

Pastoral Reflection
October 2, 2022
27th Sunday of Ordinary Time

For most of my life, I related more strongly to the older brother in the parable of the Prodigal Son, who comes in from his work in the fields and feels indignation at the prospect of celebrating the return of his younger brother, who has squandered the wealth that was given to him. The older brother, acting out of jealousy rather than love, focuses on his brother's past actions rather than his humble decision to return home (to God).

When we do the work that we are obliged to do, are we due praise and affirmation? Is it justified for us to feel angry when we see others, who have not put in the same amount of time or thought or energy, be congratulated for what they have accomplished? Justified or not, I admit that I have felt this anger, such as when I've seen someone else receive a promotion or award when I did not, while believing that I was more worthy due to my skills and contributions.

The lesson of the older brother in the Prodigal Son story is the same as the lesson of the example Jesus shares at the end of this week's Gospel reading, and it also resonates with the reading from the prophet Habakkuk: We must see beyond our expectations of prompt rewards and answered prayers. As Archbishop Oscar Romero opened his well-known prayer for workers, "It helps, now and then, to step back and take the long view." When we are obedient to God, seeking to love as God loves, God celebrates our good works in ways beyond our understanding, beyond our timelines, and even beyond our beliefs about what constitutes "good works." We are called to trust in God's "slow work" and surrender our desire for an obvious reward here on earth, whether that be praise, privilege, or material gain. We are called to challenge ourselves when we notice the shadow of self-righteousness impacting our willingness to love and welcome.

The father says to his eldest son in the Prodigal Son parable, "you are always with me, and everything I have is yours."

Do I see the ways God is with me, offering his gift of love, regardless of any person's judgements about how much I may have earned it?

Justin Lorenz