

WELCOMING THE WORD TO
TREASURE IT TOGETHER
A NEW IMPETUS FOR UNDERSTANDING MARY AS
THE MOTHER OF LISTENING

Bruno Secondin O.Carm.

Bruno Secondin (1940), an Italian Carmelite, has studied in Rome, Germany and in Jerusalem. He is a doctor of theology and professor of spiritual theology at the Pontifical Gregorian University in Rome.

He is a member of various Italian and international theological associations, has worked as a theological expert on the working document of the Congress in 2004, and is involved in conferences and articles on spirituality, pastoral work and consecrated life.

He has written many books, translated into various languages.

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Benedict XVI wrote in his first encyclical: “The *Magnificat* is entirely woven from threads of Holy Scripture, threads drawn from the Word of God. Here we see how completely at home Mary is with the Word of God, with ease she moves in and out of it.. She speaks and thinks with the Word of God; the Word of God becomes her word, and her word issues from the Word of God.” (*Deus caritas est*, 41).

Pope Benedict XVI knows well, as we all do, that the *Magnificat* is the expression in prayer and praise not only of all that Mary had experienced at that moment and throughout her life, but also of the close relationship between herself and the community of believers. That is to say, this magnificent canticle is like embroidery done by many hands, like the rejoicing of a multitude of believers, like the echo of many sounds blended together. Mary, in her life and her adventure of grace, is the person most worthy to proclaim it, the one closest to the experiential theology reflected in it, and the voice of the whole Church which identifies itself with this canticle.

This is because such an elegant composition, with a thousand Biblical echoes, evocative and effective images, wide horizons and yet so close to the language, the terminology, the rhythm of praise of the whole of Scripture, is

both a personal and a collective compilation and resonates in Mary's feminine heart and soul in a unique way, echoing like thunder in the hearts of all who are children of Abraham, redeemed by the new Adam.

Luke has certainly shown his literary ability in these words, but the distance between the initial event and the writing of the text has also made it possible to blend together the initial feelings and the results of personal and collective living which are channelled into the text and its resonances. It becomes truly a song of longing and hope, and also a prayerful response of praise to all that had happened and had taken a full and definitive form. In fact the roots of the first Covenant are evident in the text as well as the truth of the new Covenant in its most authentic core.

1. From the parable of the sower according to Luke

I will begin with a broad theme. We all know the parable of the sower: the three Synoptics tell it with their own emphases (cf. Mt 13:1-9.18-23; Mk 4:1-20; Lk 8:4-15). But they also situate it according to the different structural needs of each gospel. I would like to base myself on Luke's redaction and draw attention to something which Luke does. (Lk 8:4-15) ¹.

Luke places this parable not by chance but in a very special context; before relating it, the evangelist recalls that there were women and men around Jesus who followed him and shared his journeys, his preaching and his concerns (Lk 8:1-3). Therefore the premise of the parable – different from that of the other two Synoptics, Mark and Matthew – is above all that there is a mixed group of disciples, women and men, and therefore the parable is immediately aimed at them. Furthermore, it ought to be they who are the visible form of the *bearing fruit* of the seed sown by the sower. Certainly there is also the “large crowd gathering” (Lk 8:4), but this is a stereotypical way of creating a context. Those to whom the true meaning of the parable is first of all and directly addressed are the women and men disciples.

After having told the parable, Jesus himself explains it, and we all know the explanation. However in Luke we note the absence of percentages at the end (hundredfold, sixtyfold, thirtyfold), and the more generic “yield a harvest through their perseverance” (*karpoforoùsin en hypomonè*), which is an expression of sensitivity and quality rather than efficiency. And Luke ends by recalling particular people, specifically the presence of Jesus' mother and brothers, who are trying to contact him, but do not succeed, “they were standing outside” (*exo stèkontes*) says Mark (Mk 3:31; cf. Mt 12:46).

