

SECOND MEDITACION: NAZARETH

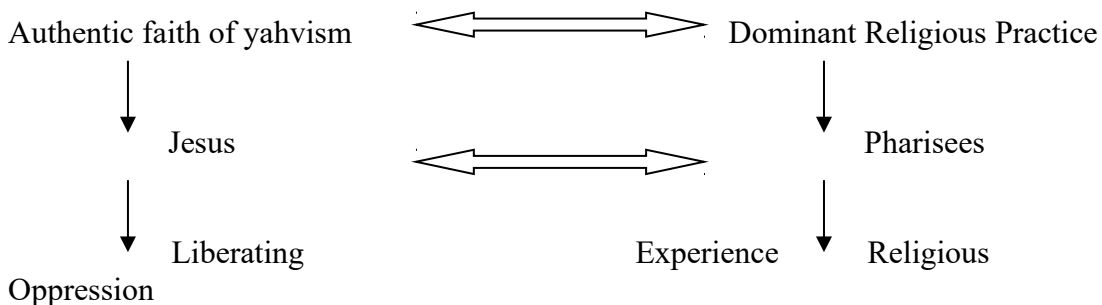
1. The second mystery of the life of Christ that marked deeply the spirituality of Brother Charles was **Nazareth**. It is a coherent way of life with the mystery of the incarnation among the poor: *“Jesus went to Nazareth, the place of the hidden life, of the common life, of the life of family, of prayer, work, darkness, silent virtues, practiced having as witnesses God, his friends and neighbors. Nazareth is the place where the life of the majority of the people passes. We have to respect infinitely the smallest of our brothers...And mix with them. Let us be one of them in the measure that God wants...And treat them fraternally so as to have in the end the honor and the joy to be accepted as one of them”*¹.
2. It is always surprising that Nazareth being the longest stage of the life of Jesus, is that the New Testament has the least data. However, this fact is of itself significant since it shows us the seriousness of the incarnation among the poor. In effect, the life of the majority of the people and with greater reason the life of the poor is similar: unobserved, is not news, is not recorded anywhere.
3. However, it is in this daily routine where we live the fundamental experiences of life, those that mark us forever. Christ does not want to jump this stage and lives it in depth and extensively: 30 of the 33 years that roughly lasted his life. To the point that they called him **Nazarene** (Mt 2,23). A single data –that is repeated twice– gives us the gospel on this period: Nazareth is for Jesus **a time and a place of maturation and growth** in every aspect: physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, lived from the human warmth of the home. In effect, when they go back after presenting him in the temple of Jerusalem, Luke says, *“The boy grew and strengthened, growing in wisdom; and the grace of God was with him”* (Lc.2,40); and twelve years later, after the episode of the loss and finding of the boy in the same temple, signals that *“He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and lived subject to them...Jesus progressed in wisdom, in height and in grace before God and before men”* (Lc 2,51-52).
4. The deep **wisdom** of Jesus that is perceived in the gospels was acquired in Nazareth:
 - In family life, with Mary and Joseph
 - In the manual work,
 - In the relations with neighbors,
 - In the religious practice,
 - In the celebrations of his village,

The daily life of the poor of a rural village was his school. Let us remember that Nazareth does not appear on the maps of the Roman Empire neither is it mentioned in the Old Testament.
5. And how does Jesus learn? He was a keen observer of nature and of human behavior. The parables are the best proof of that. He observes and he learns of the

¹ Charles of Foucauld, Spiritual Writings, page 32.

lilies of the field and of the birds of the sky; of the grains of mustard and of the fig trees; of the women that made bread and of the sowers of the fields, of the men that build their houses, do their business, loan money or declare war. (See Mt. 13, 24 and following).

6. Jesus, therefore, in Nazareth does not live in a bubble (hidden life?): He is very involved in the life of his people, he is conscious of its messianic hopes, he knows what is going on. It is in Nazareth and in his trips to Jerusalem for the big feasts where He allows himself to be impacted, by the suffering of his people. The blind, lepers, paralytics, the possessed, the deaf, the dumb that appear in the gospel, do not appear suddenly in the life of Jesus –as out of nowhere-. They were there, in his daily surroundings, and He saw them since he was a boy, and I am sure since he was a child, He felt this “compassion for the crowds” of which he speaks to us in the Gospel. His compassionate heart grew stronger with contact with human pain; And only the Father knows how many gestures of solidarity He made during these 30 years. Gestures like what a neighbour does with his neighbour.
7. And, in the deep relation with his Father, he grew in grace –in love and in obedience-. Jesus does not begin to be a Son at the moment of his baptism. This moment is possible because in Nazareth He learnt to be a Son, at the prayer and in the regular meditation of the Holy scriptures. Here he discovers the authentic faith of yahvism, based on justice and mercy (Lc 11,42), of preferential love for the widow and for the orphan; faith that is conducive to life and to freedom, that was part of his personal experience. This understanding and experience of the depth of the Jewish faith, contrasted strongly with the practice of the same, lived and taught by scribes and Pharisees, those who had transformed religion in an intolerable burden for the poor.



