

BIBLICAL PAGES

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Jesus' places and relations

General introduction

The journey we are starting today will lead us to discover in the gospels the different places where Jesus' relations are established, be they important or not, occasional or everyday. We shall try to enter those places, and to look at, to listen to, to meet Jesus and see how He inhabits them as the places of salvation, especially because in them He establishes relations that are significant, never anonymous or casual. But which are the features of Jesus' relations? What do they teach us? How can we learn to establish similar relations in the places we live in and that give form to our meetings?

There are people who interact with Jesus and Jesus with them. The places provide Jesus with different conditions, which He makes use of in order to establish relations and to make them grow.

We are starting our yearly journey, made up of eight encounters, following Jesus on the path that leads Him from His house to the road, to the villages and cities, to the workplaces, to the mountain, to the sea, to the Temple, into the desert. In all those places He meets His parents, relatives, friends, disciples, sinners, the sick, the Pharisees, the heathen, the crowds.

This year we will try to re-live some of Jesus' encounters, to enter those places and to make our own the features of those relations. Then in the next years, in a kind of liturgy reminding us about Jesus' life and inviting us to get deeper and deeper into it, we will get out of the house once again, finding new relations, new encounters, and walking once again on the road, going through villages and so on.

I wish you a very good journey, praying that the Lord of history may lead us to follow Him in our very own history, and teach us to spin the thread of communion.

Lectio n° 1 **At home in Nazareth**

At first we should find out what 'home' / 'house' meant in the Bible and in the Jewish mentality, in order to understand that term when it occurs in the gospel and in the life of Jesus.

Generally speaking, the Hebrew term ‘bajit’ means a house, an enclosed place protected and separated from a hostile environment (cf Gn 19), different from the tent that characterized the previous nomadic civilization, and typical of a population living permanently in a certain place.

In addition to that, it means also the family, the milieu of those who live together. The indivisible social unity used to be made up not only from the strict relatives but also from servants and slaves, as the Book of Genesis tells us when dealing with the composition of Abraham’s family (12:5; 14:15).

A third meaning could be ‘someone’s lineage’, as for instance Judah’s or David’s.

In the gospel, two terms occur: ‘oikos’, referring to the house (the building); ‘oikia’, referring to the familial milieu.

However, in the Bible ‘to found a house’ not only means to build walls, but also to generate descendants and pass on good examples of a religious life and of virtue (Pr 14:1; 31:10-31; Ps 127:1).

In the gospels the home / house is frequently present with relation to genealogy, to the historical reality of Jesus: He belongs to the tribe of Judah and to the House of David (Mt 1:3; Lk 3:33). More precisely, Joseph belongs to the House of David (Lk 1:27) and Jesus will reign over the House of Jacob (Lk 1:33).

How does Jesus relate to His historical roots, as well as to the people living next to Him, first of all Mary and Joseph? And what about His relation with the Father? Jesus’ home / house is in fact wider, being made up of “the things of His Father” (Lk 2:49). However, He learns to fully relate to human beings thanks to His parents, by welcoming and making His own their mission to build their own ‘house’, to pass on to Him the Jewish religious treasure, as well as all virtues, and the warmth and the beauty of the life of the upright man (Joseph) and of the treasuring of the Word in her heart by Mary.

So, let us approach the passage which is the end of the so-called Infancy Gospel by St Luke. And let us try to discover the relations of Jesus the son.

Let us invoke the Holy Spirit

*Holy Spirit, in silence You made of Mary the house of the Word.
Open our hearts and make us welcome that “silent whisper”
revealing God’s presence to Elijah on Horeb,
so that Your silent whisper may introduce us into Jesus’ silent life
at home in Nazareth;
and into the peace, joy and simplicity of His life of communion
with the Father, with Mary, with Joseph.*

1. Lectio **(to read the Word / to listen to it)**

Luke 2:51-52

*51 He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority [was subject to them]. His mother stored up all these things in her heart.
52 And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people.*

This is the end of Chapter 2 of St Luke's Gospel, as well as of all those texts that are known as "Infancy Gospel", but which should be deemed more precisely as "Gospel of the Origins", given that they answer the question about who Jesus is: from the very beginning Jesus is the Son of God and the Lord.

In this beginning of St Luke's Gospel we find all the elements making up the Easter profession of faith, later on: Jesus, Son of God, the Saviour. Thus, St Luke is disproving all those in his own community who believed that Jesus had become the Son of God at Baptism.

