

# The Hidden Life of Christ

## *Meditations for the Month of February*

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The Holy Family by Jan Brueghel, the Elder; 1623; Alte Pinakothek, Munich, Germany; [www.wga.hu](http://www.wga.hu)

February 1<sup>st</sup>

## The Hidden Life

*If* the life of the Holy Family was a hidden life in their own country, how much more was this the case in Egypt? There, amid strangers and idolaters, they were bereft of all human sympathy and consolation. In Egypt, how sorely they missed the happiness of worshiping God in His Temple. How great a sorrow to them to be deprived of the weekly services of the Synagogue, and to miss the congenial companionship of those who were full of the love of God, and of a longing for the redemption of Israel. Are we pained when circumstances prevent us from our accustomed religious duties, or do we consider it rather as a relief?

*Yet*, after all, the loss of these external privileges was of small moment to Mary and Joseph. Had they not Jesus with them? and in His company what more could they desire? O happy indeed are those who have Jesus with them, and who walk always in His Presence. "When Jesus is present," says Thomas a Kempis, "all is well, and nothing seems difficult."

*How* are we to retain the presence of Jesus with us? "Be humble and peaceable, and Jesus will be with you." This is the advice of Thomas a Kempis, this is the lesson that we learn from Mary and Joseph. Pride drives Him away; self-seeking and uncharitableness drive Him away. But humility and gentleness ensure the joy of His abiding Presence.

February 2nd

## The Presentation in the Temple

When the days of the Purification were ended, Mary carried up her Divine Son to present Him in the Temple. What were the thoughts of Jesus as He was placed in the hands of the High Priest, and offered to His Eternal Father? He was repeating in His Heart those words of the Prophet, **"Lo, I come to do Thy will, O my God. I am content to do it, yea, Thy law is within my heart."** This was the end and aim of every action, word, and thought of Jesus at every moment of His Life. How far is it the end and aim of all that I say and do?

What was Mary thinking of as she ascended the steps of the Temple with her little Son in her arms? She was saying to herself that she was indeed blessed among women, in that she was able to offer to God a gift far more precious in His sight than all the world beside. She was offering to Him the only gift worthy of the Divine Majesty --a gift of infinite value. She was offering to God none else than God Himself veiled under the garb of flesh. O wonderful privilege, granted to Mary's unequalled holiness!

What were the thoughts of St. Joseph as he walked by Mary's side? He was praying to God to make Him worthy of the wondrous privilege conferred upon him of being the guardian of Jesus and of Mary. He was full of a deep sense of the immense responsibility laid upon Him, and was thanking God for so astounding an honor, and begging that he might be faithful in every detail to God's holy inspirations, guiding him in the care of the unspeakable treasures committed to his charge.

February 3rd

## The Cottage at Nazareth

On the return of the Holy Family from Egypt, St. Joseph, under the guidance of Almighty God, chose Nazareth as the home. It was a town of ill-repute, one of the very last that St. Joseph would have been inclined to select as a fitting home for Jesus and Mary. But he knew that it was the will of God that they should dwell there, and that was the only consideration that had any weight with Joseph. Is this the only one that has any weight with me?

At Nazareth began what we generally know by the name of the Hidden Life of Jesus. It comprises all the period from the return from Egypt until the beginning of His Public Life. It extends nigh over thirty years, whereas the Public Life extends only over three years. This was to teach us that the Hidden Life with God is the important element in our spiritual life, and that all external work is of little moment compared to this.

It seems strange at first sight that the Son of God should choose for Himself a town like Nazareth. But He had come to be the Friend of sinners and to save sinners; and so it was but natural that He should dwell among sinners and those whom the world thought scorn of from the beginning. How little it matters where we dwell; if we have a humble and contented spirit, we shall make ourselves happy anywhere.

February 4th

## Jesus at Nazareth

What is it that comes out most prominently, as we watch the daily life of Jesus at Nazareth? Perhaps its most remarkable trait is its apparently ordinary and commonplace character. There is nothing striking about it; nothing that men would deem heroic or worthy of admiration. The life of the Son of God was just the sort of life that would be lived by the son of any poor couple who had to work for their daily bread. He helped His Mother in the work of the house, ran errands, and as time went on worked under the direction of His foster- father in the carpenter's shop. If these were the employments of the Son of God for twenty years, and more, shall I complain if my daily occupations are ordinary and matter of fact duties?

