



March 31, 2019 [Lk. 15: 1-3, 11-32](#) & Joshua 5: 9-12

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[On the parable of the prodigal son:](#) Pope Francis

ENTERING THE SCENE:

Lost and found. The theme of today's reading. Jesus presents us with an image of God that refuses to let anyone or anything go without endless offers of restoration. When we too "come to our senses" we realize that life in one long progression of offers of unconditional love. We must reject all those images of God that are smaller than this one if we are to accept Jesus' understanding of God. Like the people in this parable, he wants everyone to "rejoice with me" that the one who thought they were lost, were never truly lost to God, and only lost in their too small understanding of God.

[LK 15:1-32](#)

1. The **tax collectors** and the **sinners** were all gathering around Jesus to hear him, 2. at which the **Pharisees** and the **scribes** murmured, "This man welcomes **sinners** and eats with them." 3 Then he addressed this parable to them:

"11 A man had two **sons**. [12] The **younger** of them said to his **father**, '**Father**, give me the **share** of the **estate** that is coming to me.' So the **father** divided up the

property.13 Some days later this **younger son** collected all his **belongings** and went off to a **distant land**, where he **squandered** his money on **dissolute** living. 14 After he had **spent** everything a great **famine** broke out in that country and he was in **dire** need.15 So he **attached** himself to one of the **propertied class** of the place, who sent him to his farm to take care of the **pigs**.16 He **longed** to fill his belly with the husks that were **fodder** for the pigs, but no one made a move to give him anything.17 Coming to his **senses** at last, he said: 'How many **hired hands** at my **father's** place have more than enough to eat, while here I am **starving**!18 I will **break away** and **return** to my **father**, and say to him, "**Father**, I have **sinned** against God and against you;19 I no longer **deserve** to be called your **son**. Treat me like one of your **hired hands**.'"20 With that he set off for his **father's** house. While he was still a long way off, his **father** caught **sight** of him and was **deeply moved**. He ran out to meet him, threw his arms around his neck, and kissed him.21 The **son** said to him, '**Father**, I have **sinned** against God and against you; I no longer deserve to be called your **son**.' 22 The **father** said to his **servants**: 'Quick! Bring out the finest **robe** and put it on him; put a **ring** on his finger and **shoes** on his feet. 23 Take the **fatted calf** and kill it. Let us eat and **celebrate**24 because this **son** of mine was **dead** and has come back to **life**. He was **lost** and is **found**.' Then the **celebrations** began.

25 "Meanwhile the **elder son** was out on the land. As he neared the house on his way home, he heard the sound of music and dancing.26 He called one of the **servants** and asked him the reason for the dancing and the music.27 The **servant** answered, "Your **brother** is home, and your **father** has killed the **fatted calf** because he has him back in good health.' 28 The **son** grew angry at this and would not go in; but his **father** came out and began to **plead** with him. 29 "He said in reply to his **father**: 'For years now I have **slaved** for you. I never **disobeyed** one of your **orders**, yet you never gave me so much as a **kid goat** to **celebrate** with my friends. 30 Then, when this **son** of yours returns after having gone through **your property** with loose women, you kill the **fatted calf** for him.' 31 "'My **son**,' replied the **father**, 'you are with me always, and everything I have is yours. 32 But we had to **celebrate** and rejoice! This **brother** of yours was **dead**, and has come back to **life**. He was **lost**, and is **found**.'"

DISCUSSION QUESTION: This parable offers each of us an invitation. Mine says, can you come in and dance? What does yours?

PRAYER: Lord, when I am confronted by this parable I hope that I see in the mirror the child that came to themselves and stumbled home into your welcoming arms. But I must confess, more often than not, if I am truthful, I see the resentful one who grumbles about your unconditional love for the sinner. Help me as I find the strength to come in to the party and dance. Amen.

WORD STUDY AND QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

COLLECTORS / SINNERS: Tax collectors and sinners were examples of the wrong kind of living. They were hovering around Jesus, listening to his teachings and watching what he was doing.

Why do I think they were doing this?

PHARISEES / SCRIBES: Pharisees and scribes were examples of the right kind of living. They were also hovering around Jesus, listening to his teachings and watching what he was doing.

Why do I think they were doing this?

LOSES / LOST / FOUND / FINDS: Finding and loosing seems to be the main issue in this chapter of Luke. Jesus teaches that God will stop at nothing to search out what is missing and bring it to God's self.