Within this context, both the whole Gospel of the Origins and our very passage highlight how the Son of God's relation with His Father 'makes' Him; it is present at His conception (Lk 1:32); it is really shown in history within David's House and line (Lk 2:4), through relations with God and with men, in a place – Joseph and Mary's Nazareth house – it is necessary to "go down" to, in order to "increase in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people".

"To go down". We highlight this verb which is followed by "was subject to them". Immediately afterwards there is an opposite movement: "He increased..." or, better, He progressed in stature, wisdom and grace.

It is as if in the Nazareth house two movements were coexistent, referring to those of the Easter dynamism: lowering oneself and being raised.

This dynamism recalls what St Paul powerfully highlights in Philippians 2:7-9.

Lowering:

St Luke: went down / was subject to them

St Paul: humbled Himself / obedient

Raising:

St Luke: progressed in stature, wisdom and grace

St Paul: super-exalted Him

The same dynamism can be found in Lk 18:14 ("Anyone who humbles himself will be raised up"), where the tax collector, after asking God to be merciful to him, "a sinner", could go home justified.

Going back to the passage we are dealing with, it is as if it hinted to the fact that the Nazareth house is the place where the Easter dynamism is already present: the whole life of Jesus, who "submits" voluntarily (and He co-operates, takes up His burden, His responsibility), is in fact a progression in wisdom, in stature, and in

favour with God and with people, until He will be super-exalted by the Father, “giving Him the name which is above any other name” (Ph 2:9).

St Paul goes on by saying that “every tongue should acknowledge Jesus Christ as the Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Ph 2:11). In St Luke’s passage we see the beginning of Jesus’ journey, an ascent glorifying the Father, showing His love for men. This ascent has two features: what Jesus has to learn as a human being; and what He receives as a pure gift from the Father. It is already a paschal journey, a progression, later on turning into the ascent to Jerusalem, where the crucified Jesus will be acknowledged as Lord and Saviour, as St Luke himself states in Ac 2:36 and 10:36.

Founding relations

The previous passage shows Jesus in Jerusalem, in the Temple, listening to the doctors of the Law and asking them questions. Jesus is twelve. When boys were thirteen, they were prescribed to go on pilgrimage to Jerusalem in all solemn feasts (Passover, Festival of Weeks, Festival of Tabernacles). As we can see, Jesus complies to the prescription of gradually observing the commandments.

Jesus leaves the ‘synodia’, the journeying community He was walking with, He leaves Mary and Joseph, and remains in the Temple. When confronted with their worry and grief, He shows that He is utterly aware of having another Father, and better, that it is His duty “to be in His Father’s house” (Lk 2:49).

This is the proclamation that obedience to the Father has priority over anything else (“it is necessary...” is a phrase that always occurs in the gospels in order to highlight Jesus’ submission to the Father’s will). And also that He is aware of being the Son of God and committed to fulfil His mission.

He is no longer in the synodia, because now He is going on a new pilgrimage, He is starting to walk on a new path, finally leading Him to Jerusalem once again. And the three days spent by Mary and Joseph looking for Jesus let us foresee the three days of suffering that Mary experienced when Jesus was absent, dead and buried. In fact, His obedience and loyalty to the Father will lead Him to the Cross and death.

Here, however, we’d like to focus on the features of Jesus’ relations in His own home, highlighting in particular His familial milieu.

Two features have already been highlighted by the previous events: liberty and obedience, perfectly at harmony one with the other in Jesus. He has the liberty of freeing Himself from Mary and Joseph’s gaze, in order to become more and more aware of His identity as Son of God. St Luke highlights in particular His awareness of His primary and deep relation with the Father, of Whom He welcomes the plan by “going into His things”, that is, by entering, and sharing the Father’s gaze on Him and on the Father’s business. But how is the Father’s gaze? In every part of St Luke’s Gospel, Jesus relates and reveals that the Father does have a merciful and compassionate gaze (cf Lk 6:36). Mercy means to utterly share somebody else’s life, his sufferings, his whole existence.

Given that Jesus' primary obedience to the Father originates from His being aware of being the Son of God, when He goes down to Nazareth He will not discard it. On the contrary, St Luke suggests that, in the same way as He loves the Father, so He will love Mary and Joseph and will obey them consequently.

In fact, Mary and Joseph are part of His Father's things: St Luke has already highlighted how the Father chose Mary to be "Joseph's bride".

Therefore, Jesus does not complain that He has to go down to Nazareth, but lovingly entrusts Himself to those to whom the Father has given Him as a gift, and to whom – through Him – the love of the Father becomes real and concrete, by sharing one another's lives.

