

“FAMILY TIES” - A Sermon by Rt. Rev. Bradley D. Heinrichs
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“[Jesus] answered them, saying, ‘Who is My mother, or My brothers...? Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.’” (Mark 3:33, 35)

The lessons we read today provide us some very different and compelling images about families. First, Moses’ mother out of compassion for him, sets him in an ark and floats him down the river to save his life. Then Pharaoh’s daughter has compassion on him, and ends up raising him as her own son. Afterwards when Moses is grown up, he sees an Egyptian from the nation who adopted him, beating a Hebrew his native brethren, and Moses is faced with a difficult decision of the family to which he would be loyal.

In the next story, Jairus came to Jesus, *“fell at His feet and begged Him earnestly, saying, ‘My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live.’”* So Jesus took the distraught father and mother into the 12-year-old girl’s room and brought her back to life and healed her.

The parents and all the people around were greatly amazed and undoubtedly extremely thankful for this great miracle. Anyone who has ever had a sick child can relate to the great love the parents had for their ailing daughter, and can palpably feel the anguish they must have felt. The story portrays a very tender image of the incredible love between parents and children.

Then the next lesson from Mark provides us with an image that is almost opposite. Jesus’s mother and brothers come to see Him while He is surrounded by the usual multitudes seeking His great wisdom and healing powers. The people announce to Jesus that His mother and brothers have come to see Him, and He answered, *“Who is My mother, or My brothers?”*

The answer the Lord gave seems so heartless - so cold. Surely, His very own mother deserved more respect than this. We can imagine some of the people in the multitude thinking, doesn’t this great Prophet practice what He preaches? Has He forgotten about the fourth commandment, honor your father and mother?

Then Jesus gave a simple explanation to His surprising statement, *“Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother.”* So what can we learn about these differing stories about family ties and connections? The answer is not that complicated, but in its simplicity it is profound. There are two different types of family - spiritual and natural.

We are born as merely natural infants to natural parents. In order to make sure that these helpless infants are properly taken care of, the Lord instills the love of protecting and caring for offspring into the hearts and minds of the parents. They feed them, clothe them, provide them shelter, try to keep them out of harm’s way, nurture them, and try to find help for them when they are sick, as in the story of Jairus and his daughter.

For this reason, in the natural or lowest sense of the fourth commandment, we are taught to honor our father and mother. In fact, it is essential that we do honor and respect our parents, especially while we are young. There must be order and the wisdom of our elders should be respected.

So why did the Lord dismiss his mother and brethren and seemingly show them such disrespect. It is fascinating to note that throughout the four gospels, the Lord does not once address Mary as His mother but rather as woman (TCR 102:2). And one time He didn't even acknowledge her at all. This seems to be almost callous behavior.

At other times, the Lord's message about parents and children is even more pointed. He said, *"I have come to set a man against his father and a daughter against her mother...and a man's enemies will be those of his own household. He who loves father or mother...or son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me"* (Matt. 10:35-37).

Whoa! That really puts a different twist on the concept of family values! It becomes clear that the Lord is really trying to make a distinction between our merely natural family and our spiritual family. As our third lesson pointed out, this is a distinction which has been lost since the time of the Ancient Church (AC 6756:2).

Back then people did not acknowledge anyone as their Father but the Lord. They did not acknowledge any other mother than the Church. And the people that they called brothers were those who shared similar ideals based on the truth taught by the Church and the good that it encouraged. The passage states it was after they strayed from what the truth taught that charity ceased, and consequently they only called those brothers who were actually brothers in the biological sense.

When charity ceased, they lost sight of the distinction between natural and spiritual families. They ended up placing more value on their blood relationships than they did on their spiritual relationships, and as a result, they inverted the proper order that the Lord had intended (AC 3703:8). In the story of Moses, it is interesting to consider if he was merely acting from support of his blood brothers, or if it was a deeper standing up for what was right and just.