Do I trust that this truth includes everyone? What new information about God do these examples reveal?

JOYFULLY / REJOICE / REJOICING: Joy and rejoicing is the proper response to the restoration of wholeness in whatever was fragmented. This is a God's eye view of how things should be in Jesus' teaching. God does not take pleasure in the death of the wicked in Jesus' teachings.

Have I ever experienced the response of a group when their "black sheep" finally responded to unconditional care? Did anyone resent all that extra attention that this 'sinner' received? Can I think of a story or joke that included a deathbed conversion? If so, are people rejoicing or complaining that the person "got off easy"?

SON: A person's son or sons were the most important thing in the world. They were the parent's assurance of a kind of immortality. Without a son, it was as if you had never lived.

What promises immortality to me today? What could happen that would leave me feeling that I might have never lived?

YOUNGER: The younger son was in an inferior position in Jesus' day. He could only take his inheritance at his father's death and carve out a place for himself in the world.

Why do I think the younger brother chose not to wait until the appropriate time to have the use of his inheritance?

FATHER: The father of a family stood next in line with God in the power structure of Jesus' day. He had absolute authority to make decisions for himself and his family, conditioned only by the laws of God.

Was the father within his rights in waiving the usual process by giving the younger son his inheritance early? If so, why? If not, why?

SHARE: The oldest son got possession of the land with a double portion of the estate. The younger sons got one portion. This insured that the land always stayed within the family.

Do I think this arrangement was fair? What problems can I see inherent in this way of doing things? Would I like to be the oldest or younger of the brothers? Why?

ESTATE / PROPERTY/ PROPRTIED CLASS: Each of these words establish worldly possessions and therefore power.

What are my feelings about these words? Compare the feelings around the words, estate, property, and propertied class. Do they have different feelings? Why?

DIVIDED: To divide is to separate something that was once one.

Did the system of division set the brothers up for conflict? Are there any systems in my life that set me up for conflict now? What are they? Can any of them be changed?

BELONGINGS: Our belongings can take on a sense of our identity. We belong to a family, a country, a job, a church, etc.

To what or whom do I belong?

DISTANT LAND A distant land is somewhere where we can just start over. Much of our identity is left behind, and we bring only who we are. Sometimes it is the only way to really find out who WE are apart from all our belongings.

Have I ever gone to a "far country" to find myself? How did it go? If I have never gone, do I wish I could?

SQUANDERED: To squander something is to recklessly and thoughtlessly spend one's love, time, wealth, or whatever one possesses.

How did the sons actions help him 'come to his senses'? Do I sometimes have to squander something in order to get my priorities straightened out?

DISSOLUTE: To be dissolute is to engage excessively in wanton pleasures.

How is this Lent helping me to identify the places that might be thought to be dissolute?

SPENT: Something is spent when it is used up. We spend in order to gain something else.
How have these weeks of Lent been spent by me so far? Have I gained anything from this spending?

FAMINE: A famine is a time of not enough-ness.
What famine (if any) am I experiencing recently?

DIRE: A dire situation is a time of desperation. It is a period of radical choices, often of a life threatening nature.
Why does it often takes dire circumstances before a person faces the truth about something?

ATTACHED: The son attached himself to an owner of pigs. This showed how dire the man's situation was, and how low he had to sink in order to "bottom out".
Why do I think a person has to hit bottom before a change can occur?

PIGS: Pigs were an abomination to Jews. They are strictly forbidden to eat pork, since the animal was thought to be unclean.
What 'unclean' reality would serve as an example for this kind of situation today? What kind of things do people say to indicate that a person has sunk about as low as a person can get?

LONGED: To long for something is to remember and value something that one once had but now has lost.
Have I identified any longing in your spiritual reflections during this Lent? What is it?

FODDER: Fodder is feed for animal life. It symbolizes how the son has sunk to a lower life form. Even this was not offered to this desperate man.
How do I feel about the fact that no one offered this poor man even the fodder? If they had, do I suppose he would have been spared having to return home in disgrace? Would that have been a favor to him?

SENSES: Our senses are the physical ways we have to learn things about our world.
What sense did the son use to come to his senses?

HIREN HANDS: Hired hands are free people who work for a wage.
Why do I think the son thought his father might employ him as a hired hand?

STARVING: To starve is to be on the brink of death because of lack of nutrition.
Was the lack of food was the only thing the man lacked?