The situation indicates the pressure of the crowd, but above all the difficulty, even for his relations, in understanding truly the newness that Jesus

brings. John too mentions that not even his brothers understood and believed in him (cf. Jn. 7:3-6). Now Jesus' reply to those who tell him that his family are looking for him, perhaps also suggesting a time of quiet, given that there has been so much disturbance, is: "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God (*or logos*) and put it into practice" (Lk 8:21).

This radical response as to who can truly now be part of Jesus' family marks, as I have said, the end of the parable of the sower and its explanation. But we can also glimpse something else. His mother and all his brothers – like the rest of those who wish to be his disciples, whether women or men – must accept a journey of listening and discipleship, of new ways of acting and new horizons, and must bring their own lives into other relationships which will regenerate them, which will allow for a new "belonging to a family", truly a new *identity*. And this comes about precisely through an intense, obedient and regenerating listening to the Word of the Master, sown with generosity and received with a "noble and generous heart" (*en cardia kalè kai agathè*: Lk 8:15).

Therefore it can be said with certainty that these words of Jesus do not set up a distance from his family, but are rather an invitation – bearing in mind too the framework of the women at the beginning and end of the parable – to become the *fruitful womb* of the Word. Just as in a woman's experiences of motherhood, they need to watch with *hypomonè*, that is with loving and attentive steadfastness, over the development of the mysterious seed, in a symbiosis which transforms one into the other and becomes hope and a rhythm of life.

In order to speak of how to welcome the Word together in imitation of Mary and to incarnate it in one's life, it is necessary to place Mary herself on the horizon pointed out by Jesus: she herself, after having received the eternal Word in a mysterious pregnancy brought about by the Holy Spirit, after having brought him into human life, is called to undertake the journey of a disciple, to be in her turn a disciple of the son who has now grown and has become publicly a Master. A discipleship which consists not only of being present with Jesus, but also of a mysterious regeneration of the heart, thanks to the incorruptible seed of the new Word, living and eternal (cf. 1 Pet 1:23), to whom she herself had given flesh and a human identity.

This introduction helps us to enter into some reflections which I will offer, and which will be incomplete, because I am confining myself to reaching the threshold of the public life of Jesus. What interests me above all is discovering the way in which "the Virgin Mary is able to look around and to live the urgent issues of daily life... She teaches us not to remain outside a Word of life, but to participate in it, allowing herself to be led by the Holy

Spirit who dwells in the believer” (*Lineamenta*, Sinodo 2008, n. 12). And Mary is not alone in this exercise of keeping and reflecting. We see this in the gospel texts.

2. Mary of Nazareth, a Hebrew woman and the annunciation of the angel.

There is no doubt that Mary had a Hebrew identity, with all that such a statement implies. We sometimes proclaim her “daughter of Sion”, and this applies to lineage, to customs, to obligations and prohibitions, to religious practice and to a sense of identity, and also therefore also to her diligence in listening to and obeying the word. A Hebrew man or woman without an “intense listening” to the Word is inconceivable.

Luke does not go into detail about Mary’s life as a Hebrew woman, but there are aspects which we can emphasize, without distorting them, by using a little insight. Out of this emerge the typical characteristics of a Hebrew believer, who cannot be understood without the typical Hebrew way of living, with conviction and not by chance.

The fact that Luke starts from the situation of Mary betrothed to Joseph, and is not concerned to say anything about her childhood or any aspect of her religious experience at that time, does not mean that she does not have these Hebraic qualities. The *apocryphal gospels*, that is, non-canonical writings rooted in the popular sensibility of the time, took pleasure in filling in these gaps.

For a Hebrew person who knew the Scriptures, the phrase “do not be afraid”, that accompanies the confusion of someone reacting to a theophany, is normal. Mary certainly knew these stories and was aware of them. *Disturbance* is the normal reaction of a Hebrew in the face of an event of divine revelation. It is not therefore simply shyness, surprise, a moment of unease: in this prolonged disturbance, accompanied by asking herself – with a sense of fear and amazement – the meaning and the purpose of this particular greeting, we find the typical reaction of the Israelite. And the sense of a towering presence which calls someone to a task which always goes beyond their own ideas is also typical, so much more in this case in which to “The Lord is with you” – also a typical way of approaching someone – is prefaced a surprising definition: *kekaritomène*, we could say “impregnated with grace”, an expression which seems indeed unsuitable for a young girl of fifteen.

