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The Nazareth Years: Magisterium, Saints, Poets

Reflections on the years spent by the Holy Family in Nazareth, in texts from the magisterium, saints and poets.

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VOICE OF THE MAGISTERIUM

Mary's awareness that she was carrying out a task entrusted to her by God gave a higher meaning to her daily life. The simple, humble chores of everyday life took on special value

in her eyes, since she performed them as a service to Christ's mission. Mary's example enlightens and encourages the experience of so many women who carry out their daily tasks exclusively in the home. It is a question of a humble, hidden, repetitive effort, and is often not sufficiently appreciated. Nonetheless, the long years Mary spent in the house of Nazareth reveal the enormous potential of genuine love and thus of salvation. In fact, the simplicity of the lives of so many housewives, seen as a mission of service and love, is of extraordinary value in the Lord's eyes.

One can certainly say that for Mary life in Nazareth was not dominated by monotony. In her contact with the growing Jesus, she strove to penetrate the mystery of her Son through contemplation and adoration. St Luke says: "Mary kept

all these things, pondering them in her heart" (Lk 2:19; cf. 2:51).

"All these things": they are the events in which she was both participant and spectator, starting with the Annunciation but above all, it is the life of her Child. Every day of intimacy with him is an invitation to know him better, to discover more deeply the meaning of his presence and the mystery of his person.

Someone might think that it was easy for Mary to believe, living as she did in daily contact with Jesus. In this regard, however, we must remember that the unique aspects of her Son's personality were usually hidden, even if his way of acting was exemplary, he lived a life similar to that of his peers.

During his 30 years of life in Nazareth, Jesus did not reveal his supernatural qualities and worked no miracles. At the first

extraordinary manifestations of his personality, associated with the beginning of his preaching, his relatives (called "brothers" in the Gospel), assume—according to one interpretation—responsibility for taking him home, because they feel his behaviour is not normal (cf. Mk 3:21).

In the dignified and hard-working atmosphere of Nazareth, Mary strove to understand the workings of Providence in her Son's mission. A subject of particular reflection for his Mother, in this regard, was certainly the statement Jesus made in the temple of Jerusalem when he was 12 years old: "Did you not know that I must be in my Father's house?" (Lk 2:49). Meditating on this Mary could better understand the meaning of Jesus' divine sonship and her own motherhood, as she endeavoured to discern in her Son's conduct the

traits revealing his likeness to the One he called "my Father".

Communion of life with Jesus in the house of Nazareth led Mary not only to advance "in her pilgrimage of faith" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 58), but also in hope. This virtue, cultivated and sustained by her memory of the Annunciation and of Simeon's words, embraced the whole span of her earthly life, but was practiced especially during the 30 years of silence and hiddenness spent in Nazareth.

At home, the Blessed Virgin experiences hope in its highest form, she knows she will not be disappointed even if she does not know the times or the ways in which God will fulfil his promise. In the darkness of faith and in the absence of extraordinary signs announcing the beginning of her Son's messianic task, she hopes, beyond all evidence,

awaiting the fulfilment of God's promise.

A setting for growth in faith and hope, the house of Nazareth becomes a place of lofty witness to charity. The love that Christ wanted to pour forth in the world is kindled and burns first of all in his Mother's heart: it is precisely in the home that the proclamation of the Gospel of divine love is prepared.

Looking at Nazareth, contemplating the mystery of the hidden life of Jesus and the Blessed Virgin, we are invited to reflect on the mystery of our life which—St Paul recalls—"is hidden with Christ in God" (Col 3:3).

It is often a life that seems humble and obscure in the world's eyes, but which, following Mary's example, can reveal unexpected possibilities of salvation, radiating the love and peace of Christ

*from John Paul II, General audience,
January 29, 1997*

VOICE OF THE SAINTS

Children, we should learn to be subject to our parents. The greater is subject to the lesser. Jesus understood that Joseph was greater than he in age, and therefore he gave him the honor due a parent. He gave an example to every son. I think that Joseph understood that Jesus, who was subject to him, was greater than he. He knew that the one subject to him was greater than he and, out of reverence, restrained his authority. So each one should realize that often a lesser man is put in charge of better men.

*from Origen, Homilies on the Gospel
of Luke 20.5 (3rd c.).*

Consider the most prudent woman Mary, mother of true Wisdom, as the pupil of her Son. For she learned

from him, not as from a child or man but as from God. Yes, she dwelt in meditation on his words and actions. Nothing of what was said or done by him fell idly on her mind. As before, when she conceived the Word itself in her womb, so now does she hold within her his ways and words, cherishing them as it were in her heart. That which she now beholds in the present, she waits to have revealed with greater clarity in the future.

from St. Bede, Exposition on the Gospel of Luke 2.51 (7-8th c.)

We can't forget that Mary spent nearly every day of her life just like millions of other women who look after their family, bring up their children and take care of the house. Mary sanctifies the ordinary everyday things—what some people wrongly regard as unimportant and insignificant: everyday work, looking

after those closest to you, visits to friends and relatives. What a blessed ordinariness, that can be so full of love of God!

For that's what explains Mary's life — her love. A complete love, so complete that she forgets herself and is happy just to be there where God wants her, fulfilling with care what God wants her to do. That is why even her slightest action is never routine or vain but, rather, full of meaning. Mary, our mother, is for us both an example and a way. We have to try to be like her, in the ordinary circumstances in which God wants us to live.

If we act in this way, we give those around us the example of a simple and normal life which is consistent, even though it has all the limitations and defects which are part and parcel of the human condition. And when they see that we live the same

life as they do, they will ask us: Why are you so happy? How do you manage to overcome selfishness and comfort-seeking? Who has taught you to understand others, to live well and to spend yourself in the service of others? Then we must disclose to them the divine secret of Christian existence. We must speak to them about God, Christ, the Holy Spirit, Mary. The time has come for us to use our poor words to communicate the depth of God's love which grace has poured into our souls.

from St. Josemaria, Christ Is Passing By, no. 148

VOICE OF THE POETS

And surely 'twas a gracious thing

When, standing at his father's knee,

The world's great Craftsman and its King

Not king but craftsman learned to be.

by Ronald Knox

"LA MUJER FUERTE"

by José de Valdivielso (16-17th c.)

(rough translation is found below)

La mujer fuerte, madre de la vida,
que buscó cuidadosa lino y lana,
en labrar y tejer entretenida
redime el tiempo y la comida gana;
guisa a los dos humilde la comida,
y con amor y gracia más que humana
sirve y regala a los que trabajando
dulcemente la están enamorando.
Ase un cuartón el rico carpintero,
ase dél luego el Hijo que le ayuda,

y puesto al hombro de hombre
verdadero

donde José le manda el cuartón
muda;

asierran luego el rígido madero,

suda Josef y el Hijo eterno suda;

Josef, aunque trabaja, no se cansa,

y Cristo trabajando en él descansa.

The strong woman, mother of life,

who was careful to bring flax and
wool

diligently works and weaves,

redeeming the time and supporting
her family;

humbly she prepares a meal for the
two;

with a love and grace that is more
than human

she serves the two persons who as
they work

are gently winning over her heart.

The noble carpenter picks up a
plank,

which the Son who is helping him
then takes hold of,

and resting on the shoulders of the
true Man,

the plank moves wherever Joseph
wants;

they set about sawing the hard wood,

and Joseph and the eternal Son begin
to sweat;

Joseph, although working hard, does
not grow tired,

and Christ as he works rests on the
plank.

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