

Commentary on the Gospel for Sat, Oct 10th 2015

This past weekend was centered on family. Saturday night everyone gathered around the dinner table – our wonderful daughter and son-in-law, our dear son visiting from out of town and two much-loved grandchildren. We prayed, ate and had a long birthday celebration in a night filled with laughing and stories. It was the kind of evening that fills me with gratitude for the gift of family we have been given.

Whatever the configuration of our families, they are central to our lives. In today's brief, two-line gospel we listen as a woman calls to Jesus, "Blessed is the womb that carried you and the breasts at which you nursed." Jesus' responds, "Rather, blessed are those who hear the word of God and observe it."

Jesus is surprising us with a change of focus. He is not discounting his own mother and their close relationship, but he is telling us that our own relationship with him can be blessed to the degree we let it be a relationship of hearing and keeping his word. Our fidelity to him blesses us with a family relationship with him.

By extension, that also means that we are invited to be family with those beyond our immediate family relationships. We include others because we have been included by Jesus.

As we saw in Pope Francis' recent trip to the US, we find Jesus in the faces and lives of those in our world. Echoing Jesus, Francis asks us to open our hearts to the hungry, the poor and the marginalized. The outcasts we meet might be hidden most obviously within our own families: the relative who talks too much or drinks too much; the dull and monotonous among us and those hindered by poor memories, hearing or manners.

Both inside and outside our families, we are called to reach out to others who need us as a way to really unite to Jesus and his mission on earth. What does Jesus want from us? A deeply personal relationship. Jesus isn't looking for us to read more about him or discuss the theology of his ministry. Jesus longs for a close and personal family relationship with us as we speak to him about our lives and lean on him for support in times of need. Blessed by his love, we hear the call from this love to keep his word by loving as he has loved us.

Our personal prayer and friendship with Jesus will bring us the happiness that is promised in the vision from the first reading from Joel: we are no longer strangers, the mountains shall drip new wine, the hills flow with milk and the channels of Judah fill with water. "Then shall you know that I, the LORD, am your God."

My family is wonderful, but a night at the dinner table isn't always relaxed and celebratory.

Sometimes we argue, pout and have tantrums – even those out of diapers! We are human and love each other and forgive each other. We find Jesus in the midst of that table. Today's invitation from Jesus is to leave that table and reach out to those who need us as we join with Jesus in his mission. Pope Francis has called us to be families of inclusion, dialog and service for all.

