

God loves to party! Now I'm not talking about binge drinking or some debaucherous party atmosphere from *Animal House*, but rather God's desire to celebrate in love and joy! If you notice carefully in the Gospel today, there is a striking commonality among all of the three parables that Jesus tells His listeners. In today's Gospel, our Lord Jesus tells three parables about God's mercy and in the climax of each parable when God finds and embraces the sinner with His mercy and forgives them, God's immediate reaction is to ***party—to celebrate and rejoice!***

In the climax of the first parable of the "Lost Sheep," notice that the reaction of God when He finds what He has lost, in other words, the sinner who has gone astray, revolves around ***partying*** and a ***celebration***: "And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, 'Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.' I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over ***one sinner who repents*** than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance."

In the second parable of the “Lost Coin,” when God finds what He has lost—when the sinner who has gone astray is found and embraced by the Lord, we hear, “And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.’ In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

Finally, in the third parable, that beautiful parable popularly known as “The Prodigal Son,” when the rebellious younger son returns to his father after selfishly squandering everything on a life of dissipation, we hear that the father’s immediate reaction is *not anger, but love and joy!* The merciful father who eagerly runs to his son out of compassion and embraces him orders his servants saying, “Quickly bring the finest robe and put it on him; put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Take the fattened calf and slaughter it. Then let us celebrate with a feast, because this son of mine was dead, and has come to life again; he was lost, and has been found.’ Then the celebration began.”

Brothers and sisters, *God loves to party!* And He loves to party when His children repent and turn away from sin and evil and return to

Him in love with their whole heart and soul. God's desire to celebrate is deeply tied with His desire to forgive and heal us! ***God loves to party precisely because He loves to forgive!*** God loves being merciful to His children—God ***loves forgiving His children!*** ***God never tires of forgiving us!*** ***When God forgives us, He rejoices over us!*** When God forgives, He celebrates! ***When God liberates, He celebrates!***

And notice what our Lord Jesus says in the Gospel today, “I tell you...there will be more joy in heaven ***over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.***” Just think about this powerful statement for a second. This statement reveals a few important truths. First, this reveals the intrinsic and infinite dignity and value of ***every human life!*** ***Every human person is sacred and every human soul is so precious to God!*** Currently there are an estimated 7.7 billion people on the planet! And that doesn't include all of the human beings who lived in the past and it doesn't include all those who will live in the future. So out of the billions of human beings there are and have been, ***if just one human being*** repents, all of Heaven will rejoice!

This is how much God loves us! This is how much God loves the human person! God loves the human race and so when one finite human creature repents and returns to God in love, all of Heaven will rejoice in all of its infinite and eternal splendor! In God's eyes, *we are worth celebrating, most especially* when we repent and return to our merciful Father Who loves us more than we can possibly comprehend! And not only that, but God's mercy and forgiveness are worth celebrating! This is the second truth revealed in Jesus' powerful statement.

Lastly, this statement of Jesus reveals just how important repentance is to God. Nowhere else in the Gospels do we hear Jesus speak so powerfully about Heaven rejoicing than in these parables when our Lord talks about one sinner who repents! God considers repentance and the conversion of heart and mind to be so important *precisely* because it goes to the core of His plan of salvation. This is why God became man in our Lord Jesus Christ: to save us from sin and death—death being a natural consequence of sin.

Now anyone who knows me knows that I love the ocean. It's in my blood—my Lebanese-Australian blood. In fact I love the ocean so

much that I constantly ask myself why I live in PA and not on the ocean near a beach with palm trees and warm weather! Every time I'm at the ocean, I think about many things: especially the beauty and vastness of God's creation, but most prominently the beauty and vastness of God's mercy and love. I truly believe the ocean is a powerful image of God's mercy and love—and you know what: *even the vastness of the ocean doesn't come close to the vastness and infinite nature of God's mercy and love. God's mercy is infinitely larger than the largest ocean on the face of the earth!*

God *is* infinite and endless Mercy! God is Mercy Itself! And so this means that there is absolutely *no sin too great for God's infinite mercy!* Just as the father in the parable of the Prodigal Son is so eager to embrace His repentant son, God is so eager to forgive us! And not only that, but God is so eager to forgive the most horrible sins! When we selfishly go astray in our sinfulness and wander away from God, our Heavenly Father always go in search of us and invites and encourages us to come back to Him with our whole life! When we wallow in our sinfulness and experience deep shame, and possibly refuse to forgive

ourselves, our Heavenly Father pleads with us saying: “My mercy is greater than your sins! Come and receive my mercy! Come and be forgiven! Come and let me heal you by my love and mercy!”

This is why it is so important that we stay close to the Lord through prayer and the sacraments, most especially the Sacrament of Reconciliation, also known as the Sacrament of Penance or Confession. This powerful sacrament of healing is a like a diving board—a diving board into God’s infinite ocean of mercy and love! And when we encounter our merciful Savior in this powerful sacrament and take the plunge into His all-powerful mercy and love through an honest and thorough confession, we are made new again and all of Heaven rejoices!

So as we prepare to worship and receive our Lord Jesus Christ in the Most Holy Eucharist, may we never be afraid to take the plunge into God’s infinite mercy and love and return home to our Father Who eagerly searches for us and loves us more than we can possible imagine!