BREAK AWAY: To break away implies a forceful removal of something from somewhere.
What did the son break away from?

RETURN: To return is to turn again to something.
What does the son turn to?

DESERVE: To deserve is to merit something. The son recognized that he did not merit anything.
Why was this necessary for his return?

SIGHT: Sight is the ability to see. The father faithfully went out to see if the son was returning?
What was the father looking for?

DEEPLY MOVED: The father was deeply moved by the love he had for his son and the fact that he was alive and home again. This would have been seen as very strange by most men of his day and age.
Have I ever been deeply moved by the love I found for someone, even when they didn't deserve it? How did it feel?

SERVANTS: Servants are not free. Unlike hired hands they owed their lives to those who owned them. It was a step above slave, but not much of a step.
What do I think the servants thought when they witnessed to the return of the son?

ROBE / RING / SHOES: All these items signified full status of a child of a father.
Have I ever been given a robe, ring, and shoes upon returning to my senses?

FATTED CALF: The fatted calf was the offering most often used on solemn religious festivals. It was the choicest offering and commonly used to sacrifice to God.

What does this say about the father's understanding of his sons return?

CELEBRATE: To celebrate is to take time to rejoice in someone or something?

How have I celebrated Lent so far? Have I taken time to reflect on being a son or daughter of a God who loves me unconditionally?

DEAD: to be dead is to have no life in you. Before the son returned, he was facing death.

How can a life of unconscious squandering of time and effort deaden me?

LIFE have life is to be able to experience and reflect on this experience.

What is giving me life this Lent?

LOST: thing is lost when it cannot be found.

Have I lost anything that needs to be found in my relationship with the father?

ELDER SON: An elder son was assured his status in life. It was given to him. He had a role to fill and no options to deviate from that role.

Do I think this had anything to do with his response to his brother's return? How?

PLEAD: It would have been very, very uncommon for a father to plead with a son. He would simply assert his authority and compel the son to do what was wanted.

What does this tell us about this father?

SLAVED: The elder son saw himself as a slave.

Why do I think he felt that way?

DISOBEYED: To disobey is to refuse to recognize an authority. The elder son never did this.

Did the younger son disobey? Why do I think the elder son used this term to describe his relationship with the father? What does this say about his understanding of his father?

ORDERS: Orders are mandates to perform an action by someone in authority.

Did this freedom from orders help him as he made his decision to return?

KID GOAT: A kid goat was not nearly as important as the fatted calf.

What was the elder brother implying by using this example?

YOURS: The elder brother is in effect separating himself from his brother by saying that the returning son was not recognized as belonging to him as well.

In my judging others, do I separate myself from others that God loves? Have I ever been judged by another as not good enough? What is this parable saying about God? About judging? About loving? How can this parable help me to become free enough to really see the God of Jesus?

PARALLEL TEXTS: Lk. 15: 2-7 // Mt. 9: 10-13; Lk. 19: 7; **Lk. 15:27** // 2 Sam. 28:24;

OTHER TEXTS OF THE WEEK: Jos. 5: 9-12; [Ps. 34: 2-7](#); 2 Cor. 5: 17-21; Lk. 15: 1-3, 11-32;

Revised Common Lectionary: Jos. 5: 9-12; [Ps. 32](#); 2 Cor. 5: 16-21; Lk. 15: 1-3, 11-32

SUPPORTIVE INFORMATION:

But, of course, the parable does not stop with the first son's adventure. It moves on to the other. And here we find another story altogether. We find the resentment that sometimes fills the heart of the virtuous. Why should someone who doesn't even try to behave be saved? What about me? I have lived my life being careful and avoiding any need for rescue. Doesn't that count? I think of this as the kind of sin reserved to the religious-minded, those who have done their best to have lived as they ought to live. Only good people are subject to this kind of temptation. [Fr. Robert Beck](#)

