

The family experience of Jesus of Nazareth

Son of Mary, Son of the Father

“Jesus is a model of obedience to his earthly parents, placing himself under their charge (cf. Lk 2:51), but he also shows that children’s life decisions and their Christian vocation may demand a parting for the sake of the Kingdom of God (cf. Mt 10:34-37; Lk 9:59- 62). Jesus himself, at twelve years of age, tells Mary and Joseph that he has a greater mission to accomplish apart from his earthly family (cf. Lk 2:48-50). In this way, he shows the need for other, deeper bonds even within the family: “My mother and my brethren are those who hear the word of God and do it” (Lk 8:21) ¹

1. The facts

With the exception of the so-called infancy Gospels (Mt 1.18 to 2.23; Lk 1.5 to 2.52), the evangelical tradition barely mentions the family of Jesus. And when it does, it usually does not describe it too favorably: the ministry started in Galilee, Jesus was considered crazy by "his family", who tried to get him back home (Mc 3,20-21; cfr. Jn 10, 20); when he visited Nazareth, "fellow citizens, relatives and those of his household" have not believed in him (Mk 6.4). While preaching the kingdom of God, he had no relatives among his followers (cfr. Jn 7.2 to 5). Only the fourth gospel records the presence of his mother, with Jesus and his disciples during a wedding in Cana of Galilee, at the beginning of his public ministry (Jn 2,1-12), and finally, during his agony and death on the cross (Jn 19,25-27; cf. Mk 15.40 to 41; Mt 27.55 to 56; Lk 23,49.55).

But it was not his close relatives who have distanced themselves from him, it was the same Jesus, who throughout his public ministry, adopted an "apparently anti-family attitude." ² And not just with his family (Mark 3.31 to 35; Mt 12.46 to 50; Lc 8,19-21), but also with the families of his disciples, whom he ordered to break up with them as an immediate consequence of his invitation to follow him (Mk 1,20; 10.28 to 30) or, even, as a preliminary condition to start to follow him (Lk 9.59 to 62, from 12.52 to 53; 14,26).³

Well, despite this deep reserve that Jesus had with respect to family life, his and his relatives, evangelical tradition transmits enough episodes in which he values it highly. He demands the duty to honor parents (Mk 7.6 to 13) and defends the indissolubility of lawful marriage (Mk 10.2 to 12, Mt from 19.2 to 12; Luke 16:18). He encouraged to welcome and bless the children of others, which was very unusual in his time (Mk 10,13-16; Mt 19.13 to 15; Lk 18.15 to 17). He sends his disciples to proclaim the Gospel to families and to stay in their homes (Mk 6:10; Mt 10.12 to 15; Lk 10,5-7). And he himself, throughout his public ministry maintained friendly relations with some families, accepting their hospitality (Mk

¹ FRANCESCO, *Amoris Laetitia*. Post-Synodal Apostolic Exhortation on Love in the Family (19 March 2016), n. 18.

² S. GUIJARRO, “La familia en el movimiento de Jesús”, en ID., *Jesús y sus primeros discípulos*, Verbo Divino, Estella, 2007, 145.

³ For this it is shocking that such a radical attitude assumed by those who have lived with him until his death, do not remain within the group of the disciples after the resurrection: the generations that created the NT do not support the position, ambiguous if not contrary, to Jesus about the family institution, and eventually organize themselves according to the familiar pattern.

1.29 to 31; 11.11; 14.3; Lk 10,38-42; Jn 11: 1-45). And it also reached the point in presenting family relationship as a model and goal of discipleship (Mark 3.31 to 35) or as its best reward (Mark 10.28 to 30).

How do you explain this apparent 'ambiguity' of Jesus with the family, his own and that of his relatives?

2. The family institution in the times of Jesus

Jesus of Nazareth lived and died in the context of an agrarian society, immersed in the eastern Mediterranean culture, regarding the family as the fundamental social institution. Organized to ensure self-sufficiency and protection for its members, it was subdivided through a hierarchical network of relationships, in which affection among its members was not predominating but rather paternal authority. Family life primarily took its place in homes, places where the members lived, who were particularly careful to preserve the customs and traditions of the family.

The family aimed at safeguarding the identity of individuals and the continuity of the group, ensuring life on earth and after death, through the memory of their descendants (Sir 30.4; 44.10 to 11; 46 12). A fundamental point of reference for its members was offering them a particular and differentiated social role, being allowed to remain integrated in society. Promoting and safeguarding the reputation of the family and assuring them of the means of production (material goods, employment), a heritage to live (inheritance, fame) this cohesion and solidarity of the family was not making it easy for the authorities, civil or religious.

