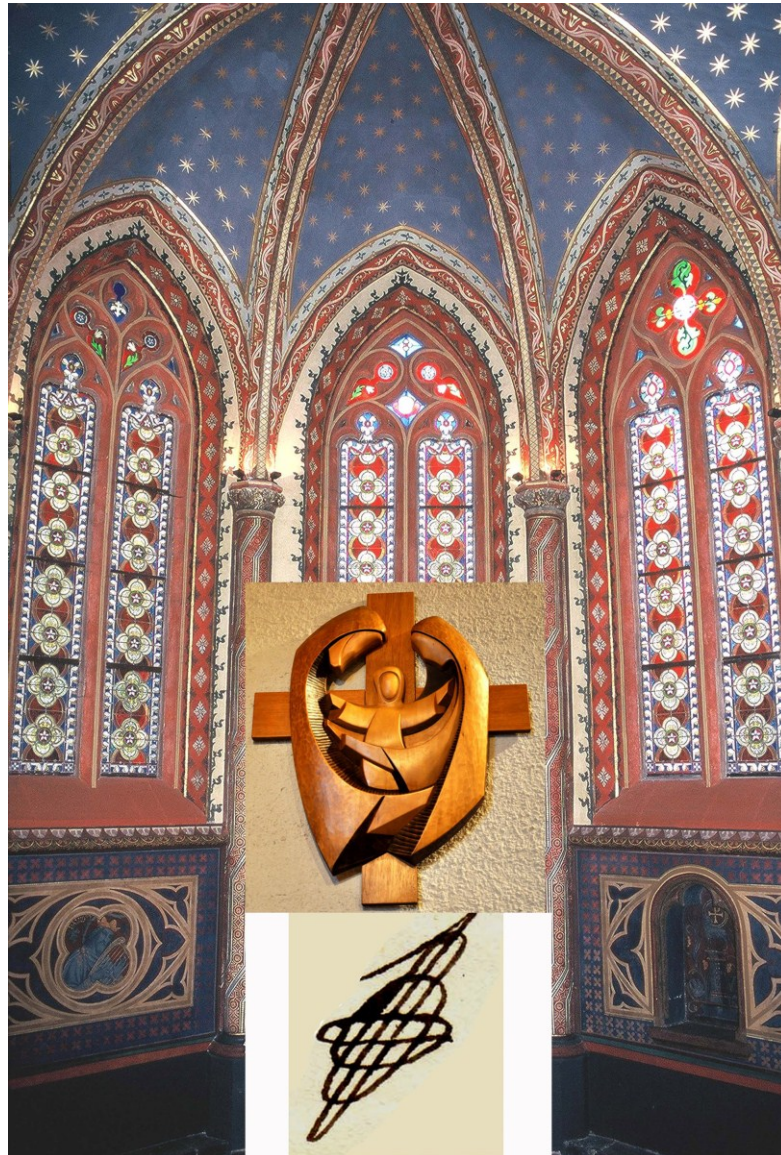


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# THE LINKS WHICH BRING US TOGETHER IN JESUS, MARY AND JOSEPH



## SA-FA FAMILY SPIRITUALITY



## PRESENTATION

*The text which we hereby present to our readers is designed to offer the Brothers of the Holy Family and to all those persons or groups who draw the inspiration for their Christian life from the Holy Family of Nazareth, and who share the charism of the Venerable Brother Gabriel Taborin, a synthesis of and for their spiritual journey.*

*One of the orientations of the 2007 General Chapter of the Institute asked us “to elaborate a manual of the spirituality of the Institute”; the Superior General and his Council confided this task to the Centre of Nazarene and Taborinian Spirituality.*

*To accomplish this mission we have studied and summarised the principal texts of the tradition of the Institute, particularly those of the Founder, but we also consulted all those who could offer ideas and suggestions, especially the group of collaborators of the Centre of Spirituality in different countries.*

*In the course of developing this document our perspective moved from the one proposed by the Chapter orientation: “spirituality of our Institute” to “spirituality of the Sa-Fa family”, as can be seen in the sub-title of this book. This is a significant change since the text now proposes a spiritual path which may be lived not only by the Brothers of the Holy Family, but also by members of the Nazarene Fraternities and by others who, either individually or in groups, are linked in different ways to Brother Gabriel Taborin, to his charism and to the Institute he founded.*

*In the course of developing this document, it was presented several times and to different groups, during retreats, days of reflection and in other gatherings. The reflections and proposals gathered during these encounters with others, offered in a variety of circumstances, have greatly enriched the text.*

*A very sincere thank you to all those who contributed.*

*Fr. Théodore Berzal  
Belley, April 2011*



## 1. INTRODUCTION: THE SA-FA SPIRITUALITY

The Sa-Fa family is composed of all those persons or groups who form part of, or who are linked with, the Brothers of the Holy Family, and who have Brother Gabriel Taborin as their common point of reference as Founder of the Institute naming it and placing it under the patronage of the Holy Family.

Spirituality is the fostering of spiritual life. It is, above all, the life experience of an individual or of a group. By the term spirituality we understand **the principle unifying and activating every dimension of the person** which enables him or her to fully develop in communion with others, and to positively transform their surroundings. Spirituality is not a flight from reality, but full integration into it.

