

Mother, Brothers and Sisters

Intro. One of the first things we often do at seeing a baby is try to tell which member of the family he or she looks like: parents, aunts/uncles or even grandparents. Sometimes it can be pretty obvious what the ancestry is and at other times not clear at all.

I. In the Old Testament, the Israelites identified themselves and were *identified by* others as belonging to one of the twelve tribes of Israel. It was a source of pride. Conversely, **not** belonging to one, meant one was a non-Israelite and a pagan. Prior to today's gospel, the Lord gathered followers through his teachings and healings. From among them he called twelve disciples for more specific teaching. Today we call it leadership training. When some of the Lord's family came asking for him, he used the occasion to teach about who family is. The translation of "relatives" from the Greek is

"*those from him,*" commonly understood as "family." The reference by the relatives to the Lord being "out of his mind," might be because they thought him mad to challenge the scribes and Pharisees who thought he had an unclean spirit. In the Christian tradition, some accept the relatives as the Lord's brothers and sisters. In the *Catholic* Christian tradition, they are understood as cousins, part of the same tribe or family group. For today, to focus too much on this is to lose the Lord's teaching point. Family was no longer to be seen as strictly blood relatives. We already understand *that*. We choose people not of our birth family to be family to us. With advances in science, it is easy to do DNA testing and identify our family background. If we believe the ads, people are often surprised at the results. We can identify ourselves as Italian, African, Hispanic, Polish, German, Irish and many more. Within the same country, our accents identify

us as from a different *part* of that country: think north and south. Identifying ourselves as *disciples of the Lord* is *much* more important and unites us as family.

Concl. From the beginning of his ministry, the Lord made it clear the usual way of relating to God and to each other was going to be different. He redefined family and relationships. *And it was shocking!* Disciples – the family of the Lord - are identified, **not** by tribe or by blood or by position of power, but *by doing the will of God*. That is a much broader understanding of family. Sometimes it seems we have returned to that Old Testament sense of family which is a very narrow idea of how we are connected to one another. It can be too easy to treat each other, not as brothers and sisters of the One, True God, but rather as lepers or pagans to be avoided. It is easy to blame others for **our** sins as in the reading from Genesis. Certainly there are

different interpretations of what doing the will of God means. Throughout history, those words have been used to justify great harm to people in God's name. When asked which of the commandments was the first, the Lord answered with what all Jews know by heart: "You shall love the Lord your God with all our heart, and all your soul, and with all your mind, and with all your strength." And added, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself [Mark 12:29-30]. That seems to cover what doing the will of the Father means. We are sisters and brothers of the same Father. Our challenge is to do the **will of the Father, not our own.**"