We next observe how all the work of Jesus was done under obedience, not because He liked it, or because it was useful, but simply because He was told to do it. Is this my motive in my actions? and do I rejoice in work done under obedience? or, on the other hand, am I inclined to rebel against orders that are opposed to what I think is right and best?

Another feature of Jesus' work at Nazareth was that it apparently produced no results. There was nothing to show for it when it was done. The world estimates the value of any work by the external effects that it has to show. Judged by this standard, the time of the Son of God at Nazareth was wasted. Hence learn not to judge of work by its immediate results, since these are no test whether it produces solid fruit to the glory of God and the good of souls.

February 5th

## The Carpenter's Shop

*L*et us look into the humble shed where Joseph is working at his trade of a carpenter, and Jesus is working too, under the direction of His foster-father. Joseph's skill is not great; the products of his handiwork are not such as would find favor in a modern workshop. They are neat and carefully made, but they are not elaborate works of art. Yet in the eyes of God how beautiful and graceful they appear, how much more beautiful than any that ever proceeded from the hands of the most accomplished artist. Congratulate St. Joseph on the merit that he acquired by each stroke of his chisel and every blow of his hammer, and pray that your works may be of similar value in the sight of God.

*W*hat was it that gave to the labors of St. Joseph such exceeding value in the sight of the Most High? It was the purity of the motive with which they were done. This it is that decides the character of our actions in the sight of God, not their external comeliness. How will my actions stand this test? Are they not too often done from vanity and a love of display, or from motives of selfishness, or a hope of earthly reward?

*B*y Joseph's side his little assistant is at work. Observe how exactly He carries out in every detail His master's instructions. He never departs from them in the smallest detail, never attempts to improve upon them, or correct what is faulty in them. This is the perfection of true obedience; to carry out the will of the superior just as he wills it, and because he so wills it.

February 6th

## Mary at Nazareth

The life that Mary led at Nazareth was the nearest to the life of the Blessed in Heaven that had ever been witnessed in this valley of tears. In some respects we may say that it was even a happier life than that of the Angels and other Saints before the throne of God, for it had in it the germ and hope of promise of a life far more glorious than that of any other of the holy ones of God. Even on earth she loved God more perfectly, and was more closely united to Him, so far as was possible to one who was not yet in possession of the Beatific Vision.

Yet Mary's life was full of crosses and trials. None ever suffered as she, because none ever shared so fully in the life of the Man of Sorrows; yet in spite of this she was intensely happy. Learn that suffering borne for God is not a source of misery or unhappiness, but goes hand in hand with joy and peace and cheerfulness and lightness of heart.

What was the source of Mary's joy? It was the presence of Jesus. How could she be aught else but joyful in His Divine company? What was the source of her sorrow? It was the knowledge that her Son and God would be rejected, and set at naught, and one day would endure an agony that none of the sons of men could bear, save only He, whose Divine Nature joined to His Humanity gave Him an indefinite capacity for suffering. This thought made Mary always sorrowful, even as she gazed on His Divine beauty. Do I ever feel any real sorrow at the thought of the sufferings of Jesus?

February 7th

## Joseph at Nazareth

No mortal man ever had a post of such responsibility as St. Joseph. To his care was entrusted a treasure of infinite value. He had to provide for the safety and welfare of God Himself. Yet St. Joseph never quailed, never was down-hearted under the task that he had to perform. How was this? It was because he knew well that God never gives to anyone a charge, without at the same time giving the graces necessary for the performance of it. This relieved him of all fruitless anxiety. So also it should console me, if I am tempted to lose heart and be cast down under my responsibilities.

What were the graces that were especially necessary to St. Joseph as the foster-father of Jesus? Every possible grace; every virtue must have been found in him in a heroic degree; the absence of any one of them would have rendered him quite unfitted for his task. So to me Jesus commits Himself in Holy Communion. How far can I find in myself this qualification of the possession of every virtue? Alas! how many are almost or wholly absent!

Yet one virtue was more necessary, if possible, than any of the rest. Prudence was the first qualification of St. Joseph's office. He was above all a faithful and prudent servant. Without this the Divine Son of God would never have been committed to his care. In me, alas, prudence is a virtue that is sadly wanting. How imprudent are my words, how impulsive and often ill-judged are my actions!



