

Life of Mary (XIII): The Nazareth Years

The thirteenth chapter in the Life of Mary looks at the many years spent by the Holy Family in Nazareth, years marked by daily work, prayer and joyful family life.

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After relating how the boy Jesus was found among the doctors of the law in the Temple, St. Luke continues: *He went down with them to Nazareth and was subject to them. And his Mother kept all these things in her*

heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom, age, and grace before God and men (Lk 2:51-52).

The Gospel summarizes in just two verses the next eighteen years of the life of Jesus and Mary—years when the Holy Family lived just like other families in Nazareth, but with a special love. They were years decisive for the Redemption, which the incarnate Word was already accomplishing through his obedience and daily work in ordinary life.

What had happened in the Temple was soon forgotten, but the words Jesus addressed to them there gave Joseph and Mary much to think about. They grasped with new clarity the meaning of Jesus' life on earth—completely given over to the mission the heavenly Father had entrusted to Him. And although this must have left a deep imprint on their souls, life in Nazareth continued as usual.

Each day brought its effort and toil. Mary's tasks were those of any homemaker: trips to the only fountain in town to fill her jug with fresh water; preparing dough for the oven to make a week's supply of bread; keeping the house clean and pleasant, quite likely with wildflowers to add color and fragrance; spinning bleached wool and softened flax to weave the necessary garments; making required purchases whenever a peddler came to town hawking his wares....the thousand domestic tasks Mary carried out like other women in the village, but with immense love.

When the Child was still small, he would accompany his Mother on her daily rounds, at home or in the village. But as He became older, Jesus began to spend more time with Joseph. During the years we are considering here, Jesus would have begun to help Joseph in his abundant

daily work. Joseph's workshop was like any other in those times in Palestine. His may have been the only such shop in the small town of Nazareth. The work of a craftsman (as the Gospel calls him) would have been quite varied: constructing a winepress or fashioning a simple cabinet, straightening a table or a roof, planing a door that didn't fit well.... Jesus the adolescent and then the young adult learned from Joseph how to work well, with care for details and a ready smile for customers, charging a just price and working out easy payments for anyone in financial straits.

One day Joseph died. Jesus had by now grown up and could take charge of the home and his Mother. Mary and Jesus must have wept in those final moments as the holy Patriarch passed away in peace, accompanied so closely by his two great loves. He had completed his mission faithfully.

With Joseph's death, Mother and Son would have drawn even closer together. How often they would have recalled Joseph, whether alone or with relatives, on long winter nights beside the glowing fire! They would dwell on many small memories—how he forgot about himself, and always served others—that summed up the life of Joseph the craftsman.

In the peace and tranquility of their home, Mary continued at her daily tasks: cooking, scrubbing pots and pans, grinding and kneading flour, sewing clothes for Jesus, amiably greeting people who dropped by....but doing so with ever greater love, since she had at her side the Source of all Love. Yet nothing in her life seemed out of the ordinary to relatives and neighbors—not even the tactful gentleness that drew everyone to her and made it so pleasant to be with her, just as the

dew freshens and brightens the fields, and yet is scarcely noticed.

And as Jesus carried out his daily work, our Lady *kept all these things in her heart* (Lk 2:51), pondering and meditating on them in her uninterrupted dialogue with God.

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