The family was defined and dominated by the father figure, whose authority in the home was almost absolute (Sirach 7.18 to 28). The honor of the family, the patrimony of all its members who felt the duty to defend it, and a profound sense of belonging kept it united. The men enjoyed great privileges; They were responsible for maintaining the honor in the family, which mainly consisted in honoring parents, living under their authority (Sir 03:11; cf. Ex 20:12; Dt 05:16; Lv 19.3). The relationship between fathers and sons was close and constant, because in it was based the continuity of the family. Women and children depended on the father, without whose support and without subordination to him, they could not survive. As long as the boys did not yet come to be adults, the relationship with their mother was very strong and influential in the daily events. Widows and orphans were in a very precarious situation, the only chance to get protection and help was in the family - unless through public charity.

The land, rather limited and based on production, was in first century Palestine, the principal economic support. With the preeminence of family heritage, laws demanded that possession of the land be maintained among the closest kinship; but the law on the consolidation of ownership in a few hands was a growing phenomenon in a rigidly structured society, where the separation between the classes made the change of social status and the prosperity of poor families difficult. Among these, we must put the family of Jesus, if Joseph, his father (Lk 4:22), were a craft craftsman (Mt 13,55), as would have been the same with Jesus (Mk 6.3).

In the time of Jesus families were distinguished by the house they dwelt, the number of members living there, the capacity to provide support and protection to the kin, the amount of land they owned and, consequently, the social class to which they belonged. The vast majority, composed of families of peasants and workers, constituted of nuclear

families, living in houses of brick, wood and branches for cover; inside, shelter for both persons and animals was found.

Children and adolescents, if they did not belong to wealthy families, were among the most disadvantaged groups of society. Child labor was a fact, socially and economically necessary. Already at six years old children were working in their home or in the field, along with their father and older brothers; for the most part manual labor offered them the unique formation they could receive. The working hours were from sunrise to sunset; when they work outside the home, they are repaid usually, in the beginning with one meal; then, with a small salary. Sometimes, child labor was used to pay off the debts of their father.

Childhood was seen as a transitional phase in which the children had to leave their immaturity and dependence until they get to take on their responsibilities in relation to the divine law; obedience to God, rather than entering into society, was the goal. This path was accompanied by education that, basically oral and through the family (Prov 1,8), did not spurn the severity of treatment nor of punishment (Sirach 30.12; Pr 13,24; 22,15; 23,13 -14) . Taking care of their father brought blessings; despising him brought about evils (SIR 3.8 to 16); disobeying him, even death (Dt 21.18 to 21; 27,16).

The obligation of parents was to teach (Pr 4.1 to 4) and transmit the faith of the people (Exodus 12.26 to 27; 13,14-15; Dt 6.20 to 24; Jos 4,6-7.21-23). In the family they learned a trade, how to interact with the environment and, in particular, the traditions of the people (Dt 32.46 to 47). Reading, repetition and memorization of the law was the normal means of learning; his goal was the internalization of the history of the people and the covenant. The family was, therefore, the primary place of socialization and identification for a child; in it and through it, the child actively participated in worship and in social life.

For a child, adulthood began at 13 years (Gen. 17:25), the age that marked the end of education and the beginning of social responsibility. While his father lived, the son did not own land while working with and for his father. Honoring their father was the second great commandment (Ex 20:12; Ex 21,15.17; Sir. 3,2.8.16). Marriage was considered an obligation: at eighteen years for men; for girls beginning at thirteen years (m. Ab 5.21), children were made a little independent from their families, enjoying a certain autonomy.

To attempt against the life of the family or just giving it up entailed the most absolute social exclusion. With the family unit being the primary place of identity, not having their own home meant living socially stigmatized. He who lived homeless (Lk 9.57 to 58), for whatever reason, became a person with no status that had adopted a style of life that was dishonorable, wandering (cfr. Mk 1.14 to 39) and without roots (cf. Lk 9.57 to 60)..

3. Jesus and his family

Jesus lived most of his life in the bosom of a family of craftsmen in Nazareth, a village without importance in Galilee (John 1:46). The fact is significant: he was welcomed as a child, he learned to be a man and he prepared for his mission in the bosom of a family with few resources. God chose a mother so he could be born man (Lk 1.31 to 35, 2.7). And Jesus was endowed with a family (Mt 1,18-21.24) to grow and mature as such (Luke 2,39-40.51-52).

The will to become man asked of God to become a child. He did not only want to be a man but he had to learn to be a man, like us, welcomed, educated, and for the most of his life accompanied by a family. It was his free choice, because God did not have to save us, nor even less be like us to accomplish this plan of salvation. If the reason for our

salvation was the love God for us, the incarnation was the way he carried it out and entering into a family was the logical consequence.

