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# The Parish Paper

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The Second Sunday after Epiphany

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## JENNIFER AND JULES

Of the seventeen years I have been here, this past week at St. John's has been one of the most difficult I can remember. Two funerals, one for a young lady nineteen years old, and the other for a gentleman ninety years of age, swept down on us with a wave of heartache and sorrow.

At nineteen, Jennifer Ross was just beginning to enter adulthood. She was a graduate of Savannah Country Day School and a sophomore at Mercer University. On December 24th, the night she was shot in an armed robbery, she was making her way home from the Cotillion where she had been presented by her parents. After the best efforts of doctors and nurses, she died a week later.

Jules, Dr. Jules Victor, Jr., died just several days later, after a courageous battle with cancer for the last couple of years. He was a Vestryman Emeritus of St. John's and a pillar of good will in the parish. As a physician, having cared for others his entire professional life, he died at home in the precious care of his family.

I cannot help but reflect on the difference of these two lives and deaths. They speak so plainly about the chances and changes of this mortal life.

Jennifer was a lovely young woman. When I saw her in the hospital I could not help but tell her that. Even in the hospital bed, she was positively radiant. Her large, expressive, brown eyes and sweet smile were strong, even in the midst of severe discomfort.

She was a devoted teacher in the church school, always willing to contribute where she was needed. Along with her family, she was faithful in her prayers and worship. She was full of life, and showed every expectation that her future would be bright and happy.

But a young man, moved by monstrous pride and greed, chose to steal from her, and when she resisted, he chose to pull the trigger. I will not say that he took her life. No one can snatch the children of God from his hand. Jennifer's parents, and we all, want justice to be done, but thankfully they have not given themselves to hatred, and neither should we.

Dr. Victor lived a full life. His contributions to medicine were enormous. He began the first practice of Internal Medicine in Savannah. He helped found Memorial Medical Center and the Medical Arts Physician Center, and he taught in the nursing schools of both Memorial Hospital and St. Joseph's. I remember him praising a number of parishioners who were nurses and who had been his students. He did much to advance the prevention, diagnosis, and care of those afflicted with diabetes. In the end he fought bravely against cancer, living two years more than he was thought to have.

Around the parish, Jules was a rock of patience and judicious advice. He was never given to petty pride. I shall always treasure our brief trips to the diocesan convention, the constant laughter, afternoon drinks, Noni's elaborate snacks, and our quiet moments of saying Morning Prayer together.

Jules lived ninety years, Jennifer nineteen. In retrospect, each one seems too short. That is how the precious moments of life always seem when they are no more. And yet, even now, they are not far from us. We shall continue to remember and to cherish the distinct individuality of these two people.

They were, and are now, only what and who they were meant to be. They do not share their unique qualities with anyone else. Jennifer is and shall remain Jennifer, and Jules, Jules. They were themselves, and are still, not because of their own making, but because of the kind making of them by God. And so it is through his almighty purpose, his immeasurable goodness, and his "property always to have mercy," that these two persons came to be, and shall always be, what and who they are. As such, Jennifer and Jules are incomparable gifts to us.

Whenever I celebrate Holy Communion, at the Sursum Corda, I remember those who are especially dear to me, who are now with the Lord. "Therefore with Angels and Archangels and with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name..." It has been my own practice to remember members of my family, dear members of this parish, especially William, and now also Jennifer and Jules. It is a dear and precious moment of recollection for me, but it is not sentimental.

At that moment I recall what is the hope of every Christian, that we shall find the chances and changes of this mortal life only a brief journey to the heavenly Jerusalem. And there we, with the Saints and Martyrs and all the company of heaven, shall participate in life eternal, in that happiness of the kingdom which has no end, and in which we find our individual lives, all that we were and are meant to be, completely and utterly realized, fulfilled, and blessed.

After all, this is what Jesus means. He is the realization of man at home in heaven. He is the union of God and man, and through him, his perfect life, his satisfaction of the Father's justice, his pure offering of love, he grants us to inherit the kingdom with him, and by the Holy Ghost at work in us, Jesus, along with his Father, brings us into everlasting joy.

Sometimes it may be hard for us really to believe that the life of heaven is better than this one now. But it is. And if so, we all want it. We want life as we know it, so good and true and beautiful, but

without sin, shame, and death. It is the life of Jesus we want. And therefore we lift up our hearts, and "...with all the company of heaven, we laud and magnify thy glorious name..." And Jennifer and Jules rejoice, and the victory is ours.

**The Rev'd. Dr. Michael L. Carreker**

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