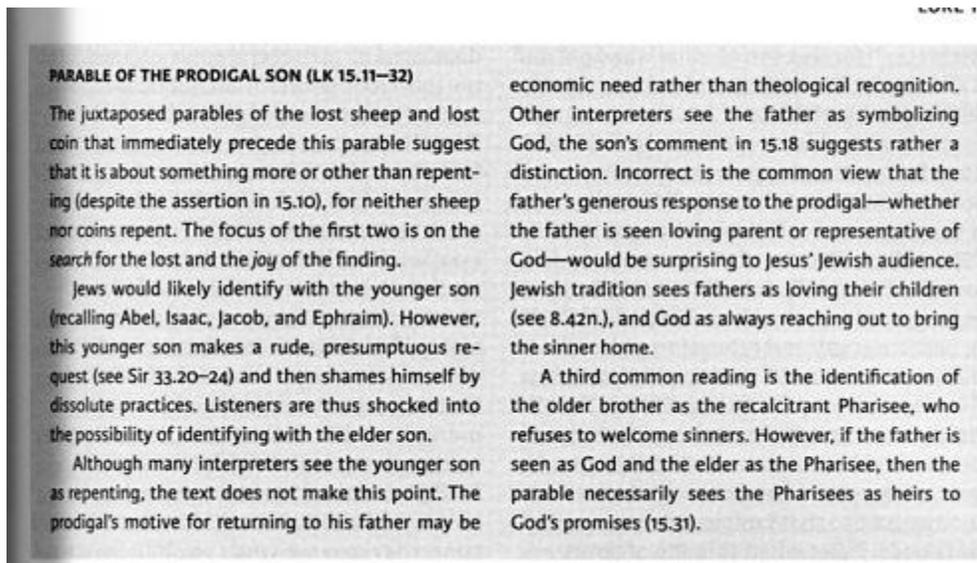
[For information on the culture of the day: http://www.liturgy.slu.edu/4LentC030616/theword_cultural.html](http://www.liturgy.slu.edu/4LentC030616/theword_cultural.html)

How do we welcome home our lost brothers and sisters? By running out to them, embracing them, and kissing them. By clothing them with the best clothes we have and making them our honored guests. By offering them the best food and inviting friends and

family for a party. And, most important of all, by not asking for excuses or explanations, only showing our immense joy that they are with us again. (See Luke 15:20-24). That is being perfect as our heavenly Father is perfect. It is forgiving from the heart without a trace of self-righteousness, recrimination, or even curiosity. The past is wiped out. What counts is the here and now, where all that fills our hearts is gratitude for the homecoming of our brothers and sisters. Henri Nouwen

Forgiveness is one of the most radically free things a human being can do. When we forgive, we have to let go of our own feelings, our own ego, our own offended identity, and find our identity at a completely different level—the divine level. I even wonder if it is possible to know God at all—outside of the mystery of forgiveness. Richard Rohr

Everyone must be separated, leave home, exercise their freedom and make mistakes that bring them to their knees in failure more than once. The trials of each stage are different but equally real and equally crucial. During each stage there must be a return home, and a humble acceptance of the love and forgiveness that have been always there, but which we have not been able to perceive. It is the shepherding function of the church to help persons at every age to look with equal honesty at the failure of their trials and their values, and at the new dimensions now revealed in the love of God through Jesus Christ. Seward Hiltner. [The Christian Shepherd](#).



Levine, Amy-Jill & Brettler, Marc Zvi. [The Jewish Annotated New Testament](#). NY. Oxford Univ. Press. 2011 Page 133:

I think it is noteworthy that in this parable the father doesn't mention any guilt because he doesn't see his son as guilty. Also he never says, "I forgive you." To have said that would have implied that the father had previously made a judgment against his son, which the father never did. The father never judged, never condemned or cut off his wayward son.

Raub, John Jacob. [Who Told You That You Were Naked?](#) Crossroad Pub. New York. 1992. Page 127.

The impasse experienced by the brother of the Prodigal Son upon the latter's

return home is another expression of this process (of integration). The killing of the fatted calf, the merrymaking, his father's rejoicing and words, "My son was dead and is alive again, he was lost and is found", Luke 15:24, now apply in reverse order to the older brother who had stayed home and thought he had inherited his brother's qualifications just by filling the gap created by his absence. The older brother was the one who had been found, but is now lost. His rise to prominence and his newly discovered identity had only been accomplished by his brother's fall to despair and ignominy. Now he himself is sinking into anonymity, despite his father's reassurance that he had always been with him, and that whatever he had was commonly held by both brothers. He is not satisfied by the initial unity pointed to by the father's words. He refuses to come to terms with his own identity independently from that of his brother; by refusing to celebrate his brother's homecoming, he distances himself irreparably from his Father.

Lambros Kamperidis. [The Other...My Brother](#). Parabola, Summer 1994. Page 8.