Let us ponder then for a second what St Luke tells us about Jesus at home in Nazareth. In line 2:40, after being presented in the Temple as the Law of Israel prescribed (2:22) and going back to Nazareth, St Luke states that "as the Child grew to maturity, He was filled with wisdom; and God's favour was with Him". In the passage we are dealing with, in parallel, St Luke stresses the fact that Jesus "lived under their authority... And He increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people" (2:52).

We infer then that "being subject" is not de-personalizing; and also that to be filled with wisdom and grace is not in contradiction with progression: He has to become more and more aware of the wisdom He is full with, as time goes by.

St Paul will say that Christ is "both the power of God and the wisdom of God" (1 Co 1:24); He "for us was made wisdom from God, and saving justice and holiness and redemption" (1 Co 1:30); "in Him all the jewels of wisdom and knowledge are hidden" (Col 2:3).

The gift of wisdom and grace, the work of God, comes to the fore more and more in His relation with Mary and Joseph in the house of Nazareth, showing itself under God's gaze and men's gaze.

To receive and to give

If a relation implies receiving and giving, what does Jesus receive from Mary in the house of Nazareth?

To be subject to her means welcoming the gift of her person. Perhaps He learns from Mary "to treasure and to ponder" all things in His heart (cf 2:19, 51), trying in His heart to harmonize the deep awareness of His self with the external events. Perhaps He learns from her how it is possible to be concretely a servant of the Lord (Lk 1:38), by humiliating oneself and discovering a different greatness (cf Lk 1:48-49), as Mary says in the Magnificat, thus directing our attention to what supports her, ie her relation with God and her faith put into practice everyday.

Perhaps He sees that she does not understand some events surpassing her (2:19; 50:51b), the events regarding Him, even though she is the only one who knows His true origins. Perhaps He is her 'accomplice', learning from the various events of His life to fulfil His mission in time, a mission that He understands better from the Scriptures and also from His own history, resting under God's gaze.

And what does Jesus receive from Joseph? The man who is upright in God's eyes, the one who is in harmony with His Law and His will, is perhaps the man who teaches Jesus the 'Shemà', who brings Him to the synagogue, who introduces Him into the House of David, thus adding up to His awareness of being the Messiah.

The gospels describe Joseph as a man capable of a superior justice (cf Mt 1:19), capable of welcoming God's directions (Mt 1:24; 2:13), capable of taking the Child and His mother, leaving everything and escaping into Egypt (Mt 2:14, 21-23), in order to protect the life of those he loves and who have been entrusted to him. Perhaps Jesus learns from him, in addition to what He can learn from Mary, to take care, to be responsible, to be docile, as well as to labour in a job which identifies Him in society: He is the carpenter's son, isn't He? (Mt 13:55)

And what does Jesus give to Mary and Joseph? His relation with the Father, which in their eyes is a constant reminder of God's mercy, the very mercy that His mother proclaimed in the Magnificat (1:50, 54), and also of God's closeness to man and of His faithfulness to His promises.

Jesus' submission to them can actually be defined as a co-operation with them, as an openness to them. Truly, His progression in wisdom and grace sheds light on them too, strengthening the wisdom of the upright Joseph and fulfilling His parents' mission. They all together walk on God's path. Submission and growth both become part of His love. Love harmonizes what Jesus receives from the Father with Mary and Joseph's 'school of humanity'.

We infer from this that Jesus' relation is founded upon a great trust and reliance, even within the context of a great frankness [for instance, in the Temple He openly proclaims to them that He is the Son of God (2:49)].

Jesus' home, however, is not limited to His familial milieu. "My mother and my brothers are those who hear the word of God and put it into practice" (Lk 8:21).

All those who can see themselves in that description enter a parental relation with Jesus: they become for Him 'mother', because they generate Him; and 'brother', inasmuch as they are similar to Him.

Therefore, that sentence is not a disavowal of His mother – as it is often interpreted – but rather an appeal to become similar to her and to Him. The enlarged house is made up of all those who bear the imprinting of Jesus' founding relation with the Father, as well as Mary's with her Lord: listening to the Word and putting it into practice.

2. Meditatio

(to meditate on the Word / to let it resound)

To Jesus the house is of course an intimate place, but not an enclosed nest.

The relations He establishes within His familial milieu tell us that we need 'to go down' in order to learn humanity and grow in the spirit:

- The dynamism of ‘submission / welcoming others’ must be put into practice and made personal in our everyday lives. Who is it difficult for us to welcome? Who do we reject? How do I put into practice my liberty and, consequently, obedience? Am I ready to learn from my relations, even from the difficult ones? Am I ready to go down my pedestal acknowledging that the Father gives me some sisters?

