

THE VOCATION OF MADONNA HOUSE AND THE SPIRIT OF NAZARETH

by Catherine Doherty

The spirit of Madonna House is the spirit of 'Nazareth'. Our spirit is to be humble and hidden, and to be poor in earthly goods, having only the necessities. Our spirit is to be detached from our own will.

Madonna House preaches the Gospel with its life. It does little things with great love of God and neighbor. Madonna House is a 'family', like the one in Nazareth—a family of God, hence a community of love. Madonna House believes that it must *be before the Lord* first, and *do for the Lord* next. It witnesses to God in the 'marketplaces' of the world. It identifies with those it serves.

This is how, as foundress, I explained what I consider to be God's mandate to our community at the time when we began to bind ourselves to that spirit—under promises of poverty, chastity, and obedience—at the suggestion of the then Holy Father, in 1951.

Community of Charity

Let us look more closely at the spirit of Nazareth, the Holy Family of Nazareth. First and foremost it was a spirit of charity. Even before Christ's birth, there existed between Mary and Joseph a great and sublime love. These two were already a community of perfect charity.

I believe God arranged that Madonna House would be a replica of this type of love, this community of charity. For almost from the first day of our foundation, God

brought men and women to Madonna House, to live together as Mary and Joseph did, in perfect and total chastity. We constantly return to this point and meditate upon it so as to have a deep understanding of this beautiful mystery.



Pregnant with God

Another facet of Nazareth is the pregnancy of Mary. She was already carrying God within her when the Holy Family, that 'community of love' between her and Joseph, was so miraculously established. Each man and woman who has the vocation to Madonna House is 'pregnant with God' in a manner of speaking. This is a grace from God, who gives them a desire for him-

self. The desire becomes a 'seed' within them, leading them to this modern-day Nazareth of Mary and Joseph—Madonna House—to dwell there in hiddenness and in humility. He leads them each day to laborious work at little tasks which, if done with great love, truly preach his Gospel.

Simple and Uncomplicated Lives

Our poverty should be that of the Holy Family. They were artisans. They had enough to live simple and uncomplicated lives. They were not destitute, but they obviously had none of the luxuries of the day. Their poverty was luminous because all three of them were utterly detached from their own wills and completely attached to the will of God the Father. Parallels abound for the spirit of Madonna House.

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Pass It On! #25



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Serving in the Presence of God

Mary was certainly a contemplative. She lived consciously in the presence of God the Father. God the Holy Spirit overshadowed her, and God the Son was with her, in human flesh. Yet she worked hard, serving the needs of Jesus and Joseph and the villagers, and pilgrims who passed by. She served by listening and gently advising those in trouble and sorrow, by sharing her food, by general hospitality, and in many other simple and direct ways which we call the corporal and spiritual 'works of mercy'.

Joseph was also a contemplative. How could he not be—he lived with God, and with God's Mother. He was a silent man, a man of deep prayer. Yet one feels sure that he, too, worked hard for the Lord, first by providing for his own family, and then by assisting his neighbors. He not only did things for them but probably also counseled them 'at the gates of the elders'. In these two quiet human beings, Mary and Joseph, the Madonna House spirit and its techniques can be clearly seen.

Part of the Familiar Landscape

One of these is identification, like the Holy Family's identification with the villagers. They were part of the familiar landscape, spoke the same language, had the

same status, for the Scriptures say of Christ, "Isn't he just the carpenter's son?" God's Mandate to us, too, is to blend with and identify ourselves with those whom we serve, as much as is humanly possible—especially with those who live in poverty. If, as happens on occasion, we are called to serve the 'rich poor' in their needs, then even more are we called to bring Nazareth, and all it stands for, to them. We bring poverty, simplicity, hard work, and joy.

An Ordinary Life of Great Love

We lead an ordinary life, filled with many monotonous jobs to be done with great love. Through these daily tasks, we become 'witnesses' of God by being a living mystery. We try to live in such a way that our life would not make sense if God did not exist.

The apostolate of Madonna House is much broader than Nazareth—in fact, it may involve anything but sin. Yet Nazareth is our model and our spiritual home.