Jesus' eyes that's a bigger party than any overtime victory could ever be.

Herein lies the danger of the older son. We can think that we have served the Father and done all the right things. We can think we earn heaven by being good, doing all the right things, etc., but that's not true if we have a Father who bestows gifts lavishly on sinners and even on us. No, it is not our service and the hard things we do that merit heaven. It is because we are God's children. It is because we live under the roof of God's house that we are entitled to that promise that God speaks to every one of you "My son [or daughter], you are here with me always; everything I have is yours."

This day we rejoice because an incredible victory has been one, against all odds. We rejoice that as God's children we have been given unfathomable gifts just because that's what God does; he gives lavishly, and we rejoice and yearn that everyone, even those difficult people will repent, just as we hopefully are doing so that they may enjoy God's gifts to his children too.