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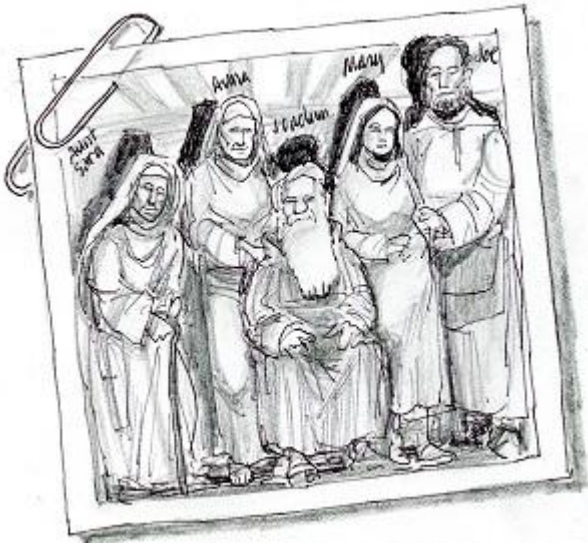
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January 25, 2021

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“Who are my mother and my brothers?” (Mark 3:33).

*2 Timothy 1:1-8; Mark 3:31-35*

In today's Gospel, Jesus seemingly challenges the preeminent cultural value of blood loyalty by declaring his disciples equal with his own family. His mother, brothers and sisters have come from Nazareth to Capernaum, where Jesus is carrying out his ministry. They stand outside the house and ask to see him. His seemingly harsh response to them requires more context.

In the preceding verses in Mark, we learn that the crowds have grown so large that Jesus and his disciples cannot even eat. Furthermore, the scribes are saying that Jesus' power to drive out evil spirits is because he is possessed by an evil spirit. His family decides to come because people are saying Jesus is “out of his mind” (3:21). Relatives had a responsibility to take charge of their own. They are there to take Jesus home to Nazareth.

At this point, Jesus makes clear that his mission to announce the Kingdom of God is paramount to all other agendas or concerns. His command of evil spirits is because the Holy Spirit has “taken charge” of his life since his baptism, and no one, not the scribes, not the Pharisees, not even his own family can halt his redemptive work of bringing healing and freedom to God's people. He has gathered disciples around him and, in a sense, is elevating them to the status and intimacy of his own mother, brothers and sisters. He is not disparaging his family but affirming that the bond he has with the disciples is equal to the most important bond of all, blood identity.

How Mary reacted to this is not recorded, but as the one person in Jesus' life who understood him more intimately than anyone, she must have been prepared for his total devotion to the prophetic call she had watched unfold within her son from childhood. Luke's infancy narrative will explore this Marcan theme in more detail with Simeon's prophecy of a sword of sorrow piercing her heart and the anguish of losing Jesus in the Temple. Anyone who has prayed the Joyful Mysteries of the rosary in the light of their own parenting experiences will attest to the painful necessity of letting go of a child to pursue his or her own calling.

The question of blood intimacy in Mark also anticipates the mystery of the Eucharist in the Gospels. Not only does Jesus call the disciples his brothers and sisters, he actually invites them to share his own body and blood. Our Communion with Jesus at the altar of his sacrifice and in the glory of his resurrection is transformative. We become what we eat and drink, sharing not only the redeemed humanity of Jesus, but also his divinity. This bond is his promise to us of life after death and his pledge of future glory. Nothing can surpass this blessing. We are his family, destined for life within the Trinity.

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