

Exercises

For personal reflection or group sharing

- 1 ■ Take the time – five or ten minutes – to look at the picture on the first page. What do you see? What does this say about the life of those who are living in the house? What in my own life is evoked in what I have noticed? Share in the group.
- 2 ■ Call to mind three or four places in your own daily life. What do they represent for you? How do you inhabit them? What sort of calls do they issue for you? Conclude by a personal prayer or a sharing emerging out of that contemplation.
- 3 ■ Share on one or other, or on both of the texts presented.

NAZARETH

1



“The angel Gabriel was sent by God to a town in Galilee, called Nazareth.”

Luke 1:26



“Our spirit, the spirit of the Society, do you know where you can find it?

For me, I find it entirely in the house of Nazareth.”

- Founder speaks 188, 12

A life like all of our lives

Who knows how many times I read it, without feeling any real emotion. The other evening, however, that phrase from the Council, quoted under an image of the Virgin, seemed so daring that I checked on its authenticity by going to its source. In fact, it comes from the 4th paragraph of the *Decree on the Apostolate of the Laity*, where we find written – and I quote – “Mary on earth led a life like that of all of us, filled with familial cares and labours”.

“Mary lived on earth” – not in the clouds. She lived “a life like any one of us”. That means, a life like that of her neighbours. She drank water from the same well, She ground the grain in the same mill. She sat down in the cool shade of the same yard. She also returned home tired in the evening, after gleaning in the fields. To her the word was also addressed one day: “Mary, your hair is beginning to turn white”. So she, too, looked at herself in

the well, and felt a moment of acute nostalgia, like all the women in the world when they notice that their youth is beginning to fade.

But we are not finished being surprised. Learning that Mary’s life, like ours, was “filled with family cares and labours” makes her so much a sharer in human weariness as to allow us to glimpse the fact that our daily chores are not, perhaps, as ordinary as we had thought.

Yes, she also had her problems: of health, money, relationships, adaptation. Who knows how often she came home from doing the washing with a headache, or lost in her thoughts because, for several days, Joseph was receiving fewer and fewer clients at his workshop? Who knows at how many doors she had to knock seeking a few days work for Jesus during the olive harvest?

Like all wives, she will have had those moments of crisis with her husband, taciturn as he is, whose silences she did not always understand. Like all mothers, she will have watched over, between fear and hope, the tumultuous phases of her son’s adolescence. Like all women, she will have suffered misunderstanding, even from those two greatest loves on earth. She will have feared letting them down. Or of not being quite up to her role. And, having washed with her tears the pain of an immense solitude, she will in the end have found in sharing prayer together, the happiness of a communion situated far beyond human nature (...)

Holy Mary, woman of every day, help us to understand that the deepest chapter in theology is not the one that places you at the centre of spirituality or of the liturgy or dogma or in art. But the one that places you

within the house of Nazareth. There, amidst the pots and spinning wheels, in the midst of tears and prayer, between the balls of wool and the scrolls of Scripture, where you experienced in the simple depths of your being as a woman joys free of malice, bitterness without despair, leavings without homecomings.

Holy Mary, woman of every day, free us from nostalgia for the grand epic, and teach us to consider our daily lives as the workplace within which the history of salvation is built up. Free us from, our fears, so that we can experience, like you, abandonment to God’s will in the monotony of time and in the slow passing of the hours.

Tonino Bello (+1993)
Mary, Woman of our time,
Mediaspaul, 1998