

## **SCREEN: Priest hearing confession image**

I was looking at my calendar and realized that between now and Easter,  
I'm going to be spending a lot of time in the confessional.

Not going to confession but hearing confessions.

Last week we had our school confessions,  
next Sunday is KidMin confessions, then middle school and  
high school ministry, plus extra hours for the parish.

Now, I'm not complaining. Not at all.

I became a priest to be an instrument of God's mercy and forgiveness.

And whenever someone comes to confession burdened with sin,  
regret and remorse and resolves to start over,

I'm humbled to stand in the place of Christ to say,

*God loves you, forgives you and welcomes you back with open arms.*

I've never seen my role as confessor to be the judge or

to wag a finger at someone;

but to give them the assurance that God's love is endless.

## **SCREEN: blank red background**

We all need to be reconciled when we sin.

I go to confession like everybody else.

But sadly, it's become a forgotten sacrament for so many Catholics.

I think the reason is they hear the word 'confession' and

think only about their sins.

And it's not easy to face one's sins.

But the beauty and power of the sacrament is in the mercy God offers.

I truly believe that until a person accepts God's forgiveness of him/herself,  
they can't truly forgive others.

They'll always end up zeroing in on the faults of others.

## **SCREEN: Everybody Always main screen**

This is week four of our Lenten message series titled, Everybody Always,

based on the book by Bob Goff.

In this series we're focusing on Jesus' call to love as he loves.

Today in the Gospel we were given Jesus' greatest story about God's mercy and love.

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The Prodigal Son is my favorite parable of Jesus.

But that title puts the focus on the son who left home.

In some bibles, this parable is called "The Forgiving Father", which puts the emphasis on his mercy and love.

The family in the parable was rich:

they lived on an estate with servants and there was an inheritance.

Life for this family would have been pretty good....maybe too good.

When the younger son asked his dad for his share of the estate, the father gave it to him, no questions asked.

The son left home and within a short time

blew through his entire inheritance and hit bottom.

At the brink of starvation he took a job tending pigs.

And it was at this point that he saw the error of his ways.

He decided to head home to confess his sins.

**SCREEN: While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him, and was filled with compassion.**

**He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.**

Now here are my two favorite lines in the whole story:

*While he was still a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was filled with compassion.*

*He ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.*

Every time I hear this I imagine the father standing on his front porch day after day, scanning the horizon, hoping, praying that his son would return.

Finally that day came.

Filled with compassion the father ran to his son, embraced him and kissed him.  
The son confessed but all that mattered to the father was that he had his son back.  
He'd feared he was dead but he was alive and the father welcomed him back with incredible love.  
Had the parable ended there, it would have been an incredible story, but Jesus took it to the next level by giving us the older son's reaction.  
To say he was a little upset would be putting it mildly.  
The older son clearly thought his dad was a pushover who'd been used by his younger brother.  
He was so angry that he refused to attend the feast.  
And the father went out to meet *him*....pleaded with *him*... assured *him* that he has love for all.

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With this parable, Jesus is teaching us about His heavenly Father, saying that God is like the father in the story.  
God's love is unconditional and endless  
and God goes to great lengths to welcome all to the feast of his Kingdom.  
And this message of Jesus drove the religious people of his day crazy.  
Remember how the Gospel today began?  
The Pharisees and scribes complained that Jesus  
*'welcomes sinners and eats with them.'*  
And he did!  
Again and again.  
Jesus ate with people who had blown it,  
people who were not respected,  
people who were seen as the worst examples of godly living:  
tax collectors, and sinners and all manner of people.  
He feasted with those who were hungry for acceptance, mercy and healing.

The self righteous had no room in their hearts for Jesus' message.

With this story it's like Jesus is pulling back the curtain and saying,

*"Tada...here's my Kingdom...a place where sinners are welcomed!*

*Where mercy and forgiveness are always on the menu."*

The Church is like the feast the father in the parable threw for his younger son.

And to be welcomed at the table, one has to love like Jesus loves,

which means loving everybody always.

If you've been following along with this series by reading Bob Goff's book,

you remember his story about the bucket.

It sounded kind of nutty when I read it, but I take him at his word.

Bob confessed that he struggles with patience.

**SCREEN: bucket**

So taking an idea from a children's book he carried

a metal bucket around with him for weeks.

Whenever he found himself getting impatient he'd look at the bucket

and remember that he was to be filling his bucket---filling up his life---with patience.

After several weeks he asked his wife, *"How am I doing?"*

She told him, *"Get a bigger bucket!"*

But the idea is that whatever we fill our lives with becomes our bucket, so to speak.

Make your life all about your career and that's your bucket.

Fill it with judging others, with complaining about

what's wrong with the world, that's your bucket.

Fill your bucket with love and you become love.

In the parable, the son who sinned clearly had a hole in his bucket.

He gorged himself on worldly pleasures and it left him penniless and starving.

His older brother's bucket was filled with rules, regulations, and judgements.

But the father's bucket was overflowing with love and mercy and welcome; it never ran empty.

With this parable, Jesus paints a picture of what the Church should look like.

A place that is wide open and welcome to all, regardless of labels,

regardless of past behavior.

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So which person in the parable do you most relate to?

Depending on what is going on in your life on any given day

you can be any member of the family in the story.

When you allow sin to take you away from God and others, you're the younger son.

When you fall into the mode of judging or shunning others, you're the older son.

When you forgive someone who has wronged you, you're the father.

As a disciple, Jesus' desire is that you become the father

who is generous with his love and welcomes everyone to the feast.

What can you do to become more like the father?

I want to mention one way to grow in love and one way to be more welcoming.

To grow in love, receive God's forgiveness in confession before Easter.

And I know it might have been a long time since your last confession.

Maybe you don't remember how to go.

Don't let either of those things become an obstacle to God's mercy.

**SCREEN: Reconciliation: Saturday 4-4:45pm and April 10 & 17 from 7:30pm-8:30pm**

We offer confessions every Saturday afternoon from 4-4:45pm and

we will have extra hours on the last two Wednesdays of Lent, April 10 & 17 from 7:30-8:30pm.

We always have a sheet to help you through the process.

If you're more comfortable going somewhere else,

every parish offers extra confessions during Lent.

Don't let this Lent end without experiencing the amazing gift of love

God offers you in the Sacrament of Reconciliation.

So that's one powerful way to grow in love.

To become more welcoming, I'm asking you to invite someone to church on Easter Sunday.

**SCREEN: You've been egged screen**

And we've got a fun, creative way for you to invite them!

Next week you'll be able to pick up a bag of Easter eggs and

we'd like you to "egg" their house!

Now, not really egg it, but set up an Easter egg hunt for them in their yard and then attach a door hanger to their front door.

On the door hanger you'll let them know that it was you who 'egged' them and you'll invite them to come with you to whichever Easter Mass you're attending here at St. Pius.

It's a great way to get the whole family involved and give them a sneak peak of the fun we're going to be having here at St. Pius this Easter.

We've got some other surprises up our sleeves for you all too!

So this week, take some time to think and pray about who it is in your life that God is nudging you to invite here this Easter.

For the rest of this season of Lent,

let's commit to be more loving and more welcoming.

Let's hear the voice of God, the Forgiving Father, say to each of us everyday:

*'My child, you are with me always;*

*everything I have is yours.*

*Let us celebrate and rejoice.*

*My mercy helps all come to life again.*

*And with me, all who are lost will be found."* Amen. +