- Jesus discloses His true self to His parents. Am I really open and frank to those with whom I have established my stricter relations?

- Is the genuine face of the Father accompanying me in my growth as a woman, as a Catholic woman, and as a consecrated woman?

I believe that all of us have experienced that age makes us rediscover the people most close to us as well as the influence they had on us... similar gestures, phrases, common memories, cooperation in difficulties. However, in this process we should also become aware of how we have imagined God and which image of God we project outside of our selves.

Is it really a Father whose gaze is all mercy and who demands mercy on our part?

I believe that the few lines of the passage we have dealt with here tell us that – similarly to Jesus – we are what we are thanks to the relations with our parents, to the modalities we have assimilated from them and so on. But we will not be conditioned by them, and we will be able to become a source of novelty, of gift, only if we genuinely be first of all children of God, mothers and sisters of Christ, listening to and obeying the Word.

We should be questioned by texts which apparently but not really contradict Lk 2:51-52.

“Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes, and his own life too, cannot be my disciple” (Lk 14:26). To be a disciple means to be vigilant over our affective relations too. We should give ourselves as a gift to others, we should care for others, of course, but we should not be part of schemes that contradict the gospel and Jesus’ way of relating to others.

“For you know that the price of our ransom from the futile way of life handed down from your ancestors was paid, not in anything perishable like silver or gold, but in precious blood as of a blameless and spotless lamb, Christ.” (1 P 1:18-19)

How can we emancipate ourselves from all the cultural chains that oppose Christ’s liberty for us?

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Let us listen to the following story, in order for us to put into practice poverty and obedience with gratitude, welcoming (Rule of Life nn° 16-22-23) the presence of all those who have been given to us as a gift.

Our names are Giancarlo, Isabella and George (our son), from the Parish of Castelguglielmo. Many people say that we are a very special family but we disagree. We are like anybody else!

Let us go back to February 10, 1988, when I was lying in a hospital bed and a self-immunity illness had just been diagnosed to me. I remember that Thursday evening when the doctor entered my room and confirmed that... I immediately asked if I would be able to conceive, and he replied, 'In your case, children cannot be conceived, just be adopted'. I gave a look at Giancarlo who simply said, 'No problem, we will adopt one!' I believe that that was the most beautiful expression of love I received from my husband.

However, a few years had to pass before we actually decided to adopt a child. On February 9, 1995 I was in Lourdes in order to fulfil a vow that my mother had made (of course it referred to my illness): it was there that our decision to adopt a child became firm. We were feeling ready to welcome a child with the blessing of Our Lady. We were clear-minded. If we were to adopt a child, we would have adopted a child that nobody else was willing to accept.

Later on, we received a call from the association: 'There is a baby boy, born on February 9, 1995, and his name is Georgi (which in Italian means 'George'). His date of birth coincided with the very day we were in Lourdes, praying in front of Our Lady.

So, on January 6, 1998, we left home and went to collect the boy. We were very very happy... At the Embassy they told us that we were about to bring home an ill child. But to us, it was our son, and if he had some difficulties, we would have resolved them together.

When finally after a year the adoption was about to be perfected, the social worker told us that we could leave him in an orphanage, if we liked. But we decided to keep him and today George – in spite of all the difficulties we encountered – is a happy and serene young man, with a certain degree of autonomy. He is a member of some associations where he spends some of his time; and we have opened to a world which was completely unknown to us before.

And that sentence, 'Go home and adopt a child', that Our Lady seems to have whispered to me, fulfilled our lives.

Isabella

3. Oratio

(to pray the Word / to repeat it)

*Lord, may You turn every little step we take
into a journey where we can learn how to relate,
a hub where our affections and our attempts to love do intertwine.*

*I wish I had, Lord, the liberty to be obedient to love.
But I am not able to free myself from my very self.*

*May Christ the Wisdom of God take me by the hand,
He who emptied Himself and took upon Himself the form of a servant.*

*Yes, this is the revelation of that wisdom
that I haven't learned yet...
To go down and learn to serve without getting anything in return,
faithful to the word uttered on me:
you are my daughter... mother... sister.*

4. Contemplatio **(to contemplate the Word / silence)**

Under the Father's gaze, let us learn to be aware of our selves. Let us make all our defences crumble. And let us breathe the unarmed air of sorority, the air of family.

5. Collatio **(to share the Word)**

Let us share our experience in the light of the Word, listening to each other as a form of reciprocal obedience.