

JESUS
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CÁRITAS

NAZARETH: PLACE AND TIME FOR CONTEMPLATION

Six months later, God sent the angel Gabriel to a young virgin living in a town in Galilee called Nazareth, who was betrothed to Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin's name was Mary.

The angel came to her house and said to her, "Rejoice, you who are beloved and favored; the Lord is with you." These words troubled her, and she wondered what this greeting meant.

But the angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary, for you have found favor with God. You will conceive and give birth to a son, and you will name him Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. God will give him the throne of his ancestor David. He will reign over the people of Jacob forever, and his kingdom will never end."

Then Mary said to the angel, "How can I have a child if I have no relationship with a man?"

The angel replied: "The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. Therefore, your son will be holy, and they will call him the Son of God. Behold, your relative Elizabeth, in her old age, is with child, and she who could not have a child is now six months pregnant; for with God nothing will be impossible."

Mary said: "I am the servant of the Lord; let it be to me as you have spoken." After these words, the angel withdrew. (1)

Nazareth is the place where God decides to become man, through a woman, Mary. She gives us Jesus of Nazareth, a real man, not a virtual one. He is the man of God who gives meaning to gratuitousness, because God has no strategies with men: He does not provide an educational, social, or virtual process. He is pure Love, a 24-karat Love, one hundred percent pure, without preservatives or colorings, without condemnation or consolation prizes.

The love of God passes through Nazareth to stay, to dwell in the womb of a virgin. The fruit of all this is Holy; He is the Son of the Most High, He is the Son of God. Here God does not hide: God dwells among us, in silence and in the Word made flesh.

Mary passes by in Nazareth without making a sound. Charles de Foucauld's intuitions during his stay in Nazareth are also born in silence and in humble, simple, socially imperceptible service. For Mary, for Brother Charles, Nazareth is a place and time of contemplation: the place and time that will transform other situations and stages of their lives into contemplative spaces. They learn in Nazareth to live their daily lives with love for the small and for the little ones.

In Nazareth, Mary teaches Jesus, and in Nazareth, Brother Charles is taught by Jesus.

We are called to live like Jesus, not to pretend to live like Jesus, making the sense of God (how we experience Him, how we adore Him, how we love Him, how we transmit Him) merely virtual. It is our lives that must evangelize, not our words. Words instruct; life convinces.

Let us be taught in Nazareth, let us work, let us grow...

None of this is possible if we do not go through life, through our meetings, through our visits, through our celebrations with a contemplative attitude. We can become executors of a heartless liturgy, faithful upholders of a tradition, and forget the One who called us, the One who enamored us, the One who proclaimed us.

Being contemplative in the daily work and pastoral dedication does not evade us from reality. You must be imbued with the Gospel of Jesus to the point of being able, in complete independence, to affirm, in the face of the powers and ideologies of this world, the values that are truly indispensable to guarantee the transcendence and essential rights of the human person. You cannot keep silent from men what Christ would say to them if he could speak through your mouth and bear witness through your actions. This is why he has chosen and called you. (2) We need to return to Nazareth, like Brother Charles's great intuition: to return to the Gospel, there where God's hope placed in Mary is born. A hope from God that will see its light in Bethlehem.

Nazareth is talking less about ourselves and more about God with our lives, our things, our homes, our belongings, our projects.

Our whole life, however mute it may be, the life of Nazareth, the life of the desert, as much as our public life, must be a preaching of the Gospel from the rooftops; our whole person must breathe Jesus, all our actions, our whole life must shout that we are of Jesus, they must present the image of the evangelical life; our whole being must be a living preaching, a reflection of Jesus, a perfume of Jesus, which makes Jesus see, which shines like an image of Jesus... (3) For Brother Carlos, Jesus is the center of his life and he invites us to do so through contemplation. He speaks of three ways of contemplating God: in the moments and life of Jesus, in the Holy Eucharist and in the mysteries of his life (4), when we do not find the whys but rather many whats for. His intuitions have given the Church of Jesus a means of encountering him, God himself, in the midst of silence and so often among the noises of our daily Nazareth. Intuitions that help us bear witness to God without proselytizing, without forcing situations, without exploiting people's feelings, and, above all, without making noise for the benefit of our egos.

Nazareth is never a flight or hiding from reality. Nazareth is standing up for Jesus and for the least of these. Just as "hidden life" can seem contradictory, the expression "preaching the Gospel in silence" can

also be misunderstood. In his own letters, where Brother Charles uses these expressions, he speaks of relationships of friendship, of contacts. Is it then necessary to remain silent? On this question, Antoine Chatelard says that the answer must be both yes and no. No, for Nazareth is the place of communication, of listening, of sharing, and of friendship, the place where the Word is transmitted in ordinary conversations with people. Yes, for Nazareth is silence, because Nazareth is shouting the good news from the rooftops, remaining silent, without preaching, loving. (5) As priests of the Fraternity, we face a real challenge if we have not followed a path, both spiritually and psychologically, that we are convinced leads to an authentic encounter with the Lord, in contemplation and adoration, and in our dedication and service to the People of God and to society. Our priestly ministry is not a monastic or conventual form: we are men in the midst of the world. When Nazareth convinces us, it ceases to be an idea, something virtual, or an annex, and makes us grow with our neighbors, wall to wall, our communities, our brothers in the fraternity. Nazareth can never be static in our lives, for that would be synonymous with installation or accommodation. Jesus, given by Mary, is a neighbor in Nazareth; he cohabits, lives with, is close to his people, is a citizen. He does not deal only with them, he is with them. And this attitude will later always make him stand with the least; it will make him look without judging, look to help and be useful, listening to men and women and listening to his Father.

Nazareth helps us to live without judgment, to live in contemplation of our personal spaces and the spaces of others: their hearts, their dreams, their lives. The spirit of Nazareth, then, urges us to review our lives by contemplating them, to love our own lives and those of others as God's great loving gift, when we experience gratuitousness. We are only in Nazareth when we de-idealize it and accept Jesus as our neighbor or companion in our home, in our lives, and in our future, as our co-pilot or companion on our visits or meetings.

NOTES:

(1) Luke 2:26-38

(2) René Voillaume, *Gospel, Politics, and Violence*, p. 22. Málaga, 1973

(3) Charles de Foucauld, *Spiritual Works. Anthology of Texts*. 59, San Pablo, Madrid, 1998

(4) Cf. Carlos de FOUCAULD, *op. cit.* 62

(5) Michel LAFON, *Vivre Nazareth aujourd'hui*, p. 27. Fayard, 1985

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For a life review:

1. Do we try to live Nazareth, or is it merely an occasional reference in our fraternity gatherings? Do I believe in and value in my life this key identity in Brother Charles's spirituality?
2. Do we step outside of ourselves to listen to the "angel" who draws us from our readings, our television, our rest, our free time, and who announces to us, through his problems or impertinences, that God is calling us?

3. Do we smell of Jesus or do we smell of incense, populism, image-building, orthodoxy to avoid being singled out?
4. How do we view our brother priests? Do we believe ourselves to be poorer, more likable, more progressive, more faithful, better pastors or orators, more intellectually solid, more likable, or with better people skills? Do we make internal judgments?