

One night this past July the Royals held onto the lead through eight innings of play when Jeff Montgomery came out to pitch the top of the ninth. Monty pitched poorly and gave up several runs. The Royals lost the lead. But in the bottom of the ninth, we scored several more runs and won the game. Baseball has a peculiar rule concerning pitchers' victories. Since Montgomery pitched the inning when his team came from behind to win, he gets credit for the victory, not the pitcher who controlled the other team for eight innings. Sometimes the person you think least deserves the credit gets it. It happens in baseball. It happens in life. It happens in the reign of God.

Jesus tells a parable about two sons. One says, "I won't work in the vineyard," but then does. The other says, "I will work," but then does not. It's a hypothetical case; I'm sure none of you parents has ever had children like that. Jesus asks which one did the will of the father. Well, neither one is much to brag about. But the first actually worked in the vineyard, so they all give him credit. Jesus compares the situation to two types of children of God. Tax collectors and prostitutes are like the first child; they say "No," to God, but hearing and accepting the teaching of Jesus, they say yes. The chief priests and elders standing in the temple with Jesus are like the second son; they say "Yeah I'll help," but then they squander their opportunity. Jesus concludes that tax collectors and prostitutes will enter the reign of God ahead of Israel's false leaders. Incidentally, this argument took place in the temple, right next to the recently opened tunnel which has touched off riots in the Holy Land just this week. Whole nations struggle to do the will of God.

This parable does not simply intend to criticize the factions of a religious war nor to straighten out the kids when they don't do their chores. It's directed against the jealousy we feel when we think we are God's special chosen ones, but someone else is getting credit. Catholics often feel like this. We badmouth another parish because of their money, their athletes, or their Mass. We take pride in Catholic schools, but we put down public schools. We love the progress in our church, but we complain that it's becoming too Protestant, as if those who share baptism with us are children of the devil. Some against whom we harbor prejudices do God's will better than we do. A man had two sons. Both were sinners, but one was saved.

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