

July 16: Our Lady of Mount Carmel

Gospel for July 16th, feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel.

Gospel (*Mt* 12:46-50)

While Jesus was still speaking to the people, behold, his mother and his brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him. But he replied to the man who told him, “Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?” And stretching out his hand toward his disciples, he said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother.”

Commentary

On the day we celebrate the feast of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, the Gospel for the Mass presents us with a scene that is somewhat disconcerting at first glance. But Jesus is actually showing us here the greatness of his blessed Mother.

Saint Matthew tells us that Jesus was preaching in the midst of many people while “his mother and brothers stood outside, asking to speak to him.” As is well known, “brothers” is the usual way in the Near East of referring to close male relatives. These were not children of Mary of course, who always remained a virgin. We know the names of some of these relatives from other Gospel passages: James, Joseph, Simon and Judas (cf. *Mt* 13:55).

Jesus' response is provocative: "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" This might seem overly harsh, as though he were rejecting his loved ones, but that was certainly not the case. Saint Augustine asked: "Is it possible that the Virgin Mary – chosen so that salvation would be born for us from her and created by Christ before Christ was created in her – didn't fulfill the will of the Father? Without a doubt she fulfilled it, and perfectly. Holy Mary, who by faith believed and conceived, considered it more important to be a disciple of Christ than to be the Mother of Christ."^[1]

In fact, Jesus' rhetorical question helps focus our attention on what he is going to say next: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother, and sister, and mother." The true greatness of any creature is to fulfill faithfully God's plans for each one's life.

Mary, as any good mother, would of course have found it hard not being able to enjoy the daily closeness of her Son, who had to carry out the redemptive mission for which he had come into the world. Jesus also loved his family dearly, and being apart from his Mother would have hurt him. But the fulfillment of God's plans takes precedence over all noble human affections. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church makes clear, "parents should welcome and respect with joy and thanksgiving the Lord's call to one of his children to follow him."^[2] —

May our Lady help us to embrace joyfully, as she did, our Lord's call to obey God's plans for each one of us.

^[1] — Saint Augustine, *Sermon* 72 A, 3, 7.

^[2] — *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, no. 2233.

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