My sister and I buried my mother in December of 1996. She had a long life and had been suffering from various illnesses and medical problems for the last ten years of her life. Eventually, dementia set in, but my sister was determined to keep Mom home until she. There is only the two of us since our beloved sister Gerry, a Sister of St. Joseph, had died unexpectedly years earlier. So, Maryann and I are very close. I celebrated the funeral, and my nieces and nephew and their spouses, and many relatives and friends attended. After the burial and funeral meal, it was about 5:00 pm in the afternoon, and the immediate family was in the home we had grown up in. Maybe you experienced this in your life. We just did not know what to do with ourselves. We weren’t ready to get back to ordinary life or to write thank you notes for those who attended the funeral. We were just empty and sad. Strangely, we decided to watch a movie called *Only the Lonely*. A 1991 one film, popular but not a block buster immediately became a family favorite. Here is brief summary of the *: Danny Muldoon, played by the late John Candy a 38-year-old*[*Chicago*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago)[*policeman*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Chicago_Police_Department)*, still lives with his overbearing*[*Irish*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Irish_American)*mother, Rose Muldoon played by the actress Maureen O’Sullivan. A lonely bachelor, Danny falls in love with Theresa Luna (Ally Sheedy), an introverted, lonely girl who works in her father's*[*funeral home*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Funeral_home)*as a*[*cosmetician*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cosmetician)*. On their first date, he takes her to*[*Comiskey Park*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Comiskey_Park)*and has a picnic on the field. Their courtship eventually becomes very difficult because Rose begins to feel threatened that Theresa is trying to steal her son away; the fact that Theresa is not Irish (she is*[*Sicilian*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sicilian_American)*and*[*Polish*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Polish_American)*) only exacerbates the situation*.

Although we deeply loved and admired our mother, we did see some of her characteristics in Rose in her as we laughed and smiled at the movie. Rose had a doctorate in the application of Irish guilt. I must confess my Mom perhaps had least obtained a masters level of skill in this area. My sister and I often joked which of was the John Candy figure. I saw as myself, although I am far more handsome and far thinner than he, at least in my imagination. She would to me: *are you kidding: You went off to the seminary and I have taken care of Mom for many years and I so glad I did since it was a labor of love. I knew this was true*. No daughter could have been more faithful.

Do you have a favorite movie, song, or novel that you immediately say, that is our family? That is my life story! Today, we hear the parable of the Prodigal Son, which is probably the best and most well-known of all the parable of Jesus. How could we not love this story which is a beyond amazing account of an incredibly loving father who shows a God of unconditional love? In our lives, we may have been or it may have a family member or friend who was the selfish brother/sister who basically says to his father: *I can’t wait for you to die. Give me my share now.* If you hold a mirror to your face, perhaps you have a dark moment of your life where you acted badly toward a parent, a loved one, and said words that could not be taken back. Perhaps, you have sat in the mud with the pigs and longed to eat their food because you had so messed up in some aspect of life. Or, you may have been the patient and loving mother or father who had your heart broken by a son or daughter, and maybe this happened more than once. Yet, you could never stop loving and caring for them. Maybe a former spouse or friend hurt you deeply and the pain never has gone away completely.

Notice the young boy does not come home because he is sorry. No, he goes back to the father because he is hungry. He prepares a script of sorrow so he can at least eat and get a job on the farm, but the elderly father refuses to hear his sorrowing words as he wraps his arms around him, calls for a ring on his finger and shoes on his feet and for great feast to begin. *My child was lost and now has returned.* If you want a good image of who God is to you and me, ponder this parable. We are not God and it is not so easy for us to welcome and forgive someone who has betrayed our love. Sometimes, in spite of our hunger, we are too proud to go back to the one we have hurt and seek a new beginning. This parable has the power and grace to move us in such directions. So, I am sure you as have I played the role of the sinning son and to some extent the forgiving father.

But don’t miss the elder brother. He may be the person we are like most in the story. He is the good son, the faithful son, the one who always did everything right, the one who deserves to be love and appreciated and cannot stand that his brother is welcomed home. The older son is a sad figure: he says to his father: *all my life I have slaved for you and you welcome this son of yours home with a party.* The older son sees himself as a slave and not a loved son. He is even worse off than the younger son. He does not realize how much his father loves him. He wants to see his brother rejected and punished. He screams for justice and not mercy.

Remember this parable is told directly to the righteous Pharisees who see themselves as God’s favorites because they do all that are required by the law. They are the older brothers. The more I read the Gospels, the clearer it becomes to me is that the sin, the fault, the failure that Jesus most focused on was righteousness. Once people see themselves as the good ones, the faithful ones, the correct ones, they are getting close to being righteous people who demand God’s love because they deserve it rather than welcome grace as God’s free gift to them that they do not have to earn. It is given, amazing grace, a free gift to both saints and sinners. So, as you cast the Prodigal Son in your imagination, who are you: the Father, the runway Son, or the elder brother? If you are like me, you may well have played all three roles at various times and sometimes even all at once. Come into the feast!