It could also be a polite way of speaking, for example: “how lovely, how beautiful how wonderful you are”, as some oriental traditions say. But in this context it means, as we all know, much more, more in quality and substance,

as is made explicit by the repetition “you have won God’s favour” (Lk.1:30: *karin parà tò Theò*). To find favour implies not only pleasing, but also: you have given joy, you have rejoiced the heart of God, in God’s eyes and heart you are loved and desired.

The reply of the angel could be commented on in many ways. No doubt it cannot be understood without a deep familiarity with Scripture, to which it contains many allusions, which would not escape a Hebrew woman who knew the Scriptures. I do not intend to go into this important aspect. I want rather to propose a complementary interpretation of Mary’s reply to the angel: “How can this come about, since I have no knowledge of man?” (Lk.1:34).

3. Israel the bride has no husband, she is sterile

These sentences of the angel, the first and the second – repeated also in the annunciation to Joseph – (cf. Mt 1:18-25) - imply the whole history of Israel; dozens of parallel passages are alluded to. It was a language of hope but also of suffering, because of historical unfaithfulness and grave failings. Israel the bride had become sterile, because of her many failings, the result of political and cultic unions with neighbouring peoples. She was no longer fruitful as in the time of faithfulness, and it is as if Mary identified herself with the daughter of Sion, sterile and without a husband, without the joy of seeing a descendant of David, one of the house of Joseph, guide his people towards peace and holiness.

The deep disturbance of Mary, her intense reflection, and also her reply can be placed in this perspective, together with what Jesus will say of himself – or at least often allude to by his gestures and manner – as the *husband* of Israel. There are many occasions on which Jesus will take up the imagery of espousal, already developed by the prophets with regard to the loving marriage relationship between God and Israel, with its betrayals and its reconciliations (cf. Hosea, Deutero-Isaiah, Ezekiel and above all the Cantic of Canticles).

Mary feels this centuries-old sterility of the whole people as her own, she is immersed in it and she receives in her heart the suffering common to all, together with the steadfast hope of the pious, as will be seen later in Zachariah, Simeon, Anna and so many others. The reply or explanation of the angel can also be read within that same perspective: the symbolism of the Spirit, the holiness of God which takes form and becomes visible, the sublime dignity of the one to be born, which is humanly impossible, the reference to sterility (that of Elizabeth) miraculously undone by divine intervention, are all themes of the Old Testament which resonate and are linked to the concerns of “Israel the bride”- Mary because of her barrenness and her lack of an intimate companion.

We find however in Mary's final response her personal availability not only to give herself fully to the demands of the angel's word, but also to take upon herself the entire Word of the Father's covenant, because it is accomplished in her for the benefit of all. She declares herself willing to see her existence woven in a unique way into all that she knows and meditates on of the collective memory, of expectations, of hope and of faithfulness. In accepting to be at the service of the Word – "Let it happen to me as you have said / *génaitó moi katà tò r-má sou*" – there is an availability to be the place where the ancient hopes and promises are fulfilled. In fact *remà* is *word/event*, in the full sense, and not only in terms of vocabulary, expression, sound, terminology. I see a confirmation of this in the greeting of her cousin Elizabeth who cries out joyfully, "Blessed is she who *believed in the fulfilment* of the promise made her by the Lord" (Lk.1:45). This sentence is placed at the end of Elizabeth's canticle, where various symbols of the presence of the Lord in the history of the people are also alluded to (primarily the passage of the ark of the Lord, joy because of the womb become pregnant, unrestrained exultation, praise among women, etc). It is therefore to be interpreted in this context, and not as personal praise given to Mary *alone*.

In this case Mary represents the Israel of the pious and the just who have believed in the faithfulness of God, in spite of darkness and long waiting; she is the fruitful spouse, loved with an "everlasting love" (Isa. 54:8), no longer repudiated. Elizabeth expresses this certainty that God would be faithful to God's people: she sees and recognises that in Mary this faithfulness has become a gift for all, and that in Mary's availability her response is for the benefit of all.

