

Of spilled juice, and joy

My younger son and I are shopping at Ikea, wandering through aisles of furniture and pretending we are on a wild adventure. On our way out, we stop to buy bags of frozen Swedish meatballs, and I call my younger sister to see if she wants anything.

She doesn't want any meatballs, but she would love a bottle of lingonberry juice.

Well, that's easy enough.

We snag a bottle of juice, pay at the register and head for the car.

I carry the juice carefully - it's in a glass bottle - and pack it in the car so it won't fall and break.

I'm mentally patting myself on the back, so pleased with myself for calling to ask my sister what she wanted. Now I have a bottle of her favorite juice.

Weeks pass, then months. The juice sits in my kitchen, waiting for its trip to my sister's house. She and I talk almost every day. We even see each other a few times. Yet every time we do, I forget the juice. It sits in our house, awaiting its final destination.

And then one day I'm taking my children to see my parents, and I think of the juice.

Perfect. I'll take it to their house, and my sister can pick it up next time she's there.

Again, I pack it carefully in the car. We drive to my parents' house, and my sons jump out to sprint to the door.

"Just as well," I think. "Now I can carry everything in myself."

I start pulling things out of the car, including the juice. And somehow - and I don't know how - the bottle slips out of my hands, drops to the driveway, and smashes into exactly 38 pieces.

I just stand there and stare at it, watching the river of sweet red juice run down toward the street.

It's just juice. It didn't cost much. I'm not even sure how many cups of juice you can get out of one bottle. But I'm still disappointed. It feels like a waste of juice, of money, of time and of the care I took in bringing it safely here - well, until I dropped it in the end.

What a mess.

Out of every tragedy, of course, comes some glimmer of hope. For me, in this moment, that hope comes through my father, who appears suddenly in the doorway of his house. He sees me standing there, looking helplessly at the mess I have made in his driveway. He grabs a broom and comes outside to clean up the shards of glass. There's no judgment and no criticism. He doesn't even gently tease me. He's just a father who sees a problem his daughter has created and handles it without complaint.

How many times has my father done that for me? And how many times has my heavenly Father done the same? I make messes by accident and on purpose over and over and over, and God continuously offers forgiveness and strength and peace.

In June we celebrate the Sacred Heart, Jesus' divine love for humanity - a love that burns for us. It's a love that is given unconditionally, without expectation. Seeing Jesus' love for us is not just inspiring and humbling. It's also a love that calls us to care for one another with that same passion. It's a love that I see in my parents and that I try to emulate in my love for my husband and children.

“Do not let the past disturb you,” Mother Teresa said. “Just leave everything in the Sacred Heart and begin again with joy.”

So we begin again with joy. And one day in the not-too-distant future, I will travel back to Ikea for more lingon-berry juice. Only this time I plan to bring it successfully to its destination.