February 8th

## Obedience of Jesus

*The* obedience of Jesus was the type and pattern of the only kind of obedience that is really pleasing to God. It is therefore most important that we should examine its leading characteristics. It was a willing obedience. Jesus undertook any task that was laid upon Him. No thought of discontent, no secret whisper of complaint was ever breathed in His Heart, however hard or distasteful the work assigned Him. Learn from Him never to murmur in your heart, never to complain, even though it may cost you much to do the work that duty imposes.

*It* was, moreover, a cheerful obedience. Jesus received every command with an expression of thankfulness and actual joy, as if it were some boon that was being conferred upon Him. This is the perfection of obedience, to consider the orders given us as gifts from the hand of God, intended by Him as means to our greater good and to our eternal happiness.

*It* was also a blind obedience. He never allowed Himself to question the prudence of the order He received. It was enough for Him that it was an order, coming to Him from one who was in the place of a superior to Him, and who therefore represented Almighty God to Him. How often we, on the contrary, allow ourselves to pass sentence on the arrangements of our superiors, and to condemn them in our hearts, and perhaps with our lips also.

February 9th

## The Hidden Life at Nazareth

When we contrast the life of our Lord at Nazareth with the life that we should naturally have expected Him to live, it seems as though He were throwing away opportunities of good. If He had preached in Rome and Athens, if He had visited the chief cities of the world, would not His Divine eloquence have converted tens of thousands? Why then did He remain living a life of inaction at Nazareth? It seems strange to us, but we must recognize that God's ways are not like ours.

We often wonder why it is that God allows those who have great abilities or power of doing good to remain hidden and out of sight. Sometimes He deprives them of the health and strength necessary for active work; sometimes He cuts short their career just when they are beginning to make their influence felt; sometimes He leaves them where their life seems absolutely thrown away. We are inclined to regret it, and perhaps to think that we would have ordered it otherwise. But in view of the Hidden Life at Nazareth, all such regrets must of necessity disappear.

Would greater glory have been given to God if the Son of God had exercised His Divine power and converted all mankind while on earth, as He might easily have done? No, for that which pleases God best is that we should remain where He has placed us, even though our lives are apparently useless. Never was a life so apparently useless as the life of Jesus at Nazareth. Yet every moment of it brought a glory to God compared with which the glory He derives from the service of all the Saints and Angels is as nothing.

February 10th

## The Lesson of the Hidden Life

What was the lesson that the Hidden Life at Nazareth was designed to teach? It was simply this: that the highest and most perfect kind of life does not consist in one occupation more than another, not in severe penances, not in active zeal, not in works of self-denying charity, not in living remote from all in order to spend one's life in contemplation and prayer, but simply in doing the will of God from day to day. This and naught else is the secret of all sanctity--to do the will of God simply and solely because it is the will of God, from day to day.

Is this an easy lesson? No, it is the most difficult lesson in the whole world. He who has really learned it in its perfection is already a great saint. It means that self and self-will are dead within him, and that he can say with the Apostle, "I live, now not I, but Christ lives in me." How far from this am I, in whom self-lives, and is so strong!

Is this an important lesson? It is the most important lesson in the whole world, as it is the most difficult. Without having learned it we can never attain to solid or lasting happiness. We are always exposed to have our happiness destroyed by something that we think we have reason to regret; something that interferes with our self-will, or threatens to interfere with our comfort, or with what we fancy will tend to our welfare or happiness. If only we could learn the secret of doing the will of God simply because it is His will, our life would be a heaven upon earth.

February 11th

## The Learning of the Lesson

If the lesson of doing the will of God from day to day is such an all-important one, we must inquire diligently into the conditions necessary for learning it. Can it be quickly learned? The answer to this question is found in the fact that our Lord devoted thirty out of His three and thirty years on earth to the learning of it; and this though He was absolutely perfect in it from the very first. This was to teach us that the lesson can only be learned after long years of constant endeavor; nay, there are few indeed who learn it as they ought, even in a lifetime.

What are the means of learning it? Like all other practical lessons it can only be learned by practice. It is only by making the law of our lives the will of God, however manifested to us, that it can become the real principle animating them. Too often, alas, the law of our action is our own will and our own inclination. We act on impulse: we do just what we naturally desire without any other thought. As long as this is so there is no place left for the will of God.

