



## September 16, 2012 Twenty-fourth Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"...Whoever wishes to come after me must deny their very self, take up their cross and follow me." Mark 8:34*

Dear Friends;

In the thirteenth century, Francis of Assisi had a vision of Jesus Christ hanging on the cross and grasped the meaning of this passage from the Gospel of Mark: 'If any wants to become my followers, let them deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me' (8:34). Shortly afterward his father brought him before Bishop Guido of Assisi to renounce all claims to the family inheritance in front of the bishop and the town.

Francis went a little farther. He severed all ties with his father. "Until now I called you father, but from now on I can say without reservation, 'Our Father who art in heaven.'" Francis even returns the clothes off his back. In his nakedness Francis is prophetically announcing his spiritual rebirth. Francis then will begin to build a community of brothers (friars) who will be the context in which he will live out his new identity.

In the Mediterranean world of Francis and Jesus one can only understand themselves through the loving eyes of another. The family is the primary group through which they gain self-understanding. Taking care of your own family comes first. And no one dreams of taking their own initiative or doing it their "own way." People work through family or coalitions to achieve anything.

In our Western culture we tend not to care what others think about us. But in Jesus' Mediterranean culture it is critically important to know "Who do others say that I am." One must measure up and never surpass the expectations of the group.

Jesus in his ministry has caused a rupture with his own family. He is not performing the family business whereby he cut himself off from the family. In Mark's gospel his family thinks he has lost his mind. His teaching and healing deviates from what is expected for his humble origins.

Summoning the Twelve and other disciples Jesus is forming a new kind of family based on those "who do the will of God." Those who obey the word "are brother, and sister and mother" (Mark 3:13-19) to him. Jesus asks the question about his identity to learn his status and authority among the public and his new family. The answer of "Messiah" reconfirms his ability to proclaim the reign of God.

We who have been baptized are part of the group that Jesus gathered as his own new family. We are called to know who we are as members of Christ through each other. This means leaving behind other self-understandings. To be a follower of Christ means that we must reject the extreme individualism of our culture and "deny ourselves." And we find our new selves in communion and solidarity of the communion of the people of God.

Christianity cannot be lived in isolation. Francis knew this. Only in relation to Jesus our eldest brother AND with all our sisters and brothers in Christ can we live our faith. We are a family of mutual love, will you follow?

Peace,

*Fr. Ron*