

Universal Family Third Week in Ordinary Time Tuesday, January 26, 2016 8:15 AM
2 Tm 1:1-8; Mk 3:31-35 Sts. Timothy and Titus, bishops (We become immortal by being baptized into Christ.)

“Who are my mother and my brothers?”

Today’s reading is one of the more, frankly, shocking readings. Jesus seems to be rejecting his own family, including his mother. Now doubtless, prophets exaggerate, and Jesus often exaggerated things. But the point is he is trying to develop a new idea that doesn’t fit ordinarily into people’s thinking, that is, the new idea of a new family, **a universal family where everyone belongs under the leadership of God.** Jesus would tell the Jews, “You have only one Father, and it isn’t Abraham. Your one Father is God, but guess what? The gentiles have the same Father.” Well, **that goes against the very idea of ethnic identity and tribe and the very essence of the covenant,** the twelve tribes, the confederation of tribes. It’s all about tribalism; even modern Israel is all about ethnic identity and tribalism.

This is what Jesus was against. He was trying to lift people beyond it. “Who are my brothers? Who are my sisters? Who is my mother?” You are. You are my family if—and there is a condition: **“Whoever does the will of God”**—that’s the condition—**“is brother and sister and mother to me.”** **So doing the will of God transcends all forms of identity:** tribal, family, clan, nation, etc. And this is clearly part of the meaning of Baptism, that **in Baptism we become one with Christ and therefore part of this family.**

Now if you study the liturgy of the Church, if you actually read the prayers—and the new missal, although you may not like the formality of the language, but it is more accurate in translating the age-old tradition of the Catholic Church than the missal we were using before, which sounds more modern, but also was very inaccurate in many cases. If you read it carefully, you will see **the Church never says that all of us are born with immortal souls. That’s not part of any teaching in the Bible or in the liturgy.** It found its way into theology. It was promoted by the scholastics. But it’s not in the Bible and it’s not in the liturgy. **What it says is Christ is the only Immortal One. We become immortal by being baptized into him,** and henceforth **we believe in the resurrection of the dead and life everlasting in him.** That is our faith. **It’s not about some already present reality, some immortality that everyone already has.** No, that’s not the faith in the Bible, and that’s not the faith of the Church—never was.

Now **we do believe in the universal call to salvation.** So everyone is invited into this life of God. Everyone without exception is invited into mercy and forgiveness, because no one is really worthy of God or sharing in the intimate life of the Creator. So **everyone is in need of mercy and everyone is offered mercy.** But, on the other hand, **there is this matter of responding. Everyone is included if one does the will of God.** Yesterday it was if people believe the good news and are baptized, they will be saved; but we can refuse. So this is a very important idea that Jesus is advancing.

Now what happens to those who refuse? That no one knows. The Bible is very silent. People have all kinds of imagination. People have written books about it. Dante wrote his *Divine Comedy*, in which he purported to know all kinds of things, which he couldn't possibly know. **No one knows** what happens to those who refuse. **But apparently living with God is not one of them. So we have to take very seriously our need to respond to the invitation of God.**

In the Letter to Timothy, the author says, **“Fan into flame the gift of faith given in the imposition of hands.”** Now what does the imposition of hands mean? Well, it is a sacramental sign and it's in five different sacraments. You might think there are only seven sacraments; there are actually more. **There are three sacraments of Holy Orders. Each one has imposition of hands. The Anointing of the Sick has imposition of hands, and Confirmation has imposition of hands.** It refers to the gift of the Spirit. Again, the Spirit is given, but **we need to fan the flame that the Spirit gives us,** get it going, build it up, give it more fuel, let it burn with ardor. **That is being a brother, a sister, and a mother to Jesus.**