We must not expect the process to be at first a pleasant one. It is no agreeable task at the beginning to sacrifice our own wills. It is a painful process. But as time goes on it loses all its painfulness, and becomes attractive, and at length the act of obliterating self to substitute God in its place is a real delight. This it was to the Saints; this in the end I hope it may be to me.

February 12th

## The Obstacles to its Acquirement

What makes it so difficult for us to do the will of God from day to day? It is mainly because we are not fully convinced that all true happiness is to be found in God and God alone. We go on trying to attain to happiness by doing our own will, even when we are conscious that it is opposed to the will of God. Yet we know by experience that all attempts to be happy without God prove miserable failures in the end.

Another obstacle is our inordinate love of our own will. It is one of the consequences of free will, in our fallen state, that a certain satisfaction is found in the mere arbitrary exercise of it. It is only when we have learned the joy, without bound or limit, that is to be found in doing the holy will of God that we are willing to forego the indulgence of our own will in order to put the will of God in its place. Then God's will becomes ours, or rather our own will disappears, swallowed up in the Infinite Will of God.

Yet there is another obstacle consisting in the pain and suffering which are, from time to time, sure to accompany a faithful performance of the will of God. He permits this for the greater glory of His elect. Now pain and suffering are naturally very distasteful to us. We shrink from them instinctively. We require a very strong motive to enable us to face them. Nothing can counteract them save a strong fear and love of God.

This then must be my prayer: **"Pierce through my flesh with Thy fear. Grant, O Lord, that I may love Thee ever more and more."**

February 13th

## The Visit to Jerusalem

Every grown-up man among the Jews was bound once each year to go up to Jerusalem, in order to pay a visit to the Temple. This was in order to keep fresh and bright the love for the place where God in an especial manner dwelt, and to preserve the faith of those who lived far away. We are not bound to visit Rome, as the Jews were to visit Jerusalem. But nevertheless we should esteem it a high privilege to visit the tombs of the Apostles, and the home of the Vicar of Jesus Christ.

Women were under no obligation to pay this yearly visit; but Mary accompanied her husband year by year. It was a joy to her to which she looked forward with joyous expectation to each returning Pasch, crying out in her heart. My soul longeth for the courts of the Lord, for the courts of the house of my God! How sweet were the memories that the Temple recalled to her. She thought of the happy years of her infancy and childhood, spent within those sacred portals; she thought of her espousal with her dear husband; she thought of the day when with a joyful heart she presented her Divine Son in the Temple. Congratulate Mary on these happy reminiscences.

When Jesus was twelve years old, He went with His parents on their annual visit. He, the Lord of the Temple, went up to worship there as if He had need of pardon for the past, or aid from God to preserve His youthful steps in the right way. If He thus went up to pray, then how all-important prayer must be for a poor sinner like me.

February 14th

## The Journey Home

*I*t was the custom in the caravans that used to go up to Jerusalem for the Pasch, that men and women should travel separately. Children would travel with either company. Hence on the journey home from Jerusalem St. Joseph thought that Jesus was with His Holy Mother, and Mary thought that He was with Joseph. Each of them was always thinking of Him, and longed to have Him with them, but in their unselfish love for each other, each was willing to forego the joy of His company for the other's sake. Learn from them to be unselfish, even in spiritual things.

*W*hen they halted for the night, each was astonished to find that He was not with the other. In sorrow and anxiety they sought Him among their kinsfolk and acquaintance. But no, they found Him not. He was not in the returning company. O how bitter was Mary's sorrow! How keen the distress of her holy Spouse! Condole with them, and try to realize the intensity of their anguish.

*W*e sometimes lose Jesus, and in our case it is too often through our own fault. It is not through our unselfishness, as in the case of Joseph and Mary, but through our selfishness and self-will and unfaithfulness to grace. Yet how strangely indifferent we are to our loss. Perhaps we have even lost Him altogether through some serious sin. At all events we have alienated Him by deliberate venial sin. Yet we have little or none of the sorrow that Joseph and Mary felt when they lost Him through no fault of their own. Pray for a keener appreciation of the misery of being in any way separated from Jesus.

February 15th

## The Search after Jesus

When Mary and Joseph failed to find Jesus among their kinsfolk and acquaintance, they returned to Jerusalem seeking Him. What were their thoughts during that dreary and desolate time? Did they blame themselves for carelessness in not making sure that their Divine Son was among the home-bound company? We can scarcely think so. No reasonable precaution had been neglected. They had not to add to the bitterness of their sorrow, that the loss of Jesus was through their own fault. It is a great mistake ever to blame ourselves for any misfortune however great, when we know that we have acted for the best, and have not done anything to offend God.

