

THE IMMENSITY OF THE “LITTLE ONE”

The full mystery of Christ redeems us. We should strive to assimilate every second of the Master's earthly existence so that he relives in the Church today. We are not called to simply put the Gospel message into practice, like a Chinese person who conforms his/her life to the teachings of Confucius. Beginning with the day we were baptized, our existence is already solely *mystical*: it is the time on earth given to us to immerse ourselves in the mysteries of the life of Jesus. When I suffer, it is he who suffers in me. When I rejoice, it is he who rejoices. When I give myself [to God], it is he who immolates himself. When I am poor, it is he who takes on the condition of a servant. When I am sick, it is he who carries the cross. As J.J. Olier wrote four centuries ago, our most sublime vocation is to become “the crystal throne” of God: his beauty glimpsed today through the transparency of our existence.



But the stages of the life of Jesus that we are called to relive in our own lives can be brought into proper focus only through the lens of the first great mystery: that of his Incarnation and formation in Nazareth. The life of the Master can be fittingly admired from the perspective of his humility and littleness. Fr. Alberione wrote that the mystery of Nazareth is the “forge shop” in which the true Christian is formed (cf. DF 14-15). It is in the hidden events of daily life that we take on the form of Christ through the mysterious work of the Spirit and the industrious hands of Mary and Joseph. Everything begins in Nazareth, and the life of Jesus and our own lives will always be colored by it. The glory of the resurrection is also colored by Nazareth: a miracle of humility accessible only to the pure of heart.

These considerations might seem to be merely pious thoughts, a sort of temporary escape into pseudo-mysticism. We do well to distrust slogans, on the condition however that we do not lose sight of reality. Because it is precisely reality that prevents us from spiritualizing things in a false way and introduces us into the mystical realm. And what could be more real in the hidden existence of Jesus of Nazareth than a house partially hewn out of rock, two goats, a carpenter's plane, and a workroom he entered at dawn to earn his daily bread? What is easier to experience than that anonymous yet marvelous new day made up of the same old things, the same old people, the same old donkey that Joseph, the guardian of this Little One, loads with just-finished items to take to clients who never pay him on time? If we consider the life of Christ in us to be just a pious thought, it is because we have never been awestruck by *what is happening now* in that little space called Nazareth in which we too, whether willingly or unwillingly, are “giants in our dreams yet dwarfed by our fears.”

Our only chance is to surrender ourselves to the Little One, making him our interpretive criterion for living the Gospel. It is that tiny but powerful contribution that, like a pebble cast from on high, shatters the clay feet of the giant statue in Nebuchadnezzar's dream. Let us abandon our enormous egos so as to embrace what we really are—little—because it is this that saves us. Madame Guyon wrote that there are two truths: Everything and nothing. God is the first...we are the second, and woe to us if we invert this order!

Advent is a favorable time in which to remind ourselves that in the world of being the only “special” person is God. We are here simply to admire the glory of the Little One and safeguard him as Joseph did. Let us begin our contemplation by focusing on our hidden life, deflating ridiculous expectations and redimensioning high-sounding projects that perhaps have little in common with the Gospel. Let us begin with Nazareth, seeking to penetrate and grasp this mystery of the life of Jesus. And if we are called to leave Nazareth for awhile, let us long to return there. Quickly.

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