A family, in Nazareth, was the home and the school of the Son of God growing to be a man. In fact, except for a few years - between one and three - the last years of his life, when he completely devoted himself to preach the kingdom of God, Jesus spent his life in a family, and everyone knew him as the son of Joseph (Lk 4:22; Jn 6,42), the craftsman (Mt 13,55), son of Mary, brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon (Mark 6,3; Mk 3.31 to 35; Mt 13:55; Acts 1:14; Galatians 1:19; 1 Cor 9.5). God was not satisfied, therefore, to be "born of woman" (Gal 4,4), but wanted to have a family in which to grow "in wisdom, stature and in grace before God and man" (Lk 2:52).

We must not forget that for God to become man he had to place his will to the parents that were chosen. He had to announce his birth to his parents and convince them why they had to give their consent. And even before knowing the proposal of God wanting them to become the parents of his Son, Mary and Joseph had already chosen to create a family (Lk 1:27; Mt 1:18). For his parents embracing God meant giving him space in the profoundness of their mutual and intimate relationship and forgo a common life project already begun.

Both Mary and Joseph had to pay a price to become his family, although in different ways, since their personal involvement and roles within the family loved by God was diverse. They did not avail themselves to be a family. Never did they deserve it: one does not aspire to become the family of God who chooses, but one becomes the family whom God offers it to. Yes, the family of Jesus paid a price to be a family, as a consequence of having God as a son.

The Gospel tradition, with much discretion and honesty, did not hide the facts. From his birth but especially during the period of public ministry, Mary's relationship with Jesus became increasingly difficult and distant, a situation, even for us today continues to surprise us, that Mary could have misunderstood: it did not leave her any other possibility but to "keep everything in her heart" (Lk 2,19.51).

To get her consent and transform her into the Virgin Mother of his Son, God sent Gabriel with an irresistible proposal (Lk 1.32 to 33: "He shall be great, and shall be called the Son of the Most High, the Lord God will give him the throne of David his father, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever"). When Mary gave birth to the Son of God in Bethlehem and "wrapped in swaddling clothes laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn" (Lk 2,7), she had to be instructed by unfamiliar people, by the shepherds to whom God had sent his angels (Lk 2:17). Forty days later, having completed the time of purification, when his parents presented the child to the Lord in the temple, following the law of Moses, an old man foretold a fearful future to them (Lk 2.35 to 36: "He is here for the fall and the resurrection of many in Israel, and will be a sign of contradiction and upon you a sword will pierce your soul "). A nice way for God to pay for services rendered!

Still a teenager

Crucial for understanding the ambiguous position of the adult Jesus regarding family life is the story of the loss of Jesus in the Temple (Lk 2.41 to 50), a curious event that Luke, the only evangelist who speaks of it, situates at the end of his adolescence. More than a family incident, which it was, the loss of the adolescent Jesus in Jerusalem represents

for the evangelist the ideal presumptions on record that recounts the public mission of Jesus.

By itself the incident could go unnoticed as a normal occurrence. The parents, the narrator considers real parents, they did not see anything special in their son ... until, once lost, they found him again. After having found him they find themselves with their son who knows himself to be Son of God: "Why did you search for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?". It is the first utterance that Jesus, as an adolescent, speaks in the Gospel (Lk 2:49).

The anecdote, of biographical character, aims to ensure the identity of Jesus in his filial relationship with God. The narrative structure is clear: the action takes place in the context of the annual festival in Jerusalem (Lk 2.41 to 42), where, inexplicably, Jesus gets lost (Lk 2.43 to 45). The parents' reaction, logical and immediate (Lk 2.46 to 48), shows their response as very surprising (Lk 2:49), as the evangelist accurately records (Luke 2:50).

The story, which opens by identifying the parents of Jesus as a pious family (cfr. Lk 2:27; 1 Samuel 03:21; 02:19), that goes to Jerusalem to celebrate the Passover, focuses immediately on the age of Jesus on that occasion: he was turning thirteen and about to enter adulthood. This record is decisive: it was not yet an obligation to go up to Jerusalem; but it was a paternal duty to accustom children to fulfill the law, especially now that soon, becoming an adult, he would have to live subjected to it (cfr. Bill II 144-147). So his family was preparing him to assume, as an adolescent, his responsibility before God and men.

⁴⁶After three days they found him in the temple, sitting in the midst of the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions, ⁴⁷and all who heard him were astounded at his understanding and his answers. ⁴⁸When his parents saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him, "Son, why have you done this to us? Your father and I have been looking for you with great anxiety.».

The absence of Jesus in the return party is, in a first moment, unnoticed. And the story remains unexplained. Neither the reason for the stay of Jesus in the temple is said. After three days of agonizing research, the parents succeed to find him. His parents found him in the temple, and not among relatives and acquaintances, but sitting among the doctors, as one of them: listener and speaker in a meeting of masters (cf. Lk 5,3; Mt 23.2; 26, 55). The astonishment is general (cfr. Lk 4:22), given the capability of the adolescent to understand and interrogate (cfr. Is. 11.2; 1 Chron. 22:12, cf.. Wis. 8.10). The wisdom that filled him is now clear (Lk 2:40). He knows the will of God, without having learned it from the rabbis.