Yet who shall gauge the desolation of their aching hearts? There was a void in them that all the world could not supply. Had Jesus left them never to return? Were they to live henceforward bereft of the Light that had made the life in the little cottage at Nazareth a little Heaven upon earth? Without Jesus, what else would their life be but a living death? Condole with the darkness and desolation that gathered over their souls, and pray for the help of Joseph and Mary, in your own days of darkness and discouragement.

Amidst all that time of anguish Joseph and Mary never for one instant lost their confidence in God and their resignation to His holy will. *Fiat voluntas tua* was their motto from first to last. They did not complain of the loss of Jesus, which was to them far worse than death. Learn from them the lesson of humble submission to the Divine will, even amid the heaviest trials.



February 16th

## The Absence of Jesus

What is it that causes the loss of Jesus and His absence from our souls? In many cases, perhaps in most, it is our own sin. Mortal sin banishes Him altogether from our hearts. Venial sin does not drive Him altogether away, but destroys the freedom and happiness of our intercourse with Him. We no longer are able to rejoice with Him, and we lose our taste for heavenly things. **O my God, grant in Thy mercy that I may never lose Thee by mortal sin, and that I may fight against those venial sins which build up a barrier between Thee and me.**

We also often lose the brightness of Jesus' presence through some negligence or infidelity to grace, which does not indeed amount to even venial sin, but nevertheless is quite sufficient to cause a sort of cloud between the soul and God. This is not infrequently the explanation of darkness and desolation. God has asked something of us, and we have preferred our own will. Now God hates self-will, and we cannot expect peace and joy as long as we indulge it.

There is also a third cause of the loss of our consciousness of Jesus' presence, which is our own fault, though, not our present fault. Sometimes God leaves us in darkness on account of some fault in the past not yet atoned for. It rises up from the grave of forgetfulness, and deprives us of our happiness. What shall we do in such a case? We must throw ourselves at the footstool of God's mercy, and with a sincere act of contrition beg Him to blot out all our past sins from the book of His remembrance, adding to this some penance for our sins.

February 17th

## Other Causes of the Absence of Jesus

The loss of Jesus is not always the result of some fault of ours; else Mary and Joseph would not have lost Him. Sometimes He permits it for our trial, to see whether we shall be faithful to Him in darkness and under difficulties. "**Because thou earnest to the service of God, it was necessary that temptation should try thee,**" are the words of the Angel to the aged Tobias. It is therefore in this case a mark of God's favor and approval. Is this the case with me? Perhaps so.

God in His mercy sometimes sends these days of desolation in order that we may thereby expiate our past sins, and that our souls may be cleansed from the stain of sin and from the liability to punishment for it. Thank God then for those times, however painful, that are the means of washing our souls clean and rendering them pure and fit for the presence of God! How we shall thank God for them when we see how they served us instead of Purgatory and at the same time have earned for us a higher place in Heaven!

The loss of Jesus is also sometimes a signal mark of God's love. He knows that the faithful soul is able to endure the trial, and He knows too that those times of darkness are the times of the most rapid progress in the love and service of God. Then it is that we advance by leaps and bounds. We often make more progress in a day of darkness than in a week of sunshine. Remember this when trouble comes, and make a good use of such harvest-days.

February 18th

## Jesus in the Temple

*Why* was it that Jesus remained behind in Jerusalem without the knowledge of His parents? It was to teach us that He had a Father in Heaven, who had a claim before which that of an earthly parent must at once give way. He desired that we should understand that when God calls us we must obey, without any regard to the claims of those whose authority it is but an authority delegated to them by Him. Hence no wish no command of any earthly parent or ruler has any weight if it is in opposition to what God commands or wills, if once we are absolutely certain that it is He who commands or wills it.

*Jesus* remaining behind in Jerusalem turned His steps to His Father's house. The Temple was the spot where he loved to dwell, saying in the words of the Psalmist, "Here will I dwell, for I have chosen it." Is it my wont to turn my steps to the Temple of God, and to visit the Blessed Sacrament as I would visit some great and all-powerful friend when I am staying near the place where he abides?

