

Mark 6:3 states: “Is He not the carpenter, the son of Mary, and the brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us?” Did Jesus have brothers and sisters?

This is a common question and one often used by non-Catholics to challenge our belief that Mary remained a virgin throughout her whole life. There are several other places in scriptures that refer to Jesus’ brothers, as well. To answer this question we need to look at differences in customs and languages. Living in a community with a large Hispanic community can be a good reminder for how this is true. In Spanish there is no word for children. The word for boy is niño and for girl is niña. The word for children is simply the plural form of boy, or niños. Niños can refer to a group of both boys and girls.

In much the same way we can look at today’s question. Let’s start by looking at the Old Testament. It was originally written in Hebrew which has no specific word for *cousin*. In the many cases that clearly referred to cousins in the Old Testament, the word for brother is used instead. At the time of Jesus there was a Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures, called the Septuagint, that the Greek-speaking Jews used. Even though the Greek language has a specific word for *cousin*, this translation does not use that word in these instances and retains the word for *brother*. If we now look at the New Testament, we must remember that even though it was written in Greek, Jesus and the disciples spoke Aramaic. The Aramaic language, like Hebrew, does not have a word for *cousin*. If someone spoke about someone’s cousin they would call him his brother. This was the situation of the language and the custom of the time. When the New Testament writers recorded their works, they used the Greek word for brothers just as the Old Testament translators did, even in cases where they were clearly referring to cousins. In our verse from the today’s question, James, Joses, Judas, and Simon were probably Jesus’ cousins or other extended family members; or they could have even been his half-brothers. (There are some who believe that Joseph may have been a widower before becoming betrothed to Mary.) If you have access to the internet, I recommend you visit the following website for a more complete discussion of this topic: http://www.catholic.com/library/Brethren_of_the_Lord.asp.

And we can also look at the question from another perspective. We can look at who Jesus considered to be His brothers. He says: **“For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother.”** (Mt. 12:50) Are you His brother or sister or mother?

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