



September 4, 2022

Twenty-third Sunday of Ordinary Time

*"Whoever does not carry their own cross
and come after me cannot be my disciple."—Luke 14: 27*



Dear Friends,

In many cultures throughout history people married within their bloodlines. For example, the parents of Cleopatra of Egypt were probably brother and sister. Cleopatra at different times was married to her younger brothers before she married the Roman, Mark Antony. People intermarried with family members to preserve bloodlines and to keep wealth within the family line.

In Jesus's own culture the ideal marriage partner was the child of your father's brother. Sons, both married and single, remained with the father. In the ancient Near East, family and friends were the basis for economic survival. In this world economics was embedded in kinship and politics. One could always count on family and friends to look after you. The downside of this system is that everyone in the family "controls" everyone else.

Following Jesus and joining his group would be liberating and exhilarating. But such freedom demands a price. The first rule of behavior in the culture of Jesus is, "family first!" A disciple who has deliberately cut family ties also is cutting ties with the social network by which someone makes a living. Such a disciple, while they may be able to rely on a new family of disciples, will no longer be able to rely on the advantages of blood ties.

Members of the Jesus family will have to rely on "hospitality." This is the virtue in the Middle East by which strangers extend care to strangers. The risk-filled option of following Jesus is quite a cross to carry. This is the very thing that Jesus himself had done.

Jesus broke away from family to proclaim the Gospel. In one scene in the Gospel of Mark the family of Jesus come to take him away. They think he has gone mad. He is not following in his father's trade, left the family, and has become a wandering preacher. He is no longer dependent nor controlled by the family. Jesus is told that his "mother and brothers" are asking for him. Jesus looking around at the group of his listeners replies, *"Who are my mother and brothers? Here are my mother and brothers! Whoever does the will of God is my brother and sister and mother"* (Mark 3:31-34)

What Jesus is doing is challenging his would-be disciples to become a family not defined by bloodlines or family wealth. The family of Jesus is formed by a new kind of bond—the willingness to be the compassion of God in the world, to be solely reliant on God and the generosity of others. It is a daring project. What Jesus proposes is liberating and heroic but costly.

A disciple who accepts the invitation effectively gives up everything. Those who would be disciples better calculate the costs. Anyone who weakens and gives up on the Jesus project will face ridicule and shame. So, if we are going to follow Jesus we must be totally committed and determined. There is no halfway position. It is all or nothing.

Jesus is constructing a new world where we no longer divide ourselves by bloodlines, tribes, cultures and nations. In this world we see Christ in the face of each stranger. We recognize all people of compassion and good will as kin. We live in a world divided by nationalism, racism, and hateful tribalism. As disciples of Jesus, we must take the challenge and risk to build up the whole human race as the family of God.

Peace,

Fr Ron

Esta carta está en español en el sitio web: www.anne.church