To the surprise of those present the amazement of the parents is joined. And it is the mother who takes the word (Lk 2:48), which is unusual given that the father was present. Instead of sharing in the admiration of those present (Lk 2,47), the mother is saddened by the actions of his son. She does not rejoice in having found him again; the bewilderment is what is being focused on. She does not hide her feelings. Her carefully chosen words look for an explanation. She continues to treat him as a child, addressing him as a favorite son ("Teknon" Lk 15,31; 16,25) and speaks to him about the distress of his father. She does not dwell on her concern, but underlines that of her husband ("your father and I are distressed"). It emphasizes their painful perplexity: "Why have you done this?". It suggests, implicitly, that such behavior. He could understand if it was lost in the big city; not that I would find to talk to writers, amazed at his knowledge.

⁴⁹ «And he said to them, "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he said to them.»

The prophecy of Simeon has come a little late since it has already begun to be fulfilled (Lk 2,35a "and you yourself a sword will pierce your soul"). In fact, it was not she who had lost his son, he had been the son, and consciously, he had left his parents; It was not an occasional loss; He had voluntarily absented himself (cfr. Lk 2,49b). Now he has no other occupation than that of his Father.

For the mother, and for the modern reader, the answer of Jesus is even less comprehensible than his behavior. He speaks for the first time to state, privately, who he is and what he has to devote himself. With emphasis, with the two questions, he answers the questions of the mother. In fact, he responds by asking in turn. He does not criticize the anguish of his parents but the reason: they did not have to look for him; "They should" have known that he is not subject to any human authority, for those things that are sacred; he had to occupy himself about his father. "Taking care of his things" is his priority, his personal mission.

Rather than defend himself, Jesus explains. It was not a whim or a coincidence, but it was his duty that separated him from them. He did not do what he wanted, but what was wanted from him. He does not understand well, then, why her parents were complaining. He acted, not for simple convenience, but driven by the inner need which dominates him and what it takes from him to live according to the will of the Father.

If the difficult amazement of Mary is based on devotion due to the parents, according to the commandment of God's law, the action of Jesus is born from his filial devotion to God. His life does not predominate his family, but his Father. His parents have a child, who in reality is not theirs, as they know very well themselves (and the reader of the Gospel; cf. Lk 1,31-32.35; Mt 1,20-21). And what is even less excusable, they would not have to forget it. The Son of God must be for the Father, and is not lost when dealing with his concerns.

Jesus the adolescent reveals to his parents his divine filiation and his exclusive mission affirms that as the son he has to take care of that which concerns the Father. It should not go unnoticed that it is "Father", an epithet addressed to God, which is the first and last word of Jesus in the third Gospel (Lk 2:49; 23:46): his whole life is consciously understood as an experience as son. Jesus, as a young boy affirms his need to serve the Father before all things, a need that arises from his conscience as son: divine sonship and evangelizing mission go together. Knowing himself as son, without any other occupation than that of the Father and his concerns is the reason of his wisdom. The reason why he lost, momentarily, his parents was because of his obedience as son to God.

The family drama is in clear opposition between " the parental program and that of the son: the will of the parents has something to do with the law; the will of Jesus, with revelation." There is nothing extraordinary, therefore, that they did not understand of what he says (Lk 2: 49, "not a word!"). In contrast with the intelligence of Jesus (Lk 2: 40.52) is his shortcoming to his parents (Luke 2:49). Only they know the true origin of Jesus (cf. Lk 1: 32,35; Mt 1.18 to 24). However, neither the gift of a virginal motherhood, nor the birth in Bethlehem celebrated by angels and shepherds, nor Simeon's prophecy, nor a daily contact, have made Mary and Joseph understand their son. For Mary there is still a long way to understand his son (cfr. Lk 8,19-21; 11,27-28).

⁵¹ «He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart.»

Divine sonship, claimed so early by Jesus, does not free him of paternal authority: he goes back with his parents in Nazareth and there, to a life of obedience. It may seem normal, but to the parents of Jesus it means living an unnatural situation. This return, after an expression so compelling about his identity, makes the most ordinary extraordinary: the subjugation of the Son of God to his parents who actually were not. It is not what one might expect after the voluntary loss and his motivation. The fact was that knowing himself to be the Son of God did not exempt Jesus from living subject to his parents in Nazareth his whole life.