8. It is, then, reading the Sacred Scriptures –particularly the prophets-, **from that to becoming Brother of the poor** in Nazareth, that awakes in Jesus and develops that deep critical sense concerning the religious practice, imposed on his people by the dominant religious groups, that we perceive in the Gospel.
9. The main points in which Jesus perceived this contradiction between the authentic Yahvistic faith and the dominant religious practice, are the following:²

² See Enrique Alvear, “Liberating Evangelization and conflict”

- There is a first contradiction regarding the concept of the **religious power** that the Jewish authorities had: no longer is it to free but to dominate: “...*You do not imitate their behavior...They tie heavy loads and put them on the backs of the people, but they don't move even a finger to carry them*” (Mt 23,3-4).
- They have restricted the concept of **neighbor**, as they affirm that there are sectors of people with whom there should be no contact, as this only tarnishes. The first excluded are the sinners: “*Why does your master eat with the publicans and sinners?*” (Mt 9,11). Also the ignorant that do not know the law: “*these people that do not know the law they are damned*”, the Pharisees say (John 7,49). Also the foreigners: they are the dogs that do not have right to the table of the children.
- There is also all the conflict around the **law** that Jesus subordinates it to the person: “*The Saturday has been created for man and not man for Saturday*” (Mc 2,27).

These and other contradictions always result in more oppression and suffering for his people, that Jesus reached the painful conclusion that the doctors, the Pharisees and the Jewish authorities have corrupted totally the image of God and that in definite are adoring the devil and not the living God of the authentic faith of yahvism (John 8,41-44).

10. A religious **criticism** so deep and complete is not improvised: it is fruit of a long reflection done by contact with the victims of this religious oppression, enlightened by the Sacred Scriptures and matured in prayer. Nazareth is, then, to say it like this, the “laboratory” where the faith and the religion preached by Jesus are developed, which is at the same time in continuity and discontinuity with the faith and Jewish religion. Jesus begins to understand what the poor need, in the first place, feel the love of the Father and not a catalogue of laws forced on them. They need to be received, healed, orientated, forgiven, because they walked like sheep without a shepherd. He feels the call to do something and at the time to ask himself the how, he becomes aware of the style of the suffering Servant of Isaiah.
11. Jesus is sufficiently intelligent so as to realize that a mission given on the terms that He perceives it will, necessarily bring conflict and will cause him a lot of suffering. He knew the luck of the prophets: “*Jerusalem, Jerusalem, that kill the prophets and stone those that are sent to you*” (Lc 13,34). In Nazareth then, the messianic consciousness of Jesus matured until the moment that he feels that “his hour has arrived” and has to leave, abandoning all his human securities to enter into the security that only God offers us, the one of his faithful love. Nazareth is, then, a new gesture of incarnation, a new gesture of poverty, a new gesture of obedience and of confidence in the Father, to initiate his public ministry.

12. Charles de Foucauld understood in depth the mystery of Nazareth and tried to imitate Jesus in that lifestyle. Therefore, his first step when leaving the Trappist's was to go to the same village of Nazareth, to live there the typical values of this stage of the life of Jesus. This experience marked Brother Charles forever. However, little by little he discovers that Nazareth, more than a geographic place, is a lifestyle to evangelize from below and from inside and not from above and from outside, especially in those places or environments estranged from the Church. *"The life of Nazareth can be lived in any part; live it where you can be of more help for your neighbor"*.³
13. Like this he explains his personal experience in a letter written to a priest: *"I am an old sinner that the day following his conversion this is nearly twenty years ago was attracted powerfully by Jesus to live his life of Nazareth. Since then strive I to imitate him –very miserably by the way-. I spent several years in that beloved and blessed Nazareth, as a servant and sacristan of the convent of the poor Clares. I did not go out of that blessed place only to receive, five years ago, the holy orders. A priest freed from the diocese of Viviers, my last retreats of the diaconate and priesthood showed me that this life of Nazareth, my vocation, was essential to live it not in the beloved Holy Land, but among the sick souls, among the most abandoned sheep (...) I have requested and obtained permission to establish myself in the Algerian Sahara"*⁴.
14. Finally, the heart of the experience of Nazareth is to learn to **be a Brother of all** and for the Brother Charles this learning is the key of the Christian and priestly life: *"we have to see in all men **beloved sons of God...** Therefore we have to behave with them in a loving way that a good brother behaves, who does not change although his brother harms him or behaves in an unworthy way"*.⁵ *"I want all the inhabitants, Muslims, Christian, Jewish and non-believers- to get accustomed to see me as their brother, **the universal brother**. Already they call this house "the fraternity" (khaoua in Arab), which pleases me exceedingly and know that the poor have a brother; here better said: not only the poor, but all men"*.⁶

For the personal prayer:

3 Charles de Foucauld, "Spiritual Writings", page 72

4 Charles of Foucauld, "Spiritual Writings" page 80.

5 Ídem, page 94

6 Ídem, page 96

Choose any of these exercises:

- Contemplate Jesus in Nazareth, imagine him in his daily life, learn from Him.
- In the light of the mystery of Nazareth and of the experience of Brother Charles, reflect on the strength that they have in my life and ministry the permanent values that this mystery encloses: continuous prayer, simplicity, closeness to the poor, to learn from the life of the people, equality in our dealings with others, warmth of home, welcome, work, and in which of them I feel called by God to grow.
- Review the exercise of our priestly ministry in the light of the criticisms that Jesus makes of the religious practices of his time.
- Reflect on the ministry of Paul in his efforts of incarnation and enculturation “to save some at all costs.” (1Cor 9,19-23)