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Earn a Gift?

Fr. Randy Roche
Loyola Marymount University

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Earn a Gift?

When we consider how some of our wants and needs in life are met, “earn” emphasizes the efforts we expend while “gift” more strongly represents the giftedness of what we receive. We think it far more reasonable to earn wages as a means of supporting ourselves and loved ones than if we wait to win a lottery. But we usually think of friendship as a gift rather than something we earn, recognizing that our own efforts cannot create bonds of closeness between persons.

Most of us understand that we cannot earn love, but we might also know that a good reputation does not come entirely as a gift; our consistent or inconsistent behavior arises from the many and varied choices we make. Our spiritual and physical environment provides us with challenges and opportunities for making decisions that are in keeping with the purpose of our existence – or not. If we earn self-respect through our choices, and some level of esteem from those who observe our words, deeds and attitudes, we become gifts – gifts that others do not earn, but which are theirs to accept.

We all need love, even to survive, and certainly to thrive. Since we cannot earn love, we can yet choose many ways of making ourselves available to receive the gift that makes life worth living. When we receive with gratitude gifts of care, concern, assistance and respect we are likely to receive further such gifts. But if we manifest an attitude of entitlement, we make it more difficult for people to take an interest in our welfare and we become less likely to even recognize the many forms of love that are spontaneously given to us.

Paradoxically, the fact that love cannot be earned is the characteristic that almost ensures that love will be given. The endearing qualities of babies and children are not their loud wails, but their very need to receive from us the kind of care that we can give. We need appropriate ways to give love for us to be human. We find this truth within us through experiences both joyful and sad. If we reflect a bit, we can see that one source of interior discomfort is not caused by the absence of being loved (honest reflection will reveal that we are loved) but that we are not acting sufficiently according to our desires and capacities to love. We have a spiritual movement inside us that urges us to get on with the reason we exist: to bring love into the world, not to gather it to ourselves (if we could).

We do not earn anyone’s love, especially God’s. Rather, our existential poverty attracts the love which we cannot earn or deserve. If or when we try to earn God’s love we are far more liable to be frustrated than fulfilled. In

order to receive love as the gift that it is, we need to be open to all the possible ways that love can come to us, not imposing limits of narrow expectations or trying to determine for ourselves in what ways we can be contented. If we make implicit demands, equivalently trying to direct love toward us in a disguised form of control, we remove the essential freedom required for love to be received. Even though God loves us always and unequivocally, every attempt to control the gift blinds us to the gift that creates and entirely enfolds us.

Rather than earn the gift of love or any gift, we need only to receive it, with gratitude.