In the spiritual or higher sense of the fourth commandment, to honor your father and mother means to honor the Lord and His Church. This is why Jesus told them, *"Whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."* In other words, our spiritual family - our true family, is supposed to be those people who follow the commandments of the Lord given to His Church. The Lord and the Church are our common spiritual parents that unite us together as brothers and sisters.

What the Lord was trying to do with these strong negative statements about warring with our father and mother, was to get us to reevaluate our family ties. *"A man's enemies will be those of his own household."* What enemies is the Lord talking about? Surely our father and mother weren't that bad. The Lord's earthly mother Mary wasn't a wicked person.

That may well be true, by all accounts in the gospels, Mary seems to be quite a wonderful woman. However, both she and our parents, passed onto their children

something not so good. We received from our parents all their hereditary tendencies toward evil. These are the enemies from our own household that we must fight against.

For some the enemy passed on may be belligerence, stubbornness, arrogance, or conceit. For others it may be a bad temper, selfishness, or the love of dominating. For others it may be lust, love of wealth, or the desire to fabricate and lie. Take a moment and think about the family that you came from. Do any of these traits sound familiar?

When you get home take a look through your local Church directory and notice the family names. We can probably see in every family some traits passed on over the years that are less than desirable. Take a look at your own family name and undoubtedly there are some things you would like to alter about its history.

If you do feel that way - it's a good thing! The Lord wants us to identify those traits, those hereditary tendencies toward evil that have been passed down, and wage war on them. He does not want to see those undesirable qualities perpetuate themselves in future generations, but rather He urges us to eliminate them in ourselves.

In fact, the Lord modeled this perfectly for us while He was on earth. His soul from His Father was Divine, but through Mary His natural mother, He took on all the hereditary tendencies towards evil of the human race. Then throughout His life, as the hells flowed in and enflamed these selfish human desires and tendencies, He fought against them and conquered them one by one. Eventually, He managed to put off every thing that was merely human which He had received from Mary and glorified it and made His Human Divine (Lord 35).

We must all go through a similar process if we are going to become angels of heaven. We need to identify those hereditary tendencies towards evil in ourselves that we received from our parents, both father and mother, and conquer them one by one. Now the hells do not want you to do this. They flow into selfish human part of you and make you feel pride in your family lineage. This is not necessarily bad if it is regarding healthy family traits like a discerning mind and a generous heart. But they try to use our natural family ties as stumbling blocks and try to cloud our minds by having us blindly defend damaging character traits passed on through flesh and blood even to the point of condoning those evils.

The son who finds a certain sense of pride in being like his father, "He was a stubborn pit bull of a man and so am I - like father like son." Or the daughter who finds satisfaction in being volatile and explosive like her mother. The hells try to make us think of these traits as being almost admirable. Yes, we are usually proud of where we came from, but let's make sure we are not being proud of the wrong things.

This is why the Lord exhorts us to look higher than our blood relationships. And asks us to consider who our father, mother, brothers, and sisters really are. Yes, they are our biological or natural family also, and we should have compassion on them when they are ailing as Jairus did for his daughter. On the other hand, they should not have their evils excused simply because they are blood, as King David did in overlooking his son Amnon's rape of Tamar and then his other son Absalom's consequent murder of Amnon.

Our real family should be those people who share common beliefs and convictions from the Word with us and strive to live according to them. Now in a healthy family, hopefully our natural father, mother, brothers, sisters, sons, and daughters, are also our spiritual family. Hopefully, we are all striving to learn the truth of the Lord's Word and live it in our daily lives. But let's not be naïve and wear rose-colored glasses, either in looking at them or at ourselves.

The same holds true in the community of our Church. Let's make sure we are seeking to support, nurture, guide, and instruct those who are on a similar spiritual journey and share the same convictions from the Word. When we see something wrong, something that goes against what the Lord teaches, let us not accept it blindly because they are friends or family, but rather try to help that person move to a better state of life according to what the Lord teaches.

But let us be cautious to distinguish between what might merely be a different point of view of what is right and something that is actually wrong. Many times we jump to the conclusion that someone is doing something evil, when in reality they are doing something good – just differently than we might do it.

