

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Jul 13th 2013

I've been thinking about family dynamics lately. I have a friend who is estranged from his adult children. He raised them as a single parent after their mother left and sacrificed a lot for their safety and well-being, but now they don't appreciate his efforts. And he is obviously upset by this. But what upsets me about his reaction is that he now thinks he was wrong to do all that for his kids. He thinks maybe he should have just left them with their unfit mother, or just walked away as well. They don't appreciate his sacrifice, so he was wrong to make it. But I think he did the right thing by taking care of his kids, and their not recognizing that and appreciating it does not make it wrong. Taking care of family is the right thing to do, and lack of appreciation or lack of reward does not make it wrong.

If anyone had cause to turn against his family it was Joseph. His brothers wanted to kill him, tried to kill him, sold him into slavery, then lied to their father and said Joseph was dead. When they come across him again many years later, they are starving and he is in charge of the food. He could deny them food. He could let them starve. They would do that to him, but he does not. He gives them food and money. He acknowledges that they've treated him poorly, but he also accepts that their mistreatment got him to Egypt where he has done much good and saved many people. He sees the hand of God in their actions to get him where he needed to go. When their father dies, the brothers think that Joseph might want some revenge for the criminal acts they did against him, so they lie again and tell Joseph that their father urged forgiveness on his death bed. But Joseph isn't looking for revenge. He tells them not to worry, he will not act against them even though they acted against him. He says he is not God to judge them, and he is where he is now because of their bad actions. He says he will take care of them and their families even though they would not do the same for him. He takes care of his family; he acts decently even though his brothers have not. He does a right thing, despite not only lack of appreciation or reward but in the face of deliberately wrong action. He does the right thing, and even their wrong actions do not make his right action wrong.

I take care of my mother after she had a debilitating stroke. It's not easy, but she can't take care of herself anymore – she's paralyzed on her right side and she cannot speak. My friend says I am wrong to be making this sacrifice, that mother will not appreciate it or will give preference to my sister. I think my mom does appreciate what we do for her. She seems to. And even if she could speak, and even if she thought it, she would not say she preferred my sister. But even if she did, that would not make my actions wrong. Taking care of my family is the right thing to do, and lack of appreciation or reward doesn't make doing it wrong.

Tami Whitney