The confusion increases when in Nazareth his parents had to live with him who belongs to another father. All that has happened, and not only the response of Jesus, is what Mary treasures in her heart (Lk 2,51b "all things"). And even if she does not understand, she will not forget: it is in her heart, the center of the person, home of consciousness and the will more than feelings, where the memory of what happened is preserved (cfr. Lk 1,66), and she searches for the hidden meaning between what she saw and the comments of Jesus. Listening to God without understanding is the Marian way of not losing it (cfr. Lk 2,19; 8,19-21; 11,27-28).

A normal event in the life of a mother constrains her to become a better believer: she loses her son in the temple forever, even if he comes back as a son to her home, subject to parental authority. He grows before her as a son and with him she has to grow in her faith. She brought her son in her womb until she gave birth; she will have to bring him in her heart so as not to lose him (Luke 08:21; 11:28). The maturation of the heart must follow the maturation of the flesh, both possible only through faith. The first requires faith to be realized; the second, so that it does not get lost.

⁵² *«And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man.»*

Luke adds a brief note with the intention to cover the entire youthful period of Jesus until his appearance, already as an adult, into the wilderness to be baptized by John (cfr. Lk 3:21) "he grew in wisdom, age and grace before God and man" (Lk 2:52). The marginal note, though short, is beautiful: it provides all the information we have about Jesus' childhood until the beginning of his public ministry.

The commentary that begun with an infant in the arms of Mary thus comes to its natural end (Lk 2: 12.16), he becomes a child (Lk 2, 17.27-40) and her son (Lk 2:43) and ends as the son of God (Lk 2:49): on the first twelve years of Jesus, and the remaining twenty, Luke has nothing to say. Loved by all, the Son of God grows, maturing as a man ... for thirty years in the bosom of his family.

Already an adult

With the exception of the stories of the infancy, the evangelical tradition is silent on the figure of Joseph, father of Jesus (Lk 4:22; Jn 6,42). Knowing, therefore, the relationship of Jesus with his family during the years of public ministry rests solely on centering on his mother and his brothers.

It is surprising that the four Gospels devote little attention to the family of Jesus, formed by Mary, who is usually identified, almost always, as "the mother of Jesus" (Mt 13:55; Jn 2,1.3; 19 25 ; Acts 1:14) and by his brothers, James, Joseph, Judas and Simon (Mark 6,3; Mk 3.31 to 35; Mt 13:55; Galatians 1:19; 1 Corinthians 9.5). It attracts more attention that the mother of Jesus, as the Gospel account goes on, always appears less (Mc 3,31-

32; Mt 12.46 to 47; Lk 8.19 to 20; 1 John 2 -11; see. EvTom 79.1-2). And if it does, it has little to say (Lk 11,27-28; Jn 19,26-27; cfr. Acts 1:14).

The picture that emerges from these data is that of a relationship of Jesus with his family which, seen only at the beginning after the birth of Jesus, has become less frequent during the period of public ministry and had just a few contacts in the final moments, during the week of his passion and resurrection. From a strictly historical point of view, it must be presumed that this stage has been the most enduring - and most difficult - of Mary's life: the longer the child lived, the less he belonged to her. On the other hand, it is like any mother.

In fact, the evangelical tradition, frugal as it is in the transmission of news on the family of Jesus, presents us with an episode, just at the start of the ministry of Jesus in Galilee, where Jesus himself publicly opposed his closest relatives to his new followers (Mc 3.31 to 35; Mt 12.46 to 50; cf. Lk 8,19-21. Jn 7: 3-5). Jesus has already decided on an itinerant life and has left Nazareth, his hometown (Mark 6,1; Mt 13,54) and his house (Luke 9:58; cf. Mk 1.14 to 39), making Capernaum his place of residence (Mt 4,13; 9,1), where he had, it seems, his home (Mt 13, 1:36; Mk 2.1; 3.20; 9.33).

The incident, written by the three Synoptics, is narrated in such a way as to show a clean break between Jesus and his family: the family (Mk 3,20-21.31-35) and enemies (Mark 3.22 to 30; cfr. Mt 12, 22-32; Lk 11.14 to 23) are put together in exclusion. The family of Nazareth, with undoubted interest in the person of Jesus; the scribes of Jerusalem, with the coldness of a theological reasoning. To Jesus only his disciples remain with whom to share his teachings, cause and feelings.

The scene takes place in three acts: the first (Mc 3,20-21) serves to place the action in a house and to insinuate that the issue of public rejection of Jesus begins within his family. In the second (Mk 3.22 to 30) Jesus defends himself from the accusation of collusion with Beelzebub (Mark 3: 22.30) with a parable discourse (Mk 3.23 to 27), which closes with a solemn position: he will not pardon those who reject him (Mark 3.28 to 29). The third (Mark 3.31 to 35) focuses in defining what is, for Jesus, his real family. The text is fundamental: it is not only situated some time after Jesus left Nazareth (Mark 1.9), but, above all, implies a serious and public affront that Jesus makes to his family, when it was present.