Only two women who had believed, meditated on and lived the Scriptures, that is, who had listened, loved and had identified themselves with the ancient promise, with which the Word, handed on from generation to generation, was impregnated, would have been able to see that unity and to go beyond personal joy, however legitimate and intimate.

4. A people of exegetes: Mary *reflects in her heart, together with her people*

We always meditate on the event of the birth in time of the Son of the Most High with amazed and contemplative hearts. Each one is struck by and savours so many aspects which are worthy of comment – and throughout the ages there have been many comments – because the events are "grace upon grace" as John says (cf. Jn. 1:16). I will limit myself to commenting, following the line I have taken up to now, with some emphasis, on Mary's silent and reflective manner throughout the *infancy* of Jesus.

Luke notes twice that Mary reflected and tried to interpret. After the visit of the shepherds it is said: “Mary treasured all these things and pondered them in her heart (*synetèrei tà rêmata sycmbàllousa en tè kardìa*) (Lk.2:19); and after the finding of the child Jesus in the temple it is said, “His mother stored up all these things in her heart (*dietèrei panta ta rêmata*)” (Lk. 2:51). But around the mother who reflects and watches over her memories, with a heart that is amazed but that also searches for a unifying meaning, there are others who are doing the same.

For example, when Zechariah is able to speak again and give the name *John* to his son, the neighbours have a sense of surprise and fear, and “all those who heard of it treasured it in their hearts (*ta rêmata*)” cf. Lk.1:66. The shepherds, before going to Bethlehem, discussed whether it was worth going to see “to see this word/event (*to r-má*) which the Lord has made known to us” (Lk:2:15), and they then speak to all about what (*tou rêmatos*) they have heard and seen” (Lk: 2:20). We also have *amazement*: above all that of Elizabeth (Lk. :41-45) at the visit of the Mother of the Lord, who presents herself like the new ark of the covenant passing over mountain roads to come and share with her cousin the joy of an extraordinary motherhood.

Then there is the amazement of the relations of Elizabeth and Zachariah when their son is born: they rejoice with them (*synèkairon autè*) (Lk. 1:56). All those who heard the shepherds tell of their extraordinary experience felt amazement and astonishment: “everyone who heard it was astonished at what the shepherds said to them” (Lk. 2:18). Even more in the temple, faced with Simeon’s joy, father and mother wondered (*thaumàzontes*) at the things that were being said about him” (Lk. 2:33).

This is with regard to the birth and the first days that followed. But it is said of Mary that she reflected with a watchful heart after the episode of the finding in the temple. Here too we have amazement and wondering (*existanto*: it can be translated as *they were dazed or stunned*) of the teachers in the temple (cf. Lk.2:47). But it is noted that the parents “did not understand what (*to rëma*) he meant” (Lk.2:50). And afterwards “his mother stored up all these word/events (*panta ta rêmata*) in her heart (Lk.2:51).

I would like to comment on this collective attitude of amazement and reflection, of incomprehension and keeping in the heart. As we have seen, this attitude is not only Mary’s, but that of many others. And this already indicates something really important: it was a holy custom of the Hebrews to place in the heart and watch over what happened with care and wonder. Because all events were both words and facts, objective happenings and mysterious signs, to be reflected on in order to find their connection within a perspective that would explain their meaning and purpose. Mary does nothing other than live

with the struggle to understand, accompanied for her by wonder, surprise, a sense of fear and amazement.

Because this is the true Biblical way of welcoming the Word and keeping it in one's heart. With the amazement that comes from the sense of one's own fragility and ordinariness, that is shot through with signs of God who comes close to us, who becomes visible and audible while remaining totally other, compels us to reflect in our hearts, to dialogue in order to understand, to reflect so as not to miss unexpected connections and echoes. An entire people of the humble who reflect and question, who are struck by amazement and together keep in their hearts *ta rēmata*, so that nothing should escape but should leave a lasting impression and become a discovery opening up new horizons.