*How* did Jesus spend those three days that He passed in Jerusalem? We have no record of their employment, save that we know from His own lips that He was about His Father's business. If this can always be said of us, it matters nothing what may be our external employment. This is the secret of sanctity, to be always doing, not what we like best, or what we have chosen for ourselves, but that which God gives us to do, either through the hands of our superiors, or through His holy inspirations directly conveyed to our souls.

February 19th

## Jesus Among the Doctors

*If* we had been asked what would be the occupation of the Son of God in the Temple of His Father, we certainly should not have expected it to be to sit at the feet of those human teachers whose puny knowledge was but as a drop of water compared with the ocean of His Divine Wisdom, and who were indebted to Him for all that they knew. Yet He listened to them, as a learner to his masters, in order that He who came to be our Example in all things might teach the young to show deference to the old, and all to sit humbly at the feet of those whom God has appointed to instruct and teach others His holy law.

*What* nonsense were the wisest sayings of these doctors, compared with even the human and acquired knowledge of the Boy who listened to them. Yet He showed no impatience, did not correct their imperfect utterances, did not even criticize what they said, but received with the reverence due to their age, their position, and their sacred office. Is this my spirit when I listen to those who are my appointed teachers, or do I criticize and find fault?

*Jesus* also asked questions of the Jewish doctors. This too was to instruct us. We should learn from Him to be eager and anxious for information on heavenly things. He who knew all things in Heaven and earth, needed no instruction, but we who are full of ignorance are liable to have our usefulness marred by our want of knowledge. We should lose no opportunity of seeking and searching, in order to supply our countless deficiencies.

February 20th

## The Finding of Jesus

*F*or three days Joseph and Mary had sought in vain for Jesus. Every hour increased their agony of sorrow, and made the finding of Him whom they loved apparently more hopeless. Yet they did not cease from their weary, anxious task. In the darkest moments they never lost hope. We are too prone to lose hope when troubles come upon us. This is in many cases the reason why we do not succeed in obtaining what we desire.

*J*oseph and Mary had exhausted every human means within their reach in order to find their darling Son. They had visited the house of every friend and acquaintance that they had in the city. They had inquired high and low, but all in vain. They had prayed unceasingly, but apparently in vain. At last they turned their steps to the Temple. There they would beg for grace and strength to bear their crushing sorrow. Thus we, too, should act. Even if it is not the will of God to relieve us of the burden that weighs us down, yet at all events, we shall be strengthened to bear it patiently and with resignation.

*A*rrived at the Temple, they find at first no trace of Jesus. But at length they wander, as if by chance, into one of the courts, where a group of the doctors are assembled in earnest colloquy round a young Boy who is sitting in their midst. That Boy on whose lips the doctors are hanging in breathless interest is none other than He, whom they seek. What can have been the intensity of joy that deluged their hearts! Congratulate them, and pray that your sorrow may thus be turned into joy.

February 21st

## Mary's Remonstrance

*M*ary's first words on seeing her beloved Son once more were words of gentle remonstrance. "Son, why hast Thou done so to us?" So Mary spoke in accents full indeed of joy and gratitude, yet still echoing with the tone of sorrow that had filled her heart for the three days past, and in so speaking, she taught us that such words of loving remonstrance in time of suffering and desolation, so far from in any way displeasing Jesus, are what He likes to hear, because they are a mark of our love for Him, and of our consciousness that without His aid we never can bear up amid the sorrows that befall us.

*"Thy Father and I have sought Thee sorrowing."* Why did Mary tell to Jesus what He already knew so well? Was it that she was ignorant that He could read the secrets of every heart, or that she thought that He had overlooked her anguish? All this she knew full well, but she knew also that Jesus loves that His friends should tell Him all their troubles. Do I show Him this mark of confidence?

*O*ur Lady, in the presence of the Jewish doctors calls St. Joseph the Father of Jesus. How could she, when Jesus was the Son of the Most High? It was because St. Joseph was in every respect the true father of Jesus, save only that the Divine Infant was conceived in Mary's womb by the operation of the Holy Ghost. He exercised all the duties and rights of a parent, and was destined by Almighty God to pass as His father among the unbelieving Jews. What must have been the unparalleled holiness of St. Joseph, who thus deserved to be put in the place of God Himself!