There is another element to this lesson. When God provides this bounty of good things for the people, he does it for people who are not all that good. They are grumbling and complaining, speaking out against God. God does not hold that against them. God loves without condition. God gives to them in spite of their lack of goodness. This is a lesson that is important for us to learn also. We do not deserve what God gives to us. We are sinners. In spite of that, God continues to pour forth blessings upon us. God never stops loving us, no matter what we do or how we act. That is a tremendous change that must come about in our own thinking and in our own hearts. Bp. Thomas Gumbleton.

Here is the Good News proclaimed by our Lord Jesus Christ:

Jesus began to teach in parables. He said:

The kingdom of God is like two brothers who were called by God to give up all they had and serve humanity. The older responded to the call generously; though he had to wrench his heart from his family and the girl he loved and dreamed of marrying. He eventually went off to a distant land where he spent himself in the service of the poorest of the poor. A persecution arose in that country and he was arrested, falsely accused, tortured, and put to death.

And the Lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You gave me a thousand talents' worth of service, I shall now give you a billion, billion talent's worth of reward. Enter into the joy of your Lord."

The younger boy's response to the call was less than generous. He decided to ignore it and go ahead and marry the girl he loved. He enjoyed a happy married life, his business prospered, and he became famous and rich. Occasionally, he would give alms to the poor.

And when it was his turn to die, the Lord said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have given me ten talent's worth of service. I shall now give you a billion, billion talents' worth of reward. Enter into the joy of your Lord!"

The older boy was surprised when he heard that his brother was to get the same reward as he. And he was pleased. He said, "Lord, knowing this as I do, if I were to be born and live my life again, I would still do exactly what I did for you."

The Song of the Bird by Anthony de Mello.

THE LOST SON by Mark Littleton

The story begins with a boy gone bad. Faces in the audience light up.

The boy takes full advantage of his father, an ancient, kindly man. He wants the inheritance. Everything. Faces grimace. "An upstart," someone says. "Horsewhip him...teach him some manners." Some young men smile, but they all wait, eyes fixed on the face of Jesus.

The father lets him go after giving, everything, the whole inheritance: the gold, the silver, the favorite horse, the treasured cloak, the ring. Faces show surprise. "This father's a fool," someone whispers. "The son's a cheat." but they bend forward to hear.

He spends it all on prostitutes, wine, gambling, the best hotels. "Loose living." And the old man looks down at his friend and winks. "He should have invested it," he says. "That's the wise way." "But this one's a fool," another says. Heads nod in agreement.

Soon the boy hits bottom. Nothing left. He ends up slopping pigs. Faces flinch, stunned. But some smile. "He got what he deserved," an old man says. "This is a good story."

But then the boy remembers home. The feasts. The plenty. The laughter. He sits and weeps, his head in his hands. He decides to return, to ask for a bed in the barn. Someone laughs. "A twist," he says. Faces show intrigue.

The boy came home, hands gritty, legs scarred. He is penniless, ragged, wasted, a scarecrow. Listeners are laughing now. Revenge, they think. The disowning.

But no. the old man sees him on the road from his chair on the porch where he has sat, waiting each day. He recognizes the walk, the long hair, the shoulders. He jumps up and stumbles out to him, his heart thumping, his eyes wet. He runs to the boy, while the boy stands his head down. The old man gathers him into his arms and holds him long, so long, and he weeps. Faces are stern now, their eyes slit. "This father's a fool." they murmur. But still they wait.

The boy begins his speech, but the old man has suddenly gone deaf. He throws a cloak over the boy's rags, pulls off his last and best ring, slides it onto the boy's finger, and then begins calling for servants. "Kill the fatted calf," he shouts. "We'll have a feast! Faces are hard now. Many shake their heads.

A bitter elder son refuses even to speak to his lost brother. He stomps off, angry cursing. Some faces nod. But most are gray, their lips pressed white. Their eyes flame. Some stand up to go.

Nothing has gone right in this story. They stalk off. "A bad story," one says. "Stupid," another says. "Not one of His best."

But some from the crowd linger-- a prostitute, a tax gatherer, a thief, a liar. They glance at Jesus furtively. They wait. Then they approach shyly, slowly. One by one they fall at His feet and weep for joy.