I see Mary with this attitude, as the virgin mother who does not pass over things superficially, but also as the companion and heir to the best Hebrew tradition: that of allowing oneself to be amazed and surprised, to reflect and remember, to watch over and savour in order to draw out the true meaning and inspiration for one's life. This is life according to the Word and the Spirit: a *stabilitas mentis* that familiarises itself with events, remembers the facts well and looks for links that make them into a plan, a tapestry, a complete and unified event. A *stabilitas cordis* that becomes a sole concern, a single and coherent direction of love and desire, of values and expectations: this is the true heart of the Israelite, totally impregnated with the repercussions of the *remata*.

But there is another *stabilitas* on which I would like to dwell on: this is the *stabilitas corporis*. This completes the others spoken of and acquires particular importance during the three decades of Jesus' presence in Nazareth. Perhaps we have too often overlooked the theological importance of this long period lived in Nazareth by Joseph, Mary and Jesus. The statement about Jesus who grew in stature, age and grace and the reflective soul of Mary are all that remain and Luke has made this known.

Too little not to get the impression that perhaps these years were almost lost for the purpose of redemption: why this long, silent, ordinary, anonymous existence of the Redeemer, when the entire world was waiting for the fulfilment of the promises and the universal spreading of light to the peoples?

5. In the ordinariness of Nazareth: the Word puts down roots

We know very little about the life of the Holy Family in Nazareth until the moment when Jesus begins his public life at about thirty: it is clear that everyone knew his father's work (*carpenter/tèktonos*, a title given to Jesus too

(cf. Mt 4:55; Mk.6:3). His mother did not stand out in any way, but took part with everyone else in religious practices, going on pilgrimage in a caravan every year with relatives and acquaintances. Luke alone refers twice to the growth of Jesus. When they return from the presentation in the temple for the offering and Mary's purification, it is said: "And as the child grew to maturity, he was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with him" (Lk.2:40). When Jesus was twelve and began to be subject to the law (cf.Lk.2:42), he took part in the village pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover. He then takes the unforeseen initiative of staying in Jerusalem without warning his parents, causing them great anxiety when they realize that he is not with the caravan. And when they find him and tell him of their anguish, as we know: "He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority...And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature and in favour with God and the people" (Lk. 2:51f.).

I would like to reflect with you on this long period of three decades, about which we know almost nothing, but we can make assumptions, without believing in the miracles of the apocryphal gospels. These are years which have no less redemptive value than the last three years of public life. They are rich above all because of what is said about welcoming the Word like Mary.

We can easily think that this welcoming is shown above all in the first part (the infancy narratives) and then in the public life of Jesus. In the first part of the gospel, Mary's words are few, perhaps thirty in all, excluding the *Magnificat*. Certainly there are many holy words pronounced by Jesus during his public life, but there are only nine words attributed to Mary (at Cana: Jn.2:3, 5) – but this is not the only way in which Jesus spoke, nor the only situation in which one can listen to and welcome the Word of God, as if the Word were word of redemption and salvation only when he acted and spoke in public. Thus in Nazareth we have a *parenthesis*, a time of waiting, a postponement until much later. Here I would like to embark on a new topic.

I think in fact that we must reevaluate this long period specifically in the context of the title of this talk: certainly it is the time in which Mary thinks and watches with a reflective heart over what she has seen and heard and which she has not succeeded in understanding fully (Lk. 2:50). She is like the rich soil on which the seed of the Word has fallen, and which will yield a harvest in whoever has a noble and generous heart (cf. Lk. 8:15).

But I would like to go beyond the vision of Mary pictured in a romantic way. During these thirty years Mary has not distinguished herself in any way from the other women of Nazareth, nor has Jesus' behaviour made his fellow villagers think that there is anything extraordinary about him. This can be seen clearly when they marvel at the wisdom and the energy he shows on that

famous sabbath in the synagogue at Nazareth (Lk.4:16-30). And then where did he go to conclude that welcoming and bearing fruit of the Word: what did it consist of?

