



**July 8, 2012**  
**Fourteenth Sunday of Ordinary Time**

*"They said 'Where did this man get all this?'—Mark 6:2*

Dear Friends;

We have a saying in English, "Familiarity breeds contempt." In the word 'familiarity' is the word family. While family can be a positive relationship it can also have a shadow side of which we should be aware.

Healthy family life can be beautiful. It is a relationship that helps us to know that we are loved and accepted. Family can teach us to express ourselves and our feelings openly and honestly. Healthy families allow us freedom to become who God calls us to be. Healthy families send us out into the world secure that we have a group of people who always love and support us.

There can also be a shadow side to family life. Families can sometimes typecast members. We can define others by their mistakes. Sometimes we do not allow people to grow and change. We can label them, "Oh he/she is the black sheep of the family." We put them in a box and are unable to see them in a new light.

What is true of families can also be said of larger social groups and society as a whole. Some groups can be toxic and feed off one another's negativity. In such an environment it becomes impossible for someone to make a positive contribution if it does not fit the preconceived categories. And sometimes unhealthy families, social groups, churches or societies can lash out at those who grow in new ways or call our attention to things which may make us uncomfortable.

It takes special grace and character to stand for one's true self. It is difficult to remain true to one's calling in the face of anger and ridicule. The temptation is to become totally passive or aggressive. Jesus is someone who remains true to his call. He is assertive, not passive or aggressive with family and friends in Nazareth. He is an example of grace in the face of rejection.

Jesus' hometown was probably no larger than a couple hundred people. He would have been related to a majority of them. Most of them would have been his blood relations. Honor in his culture required that you remain in the status to which you were born. You did not become better than your parents.

In today's Gospel passage Jesus does not fit the cultural expectations. In his culture you did what your father did. In Jesus' case that is a craftsman. The honor of craftsman was suspect because the nature of their work. Craftsman had to travel for their work. This meant they had to leave the women unprotected while they traveled about the region.

Jesus was not practicing the family trade—a trade that was looked down on. And he was acting as a prophet—preaching and teaching. What is more mystifying is he is eloquent. Where did he get this? Who does he think he is? They also hurl an insult, "Is this not the son of Mary?" Jewish men are generally identified with their fathers. So this insult questions his legitimacy. Later, Mark tells us that his family thinks Jesus is insane.

Jesus is shown in the Gospel to be a shrewd man of his culture. He could size the crowd up and takes the offensive. He quotes a proverb "A prophet is not without honor except in his own country, and among his own kin and in his own house." So those who wanted to shame him were the ones who end up shamed. Luke's Gospel tells us they are so mad they try to kill him. In the end they lose because they cannot appreciate the marvelous revelation that is Jesus.

So there are two things of which we can become aware today. One, like Jesus we may need to learn to stand our ground in the face of toxic people or structures. We must stand for who we are without becoming passive or aggressive. And that means we must be assertive. The other thing is we should question ourselves. Who are the people we have boxed in? To what ideas, people or experiences am I closed off? Let us pray that the Spirit can give us courage, grace under fire, and openness to listen to the prophet among us.

Peace,

*Fr. Ron*