

7. NAZARETH

By Fr. David Kennerley, SM

A Prayer

St Joseph, such an ordinary mere mortal like ourselves, yet so at home with both Jesus and Mary. You have much to teach us as Marists!

Mary, you and Joseph were led into so many situations about which you had little understanding. Help us then to grow in faith towards the unknown, confident that God is still present with us and will not fail us.

Aspects of Prayer For Marists

As Marists, we are to become ever more thoroughly Gospel-people in our relationships – just like Mary herself. This also implies being bearers of Christ to others, ‘missionary’. One image for this is a bridge: on one side of the gap is an individual unaware of or separated from God. Following this same person is Christ, seeking to be with them but effectively stranded on the other side. It’s this meeting, this relationship that Mary wants to see happen through us. We are to be the bridge overcoming the gap.

Enabling even the atmosphere for such an encounter between someone and Christ to occur requires incredible sensitivity and great tact on our part. Hence, we need a place where we learn to process and integrate all that is happening within us so that we can be all the more ‘up to the task.’ For Marists, Nazareth is that place.

In the gospels, Nazareth was where Jesus, for a mystifyingly long thirty years of his life, was seemingly unaware of the world, almost removed from anything but the most basic needs and interests of life. As such, Nazareth stands for simplicity and of actually valuing the place of God in our lives. Nazareth also highlights the urgency of preparation for what we are called to do. Nazareth, then, represents our need for God, of being “alone with God,” and of taking time to sift and discern our plans and actions together with God.

Allied with Colin’s “spirit of prayer,” (knowing our need for God), was his “spirit of faith”: a firm belief that through us, God can achieve good things! God indeed wants to do just that, but I can get in the way. Nazareth means learning to be ‘a servant of the Lord.’ As we grow in such an openness to God we will certainly also come to see just how close God is to us personally. We will also become more aware of just how frequently God is this wonderful player in so many ways around me. In short, we will “taste God.”

At a practical level then, Nazareth isn’t finding a scene in our bibles featuring this small village, family house, or workshop a long time ago and praying on that, imagining we are a detached ‘fly on the wall.’ Leaving Nazareth simply at this level is to risk keeping Nazareth all too distant from us. It’s more like pausing to ‘have a cuppa’ with those we meet there.

Nazareth primarily means growing in the profound consciousness of God that filled that house and family at Nazareth. In a nutshell, Nazareth is that interior space I treasure because of its forever-open door and the warmth, congeniality and natural ease I have with its occupants, and they with me. I pop in regularly, perhaps only briefly, to soak in the atmosphere and genuinely connect with those there. It is where I put before God what occupies me and also dispose myself to God. Nazareth then, is about making space to be formed by God, and our heavenly partners. The point behind making time to ponder on things as Mary herself did at Nazareth, is not merely to promote a sense of interior calm or confidence. It is about centring ourselves and what we are doing on God.

In this way, from there, from that Nazareth space, we will be better focused and prepared for the task at hand. We will be more, attuned as it were, to ‘Mary in the early Church.’

Hence, prayer for a Marist will entail a regular focus on those ‘to whom we are sent.’ Marists also make a point of praying for each other and their work. All the more so, when things are difficult. We do so out of the utter conviction that any success, any good achieved comes from God.

An Insight

“Nazareth is not simply another symbol of the interior life or of a contemplative life-style. It is rather a symbol of a Marian consciousness. It is a symbol of the call to enter into the mystery of Mary and to adopt her perspectives, her viewpoint. Nazareth is where we discover whether or not our perspectives, values, priorities, what is in our heart and mind, resonate in empathy with those of Mary” (Michael Fitzgerald, MARIAN CONSCIOUSNESS, p.64).

The Practice

“To let ourselves get caught up in the mystery of Nazareth is to let yourself be shaped by the ordinariness of your days, by the routineness of your life, to learn to look at work, familiar relationships, everyday meetings with others etc., as the terrain where God waits for you, so that you can learn to live in the present moment, putting aside nostalgia for the past as well as projecting into the future” (Francois Drouilly, “15 DAYS OF PRAYER WITH JC COLIN, p.58).

Possible Questions

1. When and where are you already now inclined to ‘find God’ and/or ‘speak to God’?
2. How might Nazareth be an encouraging image for you, hold hopes for you, regards growth in prayer?
3. How would you describe your current relationship with Mary and in what ways might ‘thinking, judging, feeling and acting as Mary’ help develop that relationship in practice?