Mary was called to be the mother of the Word of God, in her womb, in a unique and unrepeatable way, mysterious and surprising. She had brought forth Jesus, “the one who is to save his people from their sins” (Mt. 1:21), she had introduced him, without his being aware, to the great Hebrew traditions of naming, of circumcision, of the offering of the firstborn in the temple, and to various Hebrew rites.

She had also lived with him, according to Matthew’s account (cf. Mt. 2:13-23), the pattern of the Exodus into Egypt and the return from Egypt. She had certainly lived with him the daily Hebrew practice of different forms of prayer, and every family had the duty of teaching their children this complex daily ritual. She had introduced him, at the appropriate time, that is at twelve years old, among the “sons of the law” (*bar mizpat*), with the obligations associated with it, like that of pilgrimage.

6. Where does wisdom and grace in daily life come from?

I wonder where the *wisdom* and *grace* in which it is repeated that he *grew* came from? And what kind of wisdom and grace is really meant? We cannot think that these are qualities “infused” from heaven, from which Mary was excluded. On the other hand, specifically in this brief reference, which we always interpret in a “Christological” sense, I would like to see a “Marian” note. We can discover what Jesus had learned about tradition, the wisdom of the people, about the Scriptures, God’s promises and the peoples’ waiting, from what he does and says in his public life. It is not necessary to give much explanation on this point; each person knows so much.

But who had handed on to him this *wisdom* and this *grace* before God and the people? *Talis Mater, talis Filius*: those long slow decades were a gradual education in listening and obedience to the great tradition in all its demands and shades of meaning, a mutual school of Mother and Son, handing on and rethinking, interpreting and remaining able to be free and flexible, above all meeting a new face of God. Mary’s exceptional motherhood had shaped her understanding of the image of God. The substance of this is engraved in the song of the *Magnificat*, but also in all the parables and the language, gestures and choices of the Son we see that the image of the Father is one of mercy and tenderness, and not one of a rigid law, of sacralized observances, of destructive threats. From the language of the son that of the mother can be known; in his gestures and way of being we find the mother. It is always thus.

The human personality of Jesus was formed in obscurity and silence, in an ordinary life, in the normal relationships typical of any village, in conformity with what the parents were able to hand on, taught by the way they lived, and celebrated with everyone else. This silent “growing within” the human temperament of Jesus, a life without difference, the relationships and humour, social marginalisation and religious duties – people from Nazareth were considered bad people, and Galilee itself was despised because of its mixed population – this is not time wasted, but the fruitfulness of the Word according to the Spirit, a time of redemption in a deep and original sense. Jesus’ living as a brother in Nazareth could appear to be a mere passage (however long) towards the full revelation of the Son of God in power. However we must see it as the truest radiation of the presence of God among us: labouring, hidden, fraternal, the human character of our human character.

I would like to dwell on this point a little longer.

7. Jesus *in* Nazareth is the eternal Son, he is an ordinary and saving presence

Again I allow myself to be inspired by something I have read ². Pierangelo Squeri, analysing the experience of Charles de Foucauld, who was so radical in his choice of Jesus of Nazareth, writes: “Jesus of Nazareth is not in fact the ‘human part’ of the Incarnation. Jesus of Nazareth ‘is’ the incarnation of the only begotten Son. Jesus ‘is’ the Son. And reciprocally: Jesus of Nazareth is the only eternal Son of the only God. Jesus of Nazareth is not the ‘human effect’ of the incarnation of the Son of God, but is precisely the ‘human effectivity’ of his divine sonship. It is not the man that the Son takes on and dwells in, not the Son who passes through the human with a view to his redemptive mission and takes leave of it when his mission is accomplished. Jesus of Nazareth is always the Son of God. This same Jesus who is born of Mary and lived in long anonymity until the gift was perfected as *gift*” ³.

