



The Holy See

POPE JOHN PAUL II

GENERAL AUDIENCE

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Mary's 'hidden life' is example to mothers

1. The Gospels offer very sparse information about the years the Holy Family spent in Nazareth. St Matthew tells of the decision taken by Joseph, after the return from Egypt, to make Nazareth the Holy Family's permanent home (cf. Mt 2:22-23), but then gives no further information except that Joseph was a carpenter (Mt 13:55). For his part, St Luke twice mentions the Holy Family's return to Nazareth (cf. Lk 2:39, 51) and gives two brief references to the years of Jesus' childhood, before and after the episode of the pilgrimage to Jerusalem: "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favour of God was upon him" (Lk 2:40), and "Jesus increased in wisdom, age and grace before God and men" (Lk 2:52).

In relating these brief remarks about Jesus' life, Luke is probably referring to Mary's memories of a period of profound intimacy with her Son. The union between Jesus and the one who was "full of grace" goes far beyond what normally exists between mother and child, because it is rooted in a particular supernatural condition and reinforced by the special conformity of both to the divine will.

Thus we can conclude that the atmosphere of tranquillity and peace in the house of Nazareth and their constant seeking to fulfil God's plan gave an extraordinary and unique depth to the union of mother and son.

2. 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.

3. 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".

4. 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 practised 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

To the English-speaking pilgrims and visitors the Pope said:

I am pleased to greet the English-speaking visitors present at today's Audience, especially from Denmark, Norway and the United States. I extend a cordial welcome also to the pilgrims from the Archdiocese of Toronto. Upon all of you I cordially invoke an abundance of heavenly favours.

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