

09/21/14 25 A

-- Those of you who have children: Would you say you love one more than the others? Does it make a difference whether they were born first, last or in the middle? Probably not.

-- Perhaps some of you adopted children: Does that make any difference in how much you love them, e.g., as opposed to “natural” children?

-- Considering these examples might help us understand better the gospel parable. For if we focus on how the owner paid his workers it’s going to look utterly unfair. We don’t do that, nor should we.

-- But this parable has nothing to do with paying people for something they’ve earned. After all, do your children “earn” your love? Of course not. You love them simply because they are your children.

-- That’s what the kingdom of God is all about. It is a gift. None of us earns our place in God’s family. Nothing we do can give us the right to share in God’s eternal love. Yet God offers it to us anyway.

-- Yet I suspect most Catholics, especially those of us over 50 years old, were brought up under the impression that salvation and God’s grace were a reward for the good deeds, prayers and religious practices we performed.

-- Our teachers may never have said that outright. (I know mine didn’t.) But Church practices may well have given us that impression. Now, I don’t intend to put down practices such as prayers, devotions and good works. These are good and commendable, but they don’t earn us salvation.

-- Rather, they are a response to God’s gracious love for us. We praise God because he has offered us his saving grace. We reach out in love to our brothers and sisters in good actions because God has first loved us.

-- So it doesn’t matter whether we have lived as faithful “cradle Catholics” most of our lives, or have just recently come to accept God’s

saving grace. God's is generous to all alike, and the eternal happiness God shares is the same for all.

-- God's word today calls us to a sense of gratitude—gratitude for all of God's blessings to us but, most of all, gratitude for the promise of eternal life if we only accept that grace freely.

-- But there is no room for jealousy or envy when we accept God's saving grace. There's a story about a man who came to the gates of heaven. He had lived what most people would consider an upright life for all his years. But he had also been hurt by certain people over his lifetime.

-- As he came to the gates he saw the wonderful scene before him of all these happy people. But, as he looked, he spotted one of those people who had hurt him. This person had died a few years before.

-- He asked why that man was there, and the angel told him he'd come to accept the Lord's love in the last months of his life. The righteous man was angry and refused to enter as long as that man was there. And he remained in his personal hell.

-- True gratitude has no room for envy or jealousy. The opportunity for saving grace is available to all of us, but we must freely accept it. This is not something we earn, but a gift from God.

-- May envy and jealousy never keep us from accepting God's saving love. His offer of saving grace stands, as long as we live here on earth. But our hearts must be accepting of other people's blessings if we are to enjoy God's eternal life.