

September Cell Group Teaching
Recovering the Spirituality of Nazareth

Lectio Divina: Luke 2: 51-52

Last month I noted the important role family plays in developing and spreading the faith. This month I want to encourage us to use the Holy Family as an example and inspiration for us. The development of our faith begins in the home as our parents are our first role models and catechists. This month I would like to offer the following challenge: place yourselves in Nazareth and observe the Holy Family as they grow together in their faith and see where we can follow their example in our own lives. This involves a great trust in God, but also a desire to love those around us. If it helps, I will try to set the scene for you but it's important to not get lost in details. Rather, place yourselves *spiritually* in the home of Jesus.

The scripture passage I chose is a short one but it has a lot for us to unpack. Just a few verses before, we follow the Holy Family as they travel to Jerusalem around Passover as was Jewish custom. This trip was a little more unique because the 12 year old Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem as his parents traveled back to Nazareth. This isn't so bad when we remember that the Holy Family would have traveled with their extended family so it's quite possible that Mary and Joseph thought Jesus was with one of their relatives. Once they discovered that Jesus was not with them or their relatives they rushed back to Jerusalem only to find Jesus speaking in the temple about God. Our Blessed Mother asked Jesus "Son, why have you treated us so? Behold your father and I have been looking for you anxiously." Jesus responds by saying "How is it that you sought me? Did you not know I must be in my Father's house?" We don't have to imagine how Mary and Joseph responded, the evangelist notes that "they did not understand the saying which he spoke to them." It was only natural for Mary and Joseph to be confused. I want to highlight the final part of the passage for our reflection. Luke notes that

Jesus was obedient to his parents and followed them back to Jerusalem. The passage ends by noting that when Jesus returned to Jerusalem he “increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man.” Lets allow that to rest in our hearts: Jesus, upon his return home, increased in wisdom and stature and in favor with God and man. In Luke’s Gospel we don’t hear about Jesus until his baptism when he’s 30 years old. The period from the time he is lost in the temple at age 12 until the beginning of his public ministry at age 30 is referred to as the “Hidden Years” of Christ. I used to tell my youth group that this was evidence of how strict Mary and Joseph were as parents because he was grounded from the time he was 12 until he turned 30!

This of course is not the case but it is important to note that the scriptures spend more time on his birth than his childhood and adolescence combined. At first the mystery of the Hidden Years may seem frustrating but it is important to note that it was during these crucial years of childhood in Nazareth that Jesus’ life was most like ours. As Fr. James Martin noted none of us during our childhood were preaching or performing miracles, but all of us lived out our lives as Jesus did such as being loved and nurtured by our parents, loving and quibbling with our families, and most importantly learning what it means to be an adult and live in the world. What does this mean for us and how are you to live our lives according to the spirituality of Nazareth. The secret is love. Catherine Doherty, writes the following:

“In Nazareth Jesus reduced love to our size. We are little people, and as we read Scripture about his immense love, it can overpower us. But if we listen in quiet, and hear his voice come gently and simply, *do little things exceedingly well for love of me*, the routine chores of the workplace and the daily tasks of housework begin to be a way of loving him.”

She goes on to write: “[t]his way of loving him is so very simple: the diapers, the baking, the laundry; sitting quietly, telling stories to children, holding the hand of one’s spouse. All are little acts of love directed not only to one’s family but to God. The farmer plowing his field, the plumber doing repairs, the husband spending time with his wife and children—all realize this is what God asks.”

We are all called to preach the Gospel through our lives and this is done by making holy even those ordinary parts of our life. This is precisely what the Holy Family teaches us from their time in Nazareth. We please God by keeping him present and in mind as we go through the rough and tumble of our lives. To paraphrase St. Teresa of Calcutta, we cannot do great things, only small things with great love. This is the very simple recipe for holiness we see in the writings and lives of the Saints from the newly Canonized Mother Teresa to St. Theresa of Lisieux. As important as it is to follow the example of the Holy Family’s time in Nazareth, we must be careful not to fall into the trap of following the other inhabitants (that is Jesus’s neighbors). Jesus began his public ministry after his baptism in the Jordan. Following this the Holy Spirit led Jesus not the desert to go spiritual battle with the evil one for 30 days and nights. Jesus then returned to Nazareth and preached in the synagogue (Luke 4: 14-30). When Jesus was finished he was quick rebuked by those in attendance giving Nazareth the distinction of being the first place to deny Christ. Think of this: he was first rejected in his hometown by people that knew him and his family. At the end of our first year in theology we make a pilgrimage to the Holy Land and I distinctly remember our trip to Nazareth. That day was particularly bad for us. I’m sure you can relate. We were exhausted emotionally and physically which affected our moods. There certainly was a spiritual heaviness and negative vibes. It was only we I got back that I was able to explain why that leg of the journey was so bad. We were in the place that first rejected Christ which seems to have left a spiritual aura of negativity. That is

why it is important to pause and ask ourselves if we want to follow the path and example of the Holy Family and dedicate our lives to making all aspects holy and pleasing to God, or are we to follow Jesus' neighbors and friends who denied him?

Questions for discussion:

- (1) What are some of the obstacles that get in the way of us making holy the ordinary aspects of our lives?
- (2) Discuss some strategies that can help us overcome these obstacles.