

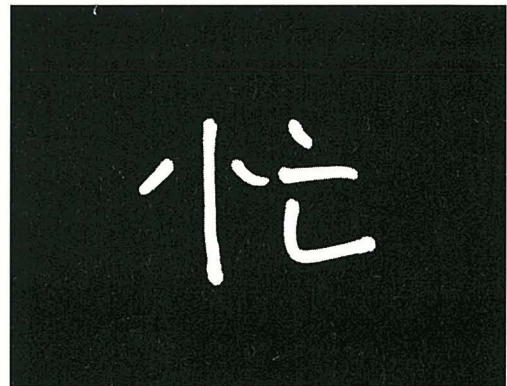
A place of the heart P 82.

"He went down with them to Nazareth...." St Luke says a great deal in this short sentence which concludes his story of the loss of Jesus in the Temple. Nazareth was the homing point for the family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph: it was the place where they belonged, the place to which they returned. "They went back to Nazareth...." But St Luke doesn't stop there. He goes on to tell us what happened at Nazareth. In the first place, it was at Nazareth that "Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and men". Slowly, silently, unobtrusively, Jesus grew in wisdom and spiritual stature. It was a growth and a wisdom that was so quiet and hidden that his own companions were astonished and could not believe it. "Where did this man get this wisdom and these miraculous powers? This is the carpenter's son, surely? Is not his mother the woman called Mary, and his brothers James and Joseph and Simon and Jude? His sisters, too, are they not all here with us?" "Nazareth? Can any good come from that place?" For the disciple of Jesus, too, Nazareth represents a time of spiritual growth, an experience of waiting on the Spirit who is gradually, quietly and imperceptibly changing us from within. This is a work of art that requires time. To us who belong to such a compulsive age, Nazareth teaches us the hard lesson of waiting. There are many things that ought to be done; there are a number of things that are in themselves necessary; but it is not always the right time for everything. Because a thing is good and holy in itself does not mean that it has to be done now, and by us. Nazareth teaches us the value of waiting patiently for God's time to unfold. It symbolises the "fallow ground" times of our lives: those moments which seem to be empty of the things we value instinctively – action, achievement, success and acclaim. St Luke tells us also that at Nazareth Mary "stored up in her heart" and pondered the words of Jesus. For a Marian disciple of Jesus, Nazareth stands for a way of contemplating the words and example of Jesus, even in our busiest moments. It is an approach which "ponders the things of God" and treasures them in our heart. Nazareth is a place of the heart: it is a place of silence and of faith; a centre point of stillness and tranquillity. Nazareth is the place where we can learn the wisdom that comes from seeing things from God's point of view. It is, as Colin says, "from Nazareth" that we can get a balanced perspective on life.

June 29, 1847

Father Colin said: "People are bored, too, at doing nothing, for we are made for action and feel a need for it. But look at our mother after the Ascension of the divine master. She is the support, the director, of the new-born Church. She is called "Queen of Apostles". Yet she seemed to be doing nothing, although she did more by her prayers than the apostles by their preaching. Look also at our Lord Jesus Christ in Nazareth for thirty years. These are your models."

The Mayet Memoirs



Stilled hands

The Japanese ideograph for "busy" is like a sudden karate chop! You write the ideograph for "heart", and then you add the one for "destroy" and you have "busy". The Chinese of several thousand years ago who chose that combination did not have to be members of our busy busy West to know the dangers of being a "busybody". Human nature was the same 3,000 years ago on the Yellow River. When I came to the East, I had a sense of wonder to see the Oriental people joining their hands at prayer like us. Who taught the human race this universal prayer symbol? Was it not the common experience that our hands which aptly represent our human doing must be stilled in prayer? Joined hands cannot "do" anything. They dumbly, but hopefully, say, "Lord, these problems are too big for my little hands, my tiny abilities. Please help." History is full of examples of hands that were never stilled in prayer and became exceedingly destructive.

Paul Glynn, sm

Fallow times

I detect sadness in many people like myself who seem to suppose that if redemption were still going on in their lives, it ought to be producing more visible results. The trouble is that we don't give much importance to the place of fallow ground in our environmental model of the Christian life.

I'm sure we are still too close to the "work-ethic" to get anywhere near thinking of idleness as a Christian virtue, or as a sign of Christ's kingdom. Yet we cannot escape from the fact that, like it or not, the redeeming Lord seems to insert great chunks of non-eventfulness into our lives.

When we would most want to be up and doing, to be shaping the world and planning its future, we've got the 'flu, or we are not in the right spot to make the connections. We'd like to think of ourselves as being much more in control of the course of our lives; for what else could it mean to be a responsible christian?

I believe it is not by chance that the verdict many of us would have to pass on ourselves is that we have been ineffective. In one very important sense, that is what we are meant to have been. An age of activism must somehow learn again what it is to be saved by God. Being idle rather than influential makes up the larger part of human life, just as fallow ground and forests must occupy more of the earth's landscape than the fertile fields.

Eugene O'Sullivan, op

Very true

And then we will not very often work with success. We will have to work often in the tunnel, to see that our efforts have been vain, that our attempt to help this soul seems to have been completely useless. We will have to be prepared for that, for this unsuccess, for this work in the tunnel.

And also another element, this growing questioning of our young people who will oblige us to be true – equally true before God and men.

They seem to have received from God a special gift to see beyond the appearances to what really is the value of this person. And they will scrape away whatever is superficial, and that's good for us. It's a scraping which will fortunately strip us of our masks.... And then it will be fortunate that we have been trained at Nazareth, convinced that the real foundation of our life is not the appearances that we make, but really what we are in the interior.

Jean Coste, sm

Humility gives them the courage to rely on God rather than themselves alone, to seek not their own interests but those of Christ and Mary.

Marist Fathers' Constitutions n.219

A Nazareth life

Brother Hubert Vicknair was a Brother of the Society of Mary who died of cancer at the age of 51 in 1983. He had spent his life as a Marist in the work of education. It was a life which anyone might have considered "ordinary" and he may have considered "not successful". Yet at his death, one of the senior pupils in the school read this tribute which illustrates the value of a "Nazareth life".

Character is a matter of living every hour of every day and facing ordinary challenges... Right here at Chanel there has been a man who in my eyes was a real hero.... Thirty years ago he set out to be ordained a priest, but didn't quite get there.... He wanted to become a teacher, but that didn't quite work out either.... He very much wanted to coach kids, but never quite had the chance.... He accepted the next best things without grumbling or self-pity.

He became a fan of kids instead of a coach.

He became a moderator instead of a teacher.

He became a brother instead of a priest.

And he was happy, because he was giving.

Then one day, life asked one more thing of him. It took away the physical fitness in which he took so much pride. It took away his chance to work with kids, and then it took away even the opportunity to be a fan. In turn, it gave him pain. But it's through this pain that Brother Hubert has shown the real richness of his character....

Character is simply each one of us being the best we can be, not only for ourselves, but more importantly, for others. Character is keeping faith in God, faith in your family, faith in your friends, faith in yourself, and faith in your future. And it is this character that Brother Hubert has shown us in his life.