²⁰ "He came home. Again [the] crowd gathered, making it impossible for them even to eat. ²¹ When his relatives heard of this they set out to seize him, for they said, "He is out of his mind."

Jesus, who had just formed the group of the Twelve on a mountain (Mk 3.13 to 14), returns home in Capernaum (Mk 3,20). The new location, a house frequented by him, served to introduce the subject of the true family of Jesus. It is supposed that his disciples were accompanying him, recently chosen, although to the reporter it only reports the massive presence of the crowd (Mk 3,32): many were those who accompanied him that could not even eat.

Presumably, it was not the number of people, but rather the amount of work that did not allow Jesus to be free (cfr. Mk 6:31).

The trouble to whom it is subjected reaches the ears of his family. They can not understand the reasons what pushes Jesus to lead such a life. The narrator is not interested to note how they knew him. He prepares for the next meeting (Mark 3:31), implying that they left Nazareth to search for him. They reach him after a bitter argument with the scribes of Jerusalem (Mk 3.22 to 30; cfr. Mt 12.22 to 32; Lk 11.14 to 23; 12,10). Their intention was to bring Jesus

with them by force, make him return home and distance him, as well, from what he was doing.

In fact, it is a difficult judgment to say that the feverish activity of Jesus is caused by them "He is unstable, "he is beside himself." Such opinion could hide the belief that Jesus was under the dominion of the devil (cfr. Mk 3.24 to 26). If this is not, at least the statement reveals the lack of understanding that Jesus, from the beginning of his mission, has found in his own family (cfr. Jn 7,5).

The news, too painful to have been invented by the Christian community (in fact, both Matthew and Luke omit it) reflects well the pre - Paschal situation: many, including family members, did not believe in the personal mission of Jesus (cfr. Jn 7, 3). The Gospel tradition is unanimous in noting the removal of Jesus from his family during his public ministry. The fact is entirely plausible: fully engaged in the things of the Kingdom, Jesus was able to give the impression to those closest to him of not having a sound mind: full of God, out of himself; committed for the kingdom, he could not find time to take care of himself.

³¹ «His mother and his brothers arrived. Standing outside they sent word to him and called him. ³² A crowd seated around him told him, "Your mother and your brothers [and your sisters] are outside asking for you." ³³ But he said to them in reply, "Who are my mother and [my] brothers?" ³⁴ And looking around at those seated in the circle he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. ³⁵ [For] whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother.»

The mother and brothers of Jesus reappear soon after the controversy over the demonic possession of Jesus. As a result, at Mk 6.3, the narrator mentions Mary because of her relationship not for her name. The family chooses to stay outside the house where Jesus is speaking, and calls him to take him by force (Mk 3:21), presumably in the family home (Mk 6,1-6). Her intention, though understandable, makes her distant: they do not seek Jesus, they request for him; they do not follow, they want to be followed; they do not enter into his home, they want to come back to the family home. They remain outside the house of Jesus ... and from his concerns.

The news of the arrival of his family reaches Jesus while he was in the house (Mk 3,20), surrounded by a crowd of listeners seated around him (Mk 3,32). It alludes to the difference in attitude toward Jesus, the relatives have to search to see him; his listeners live around him. He who goes for him does not have it; he who listens remains in his presence.

The reaction of Jesus prior to the announcement of the presence of his family, involves an affront, severe being public. Asking himself in public "Who is my mother? Who are my brothers?" (Mk 3,33), he claims to disown those who come and do not accept their claims on him. Given the above thought (cfr. Mk 3,20-21), a reason appears that would explain the behavior of Jesus, and that of his family: they did not succeed to understand what he was doing and were wrong in judging him.

To the public disavowal Jesus adds contempt (Mk 3:34): he recognizes more as family those in that moment stay seated around him to hear him. He observed them, before speaking: he wants that his heart identifies them, before his words in public. He proclaims, as well, in front of his earthly family, who is his new family. The break with his family could not be more obvious, much less reckless: "until that moment Jesus could be considered a good Judeo-Galilean, son of a family and an honorable brother. From this moment begins a 'new adventure' of creating a family. This is the key moment of his decision. "

The new family of Jesus is not born from blood (cfr. Jn 1:13). Not even Jesus can choose it himself. It is not born because he says so, or for those his heart prefers so. Those who do the

will of God are his own (Mk 3:35). With such an emphatic assertion Jesus diminishes somehow the family conflict. He does not directly oppose the family to his disciples; The disciples were not even present at the scene. Neither does he attack his earthly family: it can become so really, if it's the will of God. Jesus does not opt for a particular group, but for all those who take it seriously, who undertake to sit and listen to him and do the will of God. But it is no less obvious that he distances himself from his family and from his adversaries, from the first because they believed they had rights over him, even if it is about the rights of the heart, and from the other because they believed that he was serving Satan, presumably relying on what they knew about God. In both cases, they are his adversaries, because they are opposed to the project of God. There is only one way to get the love of Jesus, to do the will of his God. Becoming familiar with the will of God gains the 'love of Jesus.