May we all strive to form a community that places more value on our spiritual family than our merely natural one. A community where we, like the Ancients, can call each other "brother" in sincerity of heart because we are all diligently trying to live according to the good and truth of the Lord's Word.

If we all work to battle the combined hereditary tendencies towards evil passed down through our families, and put aside our selfish genetic traits, then we will begin to have a community that feels more angelic. We will be able to come together and worship as one family, because we are all bowing our propriums to our Heavenly Father and seeking to do His will. Even as the Lord said in Matthew:

"One is your master, Christ, and you are all brethren. Do not call anyone on earth your father, for One is your Father, He who is in heaven" (Matt. 23:8-9). Amen.

LESSON 1 – Exodus 2:1-11 (parts)

1 And a man of the house of Levi went and took as wife a daughter of Levi. 2 So the woman conceived and bore a son....

5 Then the daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river...; and when she saw the ark among the reeds, she sent her maid to get it. 6 And when she opened it, she saw the child, and behold, the baby wept. So she had compassion on him, and said, "This is one of the Hebrews' children."

7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh's daughter, "Shall I go and call a nurse for you from the Hebrew women, that she may nurse the child for you?..." 9 So the woman took the child and nursed him. 10 And the child grew, and she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and he became her son....

11 Now it came to pass in those days, when Moses was grown, that he went out to his brethren and looked at their burdens. And he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew, one

of his brethren. 12 So he looked this way and that way, and when he saw no one, he killed the Egyptian and hid him in the sand.

LESSON 2 - Mark 5:21-42 (parts)

21 Now when Jesus had crossed over again by boat to the other side, a great multitude gathered to Him; and He was by the sea. 22 And behold, one of the rulers of the synagogue came, Jairus by name. And when he saw Him, he fell at His feet 23 and begged Him earnestly, saying, "My little daughter lies at the point of death. Come and lay Your hands on her, that she may be healed, and she will live."

24 So Jesus went with him, and a great multitude followed Him and thronged Him....

38 Then He came to the house of the ruler of the synagogue, and saw a tumult and those who wept and wailed loudly.

39 When He came in, He said to them, "Why make this commotion and weep? The child is not dead, but sleeping." 40 And they ridiculed Him. But when He had put them all outside, He took the father and the mother of the child, and those who were with Him, and entered where the child was lying. 41 Then He took the child by the hand, and said to her, "Talitha, cumi," which is translated, "Little girl, I say to you, arise." 42 Immediately the girl arose and walked, for she was twelve years of age. And they were overcome with great amazement.

LESSON 2 Continued - Mark 3:31-35.

31 Then His brothers and His mother came, and standing outside they sent to Him, calling Him. 32 And a multitude was sitting around Him; and they said to Him, "Look, Your mother and Your brothers are outside seeking You."

33 But He answered them, saying, "Who is My mother, or My brothers?" 34 And He looked around in a circle at those who sat about Him, and said, "Here are My mother and My brothers! 35 "For whoever does the will of God is My brother and My sister and mother."

LESSON 3 - Arcana Coelestia 6756:2-1.

[2] The reason why in ancient times people were called 'brothers' as a result of spiritual relationships is that the new birth or regeneration established family connections and relationships on a level superior to that of those established by natural birth. A further reason is that those connections and relationships trace their origin back to the same Father, who is the Lord. This goes to explain why people who enter heaven after death no longer acknowledge any brother, or even their mother or father, if the relationship is not founded on goodness and truth. It is in accordance with these that new brotherly relationships are formed there. This then is why those who belonged to the Church in former times called one another brothers.

[1] Later on when the Church fell away from good, and consequently from truth also, people ceased any more to call one another brothers as a result of spiritual connections and relationships, which are those of charity and faith, but solely as a result of natural connections and relationships, or else as a result of friendship. They also began to

consider it beneath them to call someone brother who ranked less highly than themselves. The reason for this was that they attached little or no importance to close ties that sprang from a spiritual origin, but great and supreme importance to close ties that had a natural or social origin.