

COME BACK . . .

On a blustery fall day when the wind was blowing the leaves away my toddler grandsons Josh and Zack shouted out, “Come back! Come back!” It was hard for them to accept that the leaves they had been having so much fun playing in weren’t going to be there anymore.

I can remember dropping off my oldest son at college, giving him a hug and crying all the way home. I was going to miss him; it’s even harder now that he and his family live 500 miles away. Each time we visit and have to say goodbye our hugs are tighter. That embrace needs to carry us over to the next time we are together.

When my dad was in the navy in World War II being apart from my mom was very painful for him and he wrote tender letters describing how he longed for her. In one he described how other sailors were partying and running around with women. He stayed behind. “How could I do that when I have you to return home to?” he wrote. It was obvious that the distance carved a deep hole in his heart.

When we get too busy or turn away, I think that in some ways God must be like Josh, Zack, my dad, and me and be pained by our absence. One of my favorite Lenten songs “Hosea” by Benedictine Gregory Norbet captures this mood:

*Come back to me with all your heart.
Don't let fear keep us apart...
Long have I waited for your coming home to me
and living deeply our new life.*

God aches for our lingering and spending time just being there. How could this be possible? The God who fashioned creation out of nothingness, who paints the leaves in autumn and coaxes the flowers from the earth in spring—the all-powerful God of the universe misses us?

Jesus tells us this is true many times in his ministry. He speaks of the lost sheep, the lost coin and gives us the heart-wrenching picture of the father of the prodigal son constantly searching the landscape for his lost child. How great must be his heartache. Ask anyone who has a missing relative. Will there be a letter today, an email, a phone call? Each day the empty seat at the table is a constant reminder of the loss. It’s as if there truly is a hole in the heart that only that person can fill. Could it be that God’s heart has holes that only we can fill?



There are lots of things that seem to get in the way of our reaching out to God. There’s guilt, fear, shame, busyness, anger, pain, disappointment, disillusionment. Sometimes the gap between us and God seems too wide to cross. Yet Paul reminds us in Romans that nothing can separate us from the love of God—absolutely nothing.

This Holy Year of Mercy is an invitation to “come back” and to be welcomed home and snuggled in the heart of God who loves us beyond imagining. God loves us so much that God wants us to become intimately united. In John 15 Jesus describes that intimacy through the metaphor of the vine and the branches. “Remain in me” he says 11 times in the first few verses. It is an almost plaintive plea. “Stay with me. Don’t go away.”

God wants to be in an intimate relationship with us. Can anything be better than that?

—Angela Anno, Pastoral Associate