Those who now hear the statement of Jesus should not envy neither the disciples nor the relatives of Jesus: to do the will of God is 'Gospel', good news for those who want to be followers of Jesus, because it makes him one of his disciples, his real family, not the one that was given to him by God, but those who, like him, choose to "engage themselves in the things of the Father" (Lk 2:49; cf. Mk 3:35; Mt 12:50; Lk 8:21).

The new family of Jesus

"Among the difficult and guarded details of the life of Jesus is the fact that he left his place in the family and in the village." Renouncing the family today has difficult imaginable consequences." Family life being decisive in the daily lives of individuals and essential for their survival, "the greatest poverty consists in being without the support of a family, and not the lack of economic resources." He who renounced his family accepted social ostracism and a personal stigma. Even if one was considered a prophet, if he left the house and the family he fell into public disgrace, that caused to seeing himself excluded from family solidarity and social recognition (cfr. Mk 6,4; Mt 13,57; Jn 4, 44; EvTom 31).

So, in the patriarchal world and in the peasant society in which Jesus of Nazareth lived, the attitude he had with his family clashed very much (Marco 3,20-21.31-35; 6,1-6a; Jn 7,3 -5) and, not least, the obligation imposed on its followers to leave their homes and break their family life (Mc 1,19-20, 10.28 to 30; Lk 9.58 to 62, 10,52- 53; 14,52). Because one thing was personally opt for social exclusion, away from their families, measuring itself against unusual and culture, and another, very different, impose on those who shared life and causes, this one's lifestyle, uprooted and marginal, as a result of the break with his family.

It is true that not to all of his supporters did he ask them to leave home and family. Only a few, those he personally chose, he called them so they could lived with him and would be sent by him (Mk 3,14-15; 6,7). To follow was not simply to learn from him while living with him; to follow him did not have a limit, nor time, it was not a temporary employment, neither local, it implied the abandonment of their homes, family and livelihoods.

Jesus did not impose on his closest followers anything he himself was not living. He invited them to share his personal project and wanted that they cooperate with him to achieve it (Mk 1,16-18.19-20). When he spoke of leaving everything (Mt 19,21), he had already left everything (Mt 8:20). He said that being disposed to break with the family was needed (Luke 14:25), when he was no longer living with his family (Lk 8.19 to 20), nor, remaining unmarried, having a wife or children (Mt 19:12). He warned them that they had to be willing to give their life (Mk 8:34), immediately after announcing that he was going to do it (Mark 8:31). He did not demand to give up what was objectively wrong. What he asked to abandon was really good: material goods (Mk 10:21; Mt 19:21; Lk 18:22), family ties (Mc

10.28 to 30; Lk 12.51 to 53), their lives (Mk 8:35; Mt 10:39; Lk 09:24). But always, and only, if it demanded the Supreme Good, God and his kingdom (Mk 8:35).

To follow him and live with him, and like him, at the service of the kingdom is the absolute priority (Mt 12:30; Lk 11:23). There is no other duty how sacred it may be, that equals it, not even to bury one's father (Mt 8.18 to 22; Lk 9.57 to 62). He and the kingdom of God are to be preferred more than any other good. Jesus could not bear placing oneself at the service of God together with any other enslavement (cfr. Mt 6,33), however noble it may be. Placing oneself at his disposition and of his cause was without reservation nor delay. His cause, the kingdom of God, was always the first place: it was non-negotiable and could not be postponed (cfr. Lk 9.59 to 62). Once discovered, one is obliged to give up any other occupation or project that would interfere (Mt 13.44 to 46).

If the renunciation of one's family took Jesus and his closest disciples to a social situation of material poverty, social dislocation and definitive abandonment, sharing with them the life and the cause was possible because Jesus took them to live in a new family where everyone were brothers, and God the father of all (Mt 13.50; 23.8 to 9). The radical transformation that implied this new form of family life was the result and the proof of the coming of the kingdom of the Father (cf. Lk 11,2), which is realized when children "deal with the things of the Father" (cf. . Lk 2:49). In Nazareth it was the will of the Father who gave to His Son a family (Luke 1,26-27; Mt 1:18); at Capernaum (Mark 3:20) it was listening to the will of God, proclaimed by the Son, and his realization is what founded his new family (Mark 3:35).

