

## **Commentary on the Gospel for Tue, Sep 22nd 2015**

The words of Jesus in today's gospel strike us as strange – not at all what we would have thought Jesus might have said under the circumstances. When we experience that reaction, it's a clue that the text is challenging us. What are we missing?

Rather than an incidental happening on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem, there is something here that the Church thinks is quite important. It's worth noting that the incident is described in Matthew and Mark, as well as in Luke, and in a typical year, we will hear about this episode at least three times.

Rather than rejecting his mother and brothers, Jesus is emphasizing a new kind of relationship, even stronger than the relationship of biology – a relationship in which we are all brothers and sisters of Jesus, children of the Father, brothers and sisters of one another, and heirs to eternal life. We take this, perhaps, as a kind of figure of speech, whereas Jesus takes it very literally. This brother & sister relationship is a direct consequence of Baptism, which has to be understood as more than simply membership in a large, international organization. In Baptism, as the Catholic funeral rite proclaims, a person dies in Christ and takes on a new life, that is, is literally vivified by the spirit of God.

As with biological kinship in the Middle East, family membership carries heavy responsibilities for all concerned. In this case, it is not just any family, but being a part of the one family whose Father is God. Jesus is saying here that membership in that family is more important than and carries heavier responsibilities than mere biological kinship.

That has far-reaching ramifications for how we treat one another, how we respect one another, however much we may disagree, what our posture must be toward brothers and sisters who, for whatever reason, do not seem to abide by the rules that we hold sacred. As Archbishop Blase Cupich commented recently, our respect (for one another) “must be real, not rhetorical, and ever reflective of the Church's commitment to accompanying all people”.

So, rather than rejecting his mother and brothers, Jesus is including everyone. Are we sufficiently challenged by that?

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