February 22nd

## Jesus' Reply

The answer to Mary's question was an expression of wonder that Mary and Joseph should seek Him. "How is it that ye sought Me?" He did not really think it strange that they should look for Him whom they had lost, and the loss of whom turned the day into night for them. But He desired that we should regard it as no strange thing if sometimes He leaves us alone; for if He thus treated His holy Mother and His foster-father, it must be a mark of His love if He treats us as He treated them.

"The reason Jesus gives for wondering that they sought Him, was, they must have known that His one aim in all that He did was to do His Father's work and carry out His Father's will." Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" Did you not know that if I remained in Jerusalem, it was because I was thus fulfilling the will of Him that sent Me? No other motive but this ever influences any action that I do, or any word that I speak. Can I take these words into my mouth, and declare the will of God to be my one and only motive?

Why did Jesus speak of His presence among the doctors as in a special sense "His Father's business"? Because He had been sent on earth to proclaim to men the Truth. "For this cause," He says to Pilate, "I came into the world, to bear witness to the Truth." All His servants have in one form or other the same mission. We all, if we are to do God's business, must sometimes proclaim to others the inspired truths that He has revealed to us. Do I do this boldly and yet prudently when occasion offers?

February 23rd

## The Youth of Jesus

*When* Jesus returned with His parents to the cottage at Nazareth, we are expressly told that He was subject to them. This subjection to His earthly parents was in no way binding on Jesus Christ. He could not, in virtue of His Divine Nature, be bound to any subjection to any creature that He had made. But He took this subjection upon Himself, in order that we might learn that the highest kind of life on earth is one of voluntary subjection. It is this that gives to religious life its value in the sight of God. It is a reproduction of the life that the Son of God lived in the cottage at Nazareth.

*Jesus* lived in subjection during those years that witness the passage from boyhood to youth and from youth to manhood. For most, that time is one of a dangerous love of independence. How many a sorrowing mother grieves over the increasing tendency of her boy to resent her control, and laments those early days of his docile childhood. In those times of bitter disappointment, what can the poor mother do better than turn to that Mother whose Son was always a pattern of perfect obedience, and pray her to help and console her in those dark hours?

*How* many a son, when he looks back finds among his most poignant regrets his unkindness and disobedience to his mother. How often he brought sorrow to her fond heart. How different his conduct to her from that of the Son of God to His Holy Mother. Pray God to forgive you if you have anything of this sort to reproach yourself with. Try and repair your unkindness by present tenderness, or by many prayers in her behalf.



February 24th

## The Manhood of Jesus

The subjection of Jesus did not cease when He arrived at the age of manhood. He seemed, impossible, to rejoice then even more than before in obeying His Holy Mother and St. Joseph. It was enough for Him to know that they wished anything of Him, and it was done without a moment of needless delay. Nay, He continually anticipated their desires, and in His thoughtful love carried them into effect unbidden. Is this the character of my obedience? Or am I slow to carry out the wishes of those who have a claim upon me, even when I know them full well?

Jesus, in the fullness of His manhood, still worked on in the carpenter's shop at Nazareth. As long as Joseph lived, He acted as his assistant, worked under his directions; after his death He carried on for some time the business of His foster-father. Who would have guessed that this humble artisan was the coequal Son of God? Thus, O Jesus, Thou didst reverse the world's ideas. Grant that I may learn to despise none, but to see in the humblest Thy brethren and representatives.

Joseph's death left the cottage at Nazareth sadly desolate. Never was there so fond a spouse as Mary, never so affectionate a Son as Jesus. In proportion to their love was their grief at their common loss. Their knowledge that St. Joseph had passed to the bosom of Abraham did not restore the brightness of his presence to the cottage at Nazareth. Jesus and Mary can sympathize with the anguish of those whose longing desires go forth after one whom they have lost, even though they know that he is in Paradise.

February 25th

## Manual Labor of Nazareth

*What* was the chief external occupation of Jesus at Nazareth? Not any employment that the world esteems honorable, but the menial work of a servant. By this He consecrated menial labor, and made it something high and honorable. Hence the Saints have always rejoiced in menial and humble tasks. Hence too we should learn to respect and never to look down upon those who have to labor with their hands.

*How* did Mary employ herself at Nazareth? Was it all prayer and contemplation? It is true that Mary's thoughts were always in Heaven, but this in no way interfered with the ordinary domestic duties of a poor woman who has to do all the household work herself. We fancy sometimes that we should be very holy if we gave all our time exclusively to prayer and other spiritual employments; but we should do better to remember that the way to sanctify ourselves is to do our work, however humble it may be, in the most perfect way possible, as Mary did at Nazareth.