4. Conclusion

Wanting to save us, God became incarnate, "born of woman" (Gal 4,4), "made in human likeness" (Philippians 2.7). So it was that he saved us, "Just like that it shows us what saves."⁴ The Incarnation therefore is not only salvation already realized as salvific fact, it is also the method of salvation, the path that God showed to us to give to us.

1. A consequence of the decision of God, who wanted to become like us to save us, was to give himself a family. It was not enough for God becoming one of us, he did not want to be without us. Made man, God wanted to learn to be like us, had to mature as a man within a family, "the cradle of life and love, where in man is "born" and "grows."

For the Christian the family, this "school of humanity that is complete and rich", is not - in the first place - a strategic choice to defend in today's society, as far as this can be urgent. It is 'above all' good news' to live it before announcing it, Gospel witness. And 'the family experience of God man is what converts the family life in the place of learning of the believer where he matures in humanity and wisdom as he grows in the awareness of the son of God (cfr. Lk 2.49 to 52). Consequently, it is not left to the discretion of the Christian to live his fidelity to God in the family; nor is the promotion and the defense of family life in the society in which one lives optative.

⁴ BENEDETTO XVI, "Discorso nell'udienza alla Curia Romana in occasione della presentazione degli auguri Natalizi" (22.12.2005): *L'Osservatore Romano* (23 dicembre 2005), 6.

2. Having said this, we must add that the believer can not make family life an absolute non-negotiable, this record is due only to God the Father. God has given a family to his son: the gift is never greater or better than the Giver. So Jesus lived as such, and has asked this to those he has called.

Jesus had not yet reached adulthood, when he dared, and publicly, to lose his family being the son of Mary and Joseph, to discover himself again in the Temple of God as His Son, dedicated to the things of his Father. And when already an adult, he devoted himself completely to God's kingdom, not only left his village and family, but he recognized the family in all those who shared his life and because, by knowing and doing the will of his Father.

The family of Nazareth was a priceless gift that God gave to His Son to grow up as a man. Now in its human and filial maturity, Jesus freed himself of the gift to devote himself entirely to the Giver. The family, though it may be Christian, is not master of the children; It was put at the service of their growth "in wisdom, in stature, and in favor before God and man" (Lk 2:52). In this is his glory.

3. The God of Jesus finds his children among those who seek his will. Jesus himself, and in the presence of his natural family, is the one who considered brother, sister and mother the person who has made himself brother to him in an effort to seek the will of God and put it into action. The believer in God incarnate constructs his family, past and present, on the basis of obedience to the Father. Such was the case of Jesus, that "being Son, he learned, suffering, to obey" (Heb 5,8). It is like that of the mother who begun to be the mother of God as soon as she considered herself as servant (Lk 1,38.42).

The decisive factor to become part of the family of God is obedience to God, not from a sacred duty nor from the deepest affections. If a person opts for the kingdom and has thus become an orphan, choosing God has given him back a family. It is about presenting himself, with no other details, to his disciples as the true family. Not even - 'of course! – did he disown his own family because they were not close to him during his evangelizing mission. Jesus declared, before his earthly family, the way to become his family: he who does the will of God is he who conforms himself to His will. The servants of God are his brothers, his sisters and his mother; Jesus maintains with them close and indissoluble relationships, like those that occur among those born from the same womb.

4. It is important to note that that Jesus, who dared to challenge the values of kinship and of family life, imagined his followers as a new community in which persons lived together, without having ties of consanguinity, living together as a family, that is, as inspiration and goal, having relationships of kinship that is within a family, in which there is only one father (Mt 23,9) and where all are brothers (Mark 3.31 to 35, from 10:28 to 30); where the filial relationship with God, confident and consistent, is always inspired (Lk 11.9 to 13); and imitation of the Father, ordered (Mt 5:48; Lk 6:36); where adults must become like children (Mk 9.33 to 36; Mt 18.3 to 4; Lk 9.46 to 48) Mk 10,13-16) and the children be welcomed with preference (Mk 9.36 to 37; 10,13-16; Mt 19.13 to 15; Lk 18.15 to 17); where there is mutual service (Mk 9.34 to 35) and fraternal care (Mt 5.21 to 24; 18,15.21-22) are inculcated and rivalry or the quest for power, absolutely advised against (Mt 20.20 to 28 Mk 10:35 to 45; Luke 22:24 to 27); where there is no concern for clothing or what to eat (Mt 6,25-34; Lk 12.22 to 32) and even less anxiety to accumulate assets for tomorrow (Mt 6.33 to 34; Lk 12: 33-34).

If, in the end, I had to summarize what I have said in one statement, I would say that "the mystery of the Incarnation of the Word in a family reveals to us" not only "that this is a privileged place for the revelation of God to man" but the acceptance of God revealed as Father leads one to take a new way of living in the family, where the children have to deal first with the things of the Father. Everywhere where the Father is present, there his children find their home and their brothers.

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