Taken from: Moody, October 1984. Pages C 116-117

Reconciliation touches the most hidden parts of our souls. God gave reconciliation to us as a ministry that never ends. Henri Nouwen

We have all probably heard the parable of the prodigal son so often that we feel there is very little of something new to be gotten from it. But there are many interesting facets that might be overlooked. A father was discouraged from distributing his inheritance during his lifetime, but if he did, he was entitled to enough to live off of. Because the younger son took and wasted his share, he disgraced his father even more. The older son made no attempt at the time or later to reconcile the father and younger son, which was a cultural requirement. The younger son finally sunk so low that he ended up feeding and caring for pigs, the absolute lowest point a Jew could reach. He was even ready to eat the food of the pigs, but the carob pods were unfit for human consumption. He decided to return home as a "hired servant" in order to pay back some of what he had squandered. Michael Glotzbach

Impatient to put his mark on the world, perhaps tired of waiting for his older brother to make his move, the younger brother asks for his portion the estate, to venture forth into the glamorous and beckoning world. In the time-honored way of such stories, it is there in that alien world that he finds himself, if not his fortune. His discovery is nonetheless momentous. He discovers his strengths by discovering his limits.

The journey outward, venturing into the wide, wild world, is also the journey inward, into the unknown territories of himself, his own personality, his own spirit. What he finds there brings him back home.

It is the journey's end that proves significant. On returning, he is not even allowed to finish the little speech that he's prepared. His father interrupts him, and begins the welcoming celebration. It is because he knew this would happen, at some level in his knowing, that he was convinced to return. He knew that his father would receive him. What surprised him is the extent of the rejoicing. That he did not expect. Fr. Robert Beck

On retreat I once wrote in my journal, “How good of you, God, to make truth a relationship instead of an idea. Now there is room between you and me for growth, for conversation, for exception, for the infinite understandings created by intimacy, for the possibility to give back and to give something to You—as if I could give anything back to You. “You offer me the possibility to undo, to please, to apologize, to change, to surrender, and to grow. There’s room for stages and for suffering, for mutual passion and mutual pity. There’s room for mutual everything.” This is good religion, worthy of free, intelligent, and mature people! Richard Rohr

Unbelievably, this parable was never heard liturgically on a Sunday in the Catholic Church until after 1970 and the Vatican II reforms. And when I did hear it in catechism class, for some reason my teachers always left out Jesus' original reason for telling the parable: the older brother. Those who stubbornly support his position are the people Jesus is trying to reach. They triggered Jesus' parable. This hard-working, fair-minded son wants to create a world in which everyone is treated equally, a world in which everyone gets his or her "just desserts." Yet Jesus wants us to go beyond equality, to always act with love. If we, imitating the psalmist, strive to relate to a God who "delivered (us) from all (our) fears," we must also imitate God's actions of generously loving those around us. [Roger Karban](#)

SUGGESTED READINGS:

Links to all the books mentioned in this guide are on The Ark web site: www.theark1.com

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle C 2012.. Pgs.65-70.

Beck, Robert. Sunday Homilies: Cycle B 2007. Pgs. 66-69.

The voice of despair says, “I sin over and over again. After endless promises to myself and others to do better next time, I find myself back again in the old dark places. Forget about trying to change. I have tried for years. It didn’t work and it never will work. It is better that I get out of people’s way, be forgotten, no longer around, dead.”

This strangely attractive voice takes all uncertainties away and puts an end to the struggle. It speaks unambiguously for the darkness and offers a clear-cut negative identity.

But Jesus came to open my ears to another voice that says, “I am your God, I have molded you with my own hands, and I love what I have made. I love you with a love that has no limits, because I love you as I am loved. Do not run away from me. Come back to me—not once, not twice, but always again. You are my child. . . . I am your God—the God of mercy and compassion, the God of pardon and love, the God of tenderness and care. Please do not say that I have given up on you, that I cannot stand you anymore, that there is no way back. It is not true. I so much want you to be with me. I so much want you to be close to me. I know all your thoughts. I hear all your words. I see all your actions. And I love you because you are beautiful, made in my own image, an expression of my most intimate love. Do not judge yourself. Do not condemn yourself. Do not reject yourself. Let my love touch the deepest, most hidden corners of your heart and reveal to you your own beauty, a beauty that you have lost sight of, but that will become visible to you again in the light of my mercy. Come, come, let me wipe your tears, and let my mouth come close to your ear and say to you, ‘I love you, I love you, I love you.’ ” Henri Nouwen