

St Pius-St Anthony 13th Sunday Ordinary Time Year A

It is certainly understandable to hear today's gospel and think, "What about family? – I gotta take care of family". Jesus says today, "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me, and whoever loves son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me" (Matt 10:37). And consider that Matthew softens here what Luke reports. In Luke 14:26, Jesus teaches, "If any one comes to me without hating his father and mother....., he cannot be my disciple". But it is Family! We love them and want to take care of them. What do we do? First, I guess, is our hope that a call from God and a call from family would never be at cross purposes-opposing motives (and I would say that most everyone would never find themselves in such a pull-apart, unless we were talking about the Gambinos or some crime syndicate 'familia'). But, realistically, I think Jesus is bringing up that *sometimes* there are other interests (even family ones) that compete with our fidelity to God's call. Yes, We all have family-in fact, sometimes I find among people that there are suspicions around folks that don't have any family-like what grounds or hinges them if not some family roots or bonds. But still we can all surprise one another sometimes-even family can throw us sometimes. I like the story of little daughter and dad that had a sensitive conversation one Saturday morning as they were spending some quality time together. In between some clean-up chores together, they were sitting/resting, and the dad thought it was a good time to assure his daughter that even in his absence he wanted to make sure she was provided for so he began, "You know honey, we pray we all stay healthy and watch each other (you) grow up, and your mom and me grow old together. But I want you to know that I have made arrangements that you and your mom would be taken care of in case something happens to me and I die. I've have a term life insurance policy of \$100,000. So the little girl put her head down a minute, like she didn't want to have this conversation, and then she said, "But Dad, is that \$100,000 a total that mom and me have to split or is it \$100,000 a piece for us?" I think that was a response the dad wasn't counting on. He probably thought, "Honey child, that's a question you are not supposed to ask." The point was, the dad would do all he could to provide for them. I think this story gets at something of what Jesus is bringing up by saying, 'anyone loving family more than Him, is not worthy of being His disciple.'

Jesus is assuring us, that if we follow Him, and if we take His Name upon ourselves, then all that we love well, we must trust He will bless and take care of. So, the priority is Christ-our familial relationship **to Him first**, and then everyone else will find their fulfilling place right where God intends them for each one's glory. Sometimes our selfish attempts to push our own family ahead or our family name ahead of the mass of all the rest of God's people=family, goes against God's

will for us. It may give a little flash of glory, but inevitably it brings a crash downward. Think of history's first family. Adam and Eve thought they might make a name for themselves against God-look at what we can do-even opposing God-making a Name for themselves against God- and look at outcome-they made a Name alright. That is really what Jesus is spotlighting here, is that when one exalts one's own family even over God, then fall and failure are inevitable. That is a problem. If family is placed above God, then we have made **them** God (but they'll never deliver!). Subtly, Jesus was having His followers look around at society and the false Gods that were being exalted by popular family industries and their public logos and Name Brands. The projection of Caesar's Palace; the Name that ruled over and over the empire (that was the Roman brand); but then in Hebrew politics, it was the Herods' dynasty- the family that saw their salvation as keeping their name in charge (and even among the high temple priesthood-a family could claim privilege based on Name-Caiaphas (Tribe of Aaron?-appointed by Romans- so that they were controllable & keep in mind the great Temple treasury at time!)

So Jesus is cautioning his followers to beware of projecting a family Name above 'Christ'. As if He is saying, "You think you are creating an eternal dynasty that rivals God; but it is not going anywhere." For us today, think of the Kim Jung Un Family. In Jewish circles of Jesus time, it was the Herod Name. If Herod is involved, count on it, God would not be involved.

Or think of it this way: Jesus is saying, "First things first as a matter of priority". Here is a common example of such a necessary prioritizing of keeping 'first things first'. Consider the dilemma when we get out ahead of ourselves with plans, but have overlooked basic necessities: Here's an example I face a lot (I'm not saying I prioritize rightly, you'll see). Imagine me going out the door: Did I get my coffee? Yes, it starts there. Then Oh, I have my presentation in the folder I have to give; I have the envelope of handouts under my arm, and a bottle of water in my pocket. Then I get to the truck and realize, "Oh wait, I guess I need truck keys before anything else. They are back on the dresser!" This is what Jesus is up to here. Mother, Father, Son or daughter, love them? Yes, absolutely love them. Jesus is only saying, that if I put them above God, then I am not loving them. I'm claiming to be their Savior or them to be my Savior, because I am claiming that I and I alone will take care and provide everything for them. What about God? Seen that way, we know that is a crazy-unreal expectation to put on any human being. It is saying, "If God is not there for me, you better be." Or said another way, anything or anyone I put above God, then I worship it-them.

This is much the same as Jesus taught in summarizing the great commandments into simply 'Love God, and Love Neighbor as Yourself'. There is proper priority: God, then neighbor (and who is our closest neighbor but family,

and then last of all self). So Jesus calls us absolutely to love family; and love them in proper order. God created us-fathered us from all eternity-God created everyone; so yes we love everyone that has come from His hand. God gave us our family, or better said, God gave us to our parents. God made us, so God is not going to harm anything He made. For, God entered into this human drama with us. Jesus went to the cross for us. So, we trust. When we put God above all, then everything is ordered and prioritized for its greatest purpose and fulfillment. God is not going to harm his children, and Jesus' point is that we are all His children. We reflect this in our every prayer; just think of the Our Father alone, it is all inclusive in claiming as family, all people that God has made. Maybe the best way of thinking of this is that Jesus is teaching us that we are to love everyone in the same way that He loves us. I am to love my neighbor, my father, my mother just as He loves them. And we will, when we start with Him (to see them as He sees them!)