A strange gulf has been introduced into theology and spirituality between Jesus of Nazareth and the Son of God, as if Jesus – especially in his hidden life at Nazareth – were only a passage, a means of arriving at the Son, and were not truly the Son of God himself who lives among us, the giver of life, the interpreter of Scripture. In harmony with Charles de Foucauld, Squeri the theologian invites us to integrate “Jesus in Nazareth” into the perspective of a holistic christology “Jesus of Nazareth”. He says: “Jesus in Nazareth *is* Jesus of Nazareth in reality and in the sacrament of his pure saving presence among humankind” ⁴. It follows from this that the work of the incarnation is like the brotherly radiation of the saving presence; the pure presence of the Lord is the reason for this salvation and not simply a necessary condition of it. The

theological reality of the salvific being and acting of Jesus – the Son cannot be confined to the period of his public preaching, of the miracles and of his death on the cross.

And the experience of the Church itself can be looked at again : as the “radical sharing of the dark places of existence with a view to the *persuasiveness of the love of God*”⁵. We can call it, with the great French theologian Christoph Theobald, *hospitable holiness*, a *forma ecclesiae* in which the dignity of the human person becomes the content of the proclamation and the reality of the kingdom, even without words (cf. RH 12). The proclamation of the kingdom of heaven “already among us”, finds its truth in the salvific experience (and not just the living) in Nazareth, and is also the model which the Church should perhaps look at a little more in order to be the true community of brothers and sisters scattered among the nations (cf. 1 Pet. 5:9).

In the light of this theological statement, we can also rediscover the great importance of Mary, and speak of her as someone who listens to and lives the Word, grows with the *saving* Word of the Son who is close to her and is a saving presence while being anonymous, fraternal, ordinary, like everyone else. This is Mary’s “pilgrimage in faith”. And there Jesus grows up, together with her and all the neighbours, in full fidelity to the Father’s plan of “being in the midst of the people”, seeing himself as “God of the people” and making of the people “his family”.

What might happen if the new evangelisation could take hold firmly, in word and in act, of the “long Nazareth-moment of the incarnation of God among the people so that the *divine* proportion of the mission of the Son should acquire its full integrity again”?⁶. This *forma evangelica* of the memory of the Son *in* Nazareth, for such a long time, with such radical ordinariness and companionship of life and language, of feelings and experiences, was lived also by Mary, and she was the teacher and disciple.

Bishop Tonino Bello rightly sings of ordinariness as the building site of salvation: “Holy Mary, ordinary woman, free us from the longing for epic deeds, and teach us to consider daily life as the building site where the history of salvation is built ”⁷.

Saint Thérèse of the Child Jesus loved so much the simplicity of Mary of Nazareth, where the simplest virtues were also the most lived and rooted. In fact a few months before her death she wrote in her last poem, entitled : *Why I love you, O Mary*:

*“I know that in Nazareth, Mother full of grace,
you were poor and wanted nothing more:
neither miracles or ecstasies or raptures*

adorn your life, O Queen of the saints!

*The number of little ones who can look on you without trembling
is great upon the earth.*

O Mother incomparable, you want to live a common life

And guide them to heaven”⁸.

1. This was suggested to me by reading a comment of Fr. Innocenzo Gargano: I. GARGANO, *Maria e la Parola. Una esperienza d'ilectio divino*, Paoline, Milano 2003.
2. I refer in particular to the two papers of P.A. SEQUERI: *La cristologia "vissuta" di Charles de Foucauld* in AA.VV., *Charles de Foucauld. L'eloquenza di una vita secondo l'evangelo*, Qiqajon, Bose 2003, 77-94; e *Epilogo: Ripartire da Nazaret? Appunti su Charles de Foucauld e la nuova evangelizzazione*, in the same book, 149-174.
3. P.A. SEQUERI, *La cristologia "vissuta"*, cit. 80s.
4. *Ibidem*, 84.
5. IDEM, *Epilogo*, cit. 159.
6. IDEM, *La cristologia "vissuta"*, cit. 88.
7. A. BELLO, *Maria, donna dei nostri giorni*, Milano 1993, 13.
8. TERESA DI G.B., *Opere complete*, Libreria Editrice Vaticana –Edizioni OCD, Roma 1997, 725.