

# The family of Jesus' disciples: attracted by the newness of the Kingdom of God

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Shared family moments. Left: Perpetual profession of Fabián Cifuentes, ssc in January of this year in Bogotá (Colombia)  
Right: Santi González, ssc on the day of his profession in August 2018 in El Escorial (Spain).



**J**esus, the proclaimer of the Kingdom of God, wanted to establish a new way of living together. To this end, one of his first acts was to call men and women to follow him, to be his disciples. The quality of the person and the urgency of his call imposed upon them immediately. The project for this group was none other than to follow Jesus, to learn from him, to see how he acts in the presence of people from all walks of life, to get to know better his heart and his views. To those who wanted to follow him. Jesus asked them to share in his itinerant, 'travelling-light' lifestyle, to put their security in the providential love of God and in the goodness of the people they would meet. He also asked them to leave their families and the emotional and sometimes patrimonial security that can be associated with the family. This is how Jesus answered one of his disciples who wished first to say goodbye to those in his home: "No one who puts his hand on the plough and looks back is fit for the kingdom of God" (Lk 9:62). To another who wanted to bury his father he said: "Let the dead bury their dead, but as for you, go and proclaim the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9:60). Such radicalism can hurt our sensibility and lead us to ask if such demands are reasonable.

Our reaction, however legitimate, cannot remain as such, because the goal of Jesus and the proclamation of his Kingdom invites us to go further. Jesus wants to establish with his disciples a new family, constituted not by blood ties, but by choosing to listen and put into practice the word or the will of God. Those who do this, Jesus considers his relatives. Moreover, Jesus wants the God-Father to whom he is closely united, to be also the God-Father of his disciples. That is why when Jesus teaches them to pray and to turn to God, he tells them to do so starting with "Our Father". The ultimate root of the new family of

Jesus is the fatherly love of God and that which God the Father asks of Him and his disciples.

### **The ambition of Jesus**

To establish a community of disciples was not for Jesus something incidental or merely functional. All his efforts were to help the disciples see the power of his gospel to create new relations with God and among themselves - relations that would subvert such sacred duties as burying the father and instead create among the disciples ties that would be as strong as those of blood. Basically, the community of disciples is a concretisation and a visible sign of what is at the heart of Jesus' message: that the God who reigns is, first of all, a Father who wants to love everyone as his sons and daughters. The group of disciples and the Christian community gathered together in the name of Jesus is called to offer coherent and attractive ways by which many others can discover the depth of God's fatherly love and the fraternity that exists among those who identify themselves as his children. This ambition of Jesus is called to be fulfilled even where people have lived traumatic experiences with their parents, whether through absence or excessive presence, suffering all kinds of wounds. Indeed, it is on such wounds and traumas that God our Father wants to shine his light.

**"So too, the community desired and established by Jesus among his disciples needs to be healed of its own wounds"**

So too, the community desired and established by Jesus among his disciples needs to be healed of its own wounds. The wounds that we bring to the community from our families: splits, enmities, a falling out due to problems of inheritance or differences in opinions and choices, etc. And then there are the wounds that we cause among

ourselves, brothers and sisters in Jesus, when we close in on ourselves, when we cling to our image, when we distrust others, or we shut them out. Basically, we do not leave space to discover the transforming power of the Gospel and its capacity to generate new relations between us.

The freedom of Jesus and the authority that radiated from him came directly from his accepting his relationship of God his Father and from his being available to his will. The centre of Jesus was not himself but his Father and his freedom grew as he grew closer to him each day. Only in this context can his words be understood: "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn 14,9). For Jesus seeking and embracing the will of God for his life and for the world was as necessary as daily food: "My food is to do the will of the one who sent me" (Jn 4,34).

Jesus invites us to heal the relationships between brothers and sisters, starting by accepting the forgiveness that God the Father offers us. We are called to welcome and share in a concrete way the forgiveness that God offers us in the relationships we have as brothers and sisters, pardoning without limits. Such a capacity for forgiveness is only possible if, like Jesus, we focus on the love that God-Father has for us.

From there we can look at the quality of our fraternal relationships, at the brother or sister we have hurt and recall the words of Jesus: "Therefore, if you are presenting your offering on the altar, and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your offering there before the altar, and go, reconcile yourself first with your brother, and then come and present your offering "(Mt 5:23-24).

## **A way to heal wounds**

In this double movement away from self and towards the love of God the Father and towards the brother or sister who has something against me, we discover a path that leads to healing, that leads to the rediscovery of the demanding beauty of the Gospel that can establish richer relationships among us. But this can only happen through the death to self, dying to the excessive attachment to my own ideas, truths, certainties and the naive belief that I am freer without the others. It is true that is a risk to step outside of ourselves, our "secure" selves and accept that we are more ourselves in relationship with God and with our brothers and sisters. But only those who take the risk can discover the strength of the ties that arise among those who embrace the Gospel.

The decision of the brothers of the Province of Africa to bury our brother Landry in Mozambique speaks to us of this risk. His natural family reasonably requested that Landry's body be repatriated to Kinshasa. However, Landry also belonged to the Mozambican people who he served in the last years of his life. On account of the strength of the bonds that had been woven between him and this people it would have been an even greater sadness not to be buried among his own, among those he loved and whom he served as a pastor in the name of Jesus. It was also beautiful to see at his funeral the brothers and sisters of the Congregation accompanying his relatives at the funeral. Through it all we experience how the religious family widens and how what happens to the families of the brothers and sisters also affects us.

On the other hand, it is painful when there are brothers or sisters among us who have not spoken to each other for years, who are scarred by old wounds, who continue to believe that there is no other truth than theirs. I know that putting aside the self and one's wounds is not easy and that sometimes we do not have the tools or the will to do it ... But could not this be the occasion to rediscover the depth of the love that God has for each one? Could we not just simply ask ourselves if the brother or sister we do not talk to has something against us or something to tell us? After all, we are told in Sacred Scripture to "leave our gift at the altar", to allow the light of the Gospel to enter into the rupture and to dare to take the first step towards reuniting with the one who is and remains our brother and our sister. Maybe it is here that we will discover afresh the power of the Gospel.

So, brothers and sisters, as the family of Jesus, let us do what we can today to be reconciled to God and to each other.

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