*How* did Joseph spend his time at Nazareth? He, too, teaches the same lesson of the dignity of a life of humble toil. If we had visited Nazareth, and been told that this village carpenter was the future Patron of the Universal Church, would not a smile have been raised by a supposition so apparently absurd? How is it then that men look on the poor and humble as their natural inferiors, when their life corresponds so much more closely than any other to the life that Jesus, Mary, and Joseph lived at Nazareth?

February 26th

## The Approaching Time of Separation

At length the time drew near when Jesus was to leave the cottage at Nazareth. Mary knew well that it must come at last. It had been a shadow that from time to time had overshadowed the joy of their common life. Yet Mary had not allowed herself to dwell on the sorrow that she knew awaited her. She did not anticipate evils to come. So we, if we are wise, shall dwell with gratitude on the happy present, and shall not permit any troubles in the future to mar our peace.

Yet Mary knew that the time was not far off. The words of Jesus on the occasion of their finding Him in the Temple still echoed in her ears: "Did you not know that I must be about My Father's business?" She had laid them up in her heart when they were spoken, and had often trembled at the thought that ere long Jesus would go forth to the Ministry that He had come to exercise among the sons of men, and she would be left alone. For Mary the world was indeed a valley of tears. So it is for all who are very dear to God.

At the same time she longed for the very day that she dreaded so much. For Mary, in her unselfishness, desired eagerly the day when her Divine Son should begin His public labors of love and mercy among the sons of men. This is the true mark of unselfish love, to be willing to forfeit even the happiness of one we love, when he has some work to do whither God is calling him. Will my love for those who are dearest to me stand this test?

February 27th

## Mary's Meditations

*"Mary kept all these words in her heart."* Each word that Jesus spoke was indelibly printed on Mary's heart. All that He said was laid up as a precious treasure that was to guide her life, and to be ever present to her thoughts. No jewel was ever half as valuable in the eyes of its possessor as each word that Jesus spoke was to His holy Mother. Do I thus value the words of Jesus above gold and precious stones? How little pains I take to make my own His sacred words, recorded in the pages of Holy Scripture?

*But* Mary was not satisfied with merely treasuring up the words of Jesus. She also meditated on them day by day, finding in them continually a fresh fount of sweet refreshment for her holy soul and of food for her daily life. Do I make a similar use of the words of Jesus that I read, or hear in sermons, or do I merely read and listen for my own amusement, or perhaps even to criticize and find fault with what I hear, either with its matter, or with the manner in which it is said?

*This* habit of meditating on Jesus' words was one of Mary's chief means of progress, and advanced at such an unrivaled speed to the loftiest heights of sanctity. The practice of daily meditation on some pious thought, or some word of Jesus, is necessary to all who strive for spiritual advancement. We shall never be the intimate friends of God without it. We must keep the sayings of Holy Scripture in our hearts, we must devote some time each day to meditating on them, if we are to be true children of Mary, and true lovers of her Son.

February 28th

## Farewell to Nazareth

At length the day dawned, when Mary had to part from Jesus. It is always hard for a mother to part from her only son, even when he goes forth to brilliant prospects of wealth and honor and renown; but what is it if she knows that he is destined to sorrow and disappointment, to ill-usage, to hardships of every kind, to persecution, imprisonment, torture, death? All this Mary knew was in store for her well-beloved Son. What must have been her unspeakable sorrow as she bade Him her fond farewell.

But this grief was at least consoled by His presence as long as He was with her. It was when He was gone that the storm of anguish burst in all its violence over her breaking heart. It was when she saw His place empty, and the music of His Divine words sounded no longer in her ears, that she realized how she was to share by her Compassion in the bitter sufferings of the Son of God. O Mary, who knowest so well what it is to have the heart torn by anguish, help us when we are shedding tears of agony over the dangers or the sufferings of one who is dear to us as life itself.

As Jesus turned His back on Nazareth, we may be sure that He shed many a tear of fond regret at the thought of the happy days He had spent in the cottage where He had dwelt for near thirty years with His Mother and St. Joseph. This remembrance of the past was joined to an intense grief at the thought He was causing Mary by leaving her alone. O Jesus, full of Divine pity, have pity on us now and in all our times of darkness and desolation.