There are different ways of conceiving spirituality, each dependant on the different concepts of man, of the world, of transcendence ... All spiritualities are human based. **Christian spirituality** is the way of living in the Church, subject to the action of the Holy Spirit, a life that renders Jesus Christ's life visible in his relation to the Father, to men and to the world, under specific circumstances.

There are multiple interpretations of spirituality, dependant on personal and social characteristics, as much as on social, historical and cultural ones. Between the unity of Christian life in its fundamental characteristics and the endless diversity of ways in which it is individually incarnate, affinity arises amongst groups, historical moments, and states of life, which allows us to speak of Christian spiritualities. It is only lately that the term spirituality has been used to refer to such diversity of expressions.

This diversity finds its roots in the Gospel, and in the variety of charisms bestowed by the Holy Spirit.

In fact, Jesus Christ's **one and only Gospel** has already been passed on to us in "**four gospels**" each with its own well defined characteristics, not only in the way they narrate the facts of Jesus' life, but in terms of the communities from which they originate as well as of those to

which they are addressed, but also with respect to the testimonies and visions they offer about the contents of the Christian message, etc. ...Furthermore, the Gospel itself has been experienced throughout history by individuals and by groups in very distinct ways, thus opening a variety of paths for its overwhelming richness to become incarnate.

Saint Paul, who strongly proclaims **the unity of salvation** through faith in Jesus Christ, offers us in one single statement the **variety of the gifts of the Holy Spirit**: “There is one Body, one Spirit, just as you were called to the one hope of your calling by God. There is one Lord, one faith, one baptism and one God and Father of all, over all, through all and within all On each one of us God's favour has been bestowed in whatever way Christ allotted it”. (Eph. 4, 5-7) “There are many different gifts, but it is always the same Spirit; there are many different ways of serving, but it is always the same Lord. There are many different forms of activity, but it is the same God who is at work in them all. The particular manifestation of the Spirit granted to each one is to be used for the good of all”. (1Cor 12, 4) Such charisms, especially those which are the base of ministries, entail a vocation which demands a particular way of living the Christian faith, and of placing oneself within the Christian community.

**The call to Christian sanctity** implies that same tension between unity and multiplicity of forms in Christian life. “The classes and duties of life are many, but holiness is one - that sanctity which is cultivated by all who are moved by the Spirit of God, and who obey the voice of the Father and worship God the Father in spirit and in truth. These people follow the poor Christ, the humble and cross-bearing Christ in order to be worthy of being sharers in His glory. Every person must walk unhesitatingly according to his own personal gifts and duties in the path of living faith, which arouses hope and works through charity”. (*Lumen Gentium*, 41)

Spirituality, then, is to live a Christian life under the action of the Holy Spirit, modulated by the gift received from him.

**Spirituality may present itself with different levels of complexity.** First there is the fundamental level, which consists of **the personal or collective experience**. Spirituality thus manifests itself spontaneously under the action of the Holy Spirit, without any pretence of structuring itself. But little by little, as the history of the group develops, and always in relation to the original founding experiences, criteria and norms regarding life style are drawn up, and a certain accord **with the Gospel and some foundations based on doctrine can be felt with regard to some of its aspects**. Eventually more elaborate, organic syntheses might be attained, which will serve as guidelines along the path of Christian life towards sanctity. Within the Church and throughout its history, many so called “**spirituality schools**” **have arisen, around relevant characters, such as Saint Francis of Assisi, Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Francis de Sales, or Saint Alphonsus Marie Ligouri**. One can also speak of an Augustinian school, a Benedictine school, an Ignatian school, etc. A school of spirituality implies a strong, charismatic personality to begin with, a long and wide continuity in time, and a well founded systematic doctrine. The best test of its validity will be the fruits of holiness which it produces.

Many Religious Institutes and some existing church movements have inserted their spirituality within one or other of the prevailing church movements, imprinting in them the

seal of their “own spirit” or by introducing new activities. Others have remained more independent, trying to grasp from a focal point, (e.g. a mystery of the life of Christ, a Christian virtue, etc.), some characterising hints concerning different aspects of Christian life, as well as guidelines to achieve its fulfilment, but nevertheless remaining largely unidentifiable as spiritualities in themselves. Sa-Fa spirituality is still being developed. Its central intuition consists of building community by fixing one’s eyes on the Holy Family of Nazareth, always in reference to the Blessed Trinity.

Inspired by the life and the writings of Bro. Gabriel Taborin, and in continuity with its history, the Institute of the Brothers of the Holy Family has presented the Holy Family as the inspiration of the life style of the Brothers and, to anyone willing to share in their spirituality and in their mission, the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph will remain their point of reference ... “This Nazarene and Taborinian spirituality will animate their whole existence” (*Constitutions* 7). It is, hence, a **Nazarene and Taborinian spirituality which underlines fraternity and its lay nature, and which contributes to the Church’s mission, especially in terms of education, of liturgical animation and of catechesis...**

The most significant steps in the development of the Institute’s spirituality have been:

- Bro. Gabriel and the first Brothers’ experiences of life in fraternity
- The choice of the Holy Family as the Institute’s patron
- The writing of the Institute’s Rule of Life along with the motivation and the explanations regarding the different aspects of the Brothers’ life.
- The synthesis of the spirituality in the motto: “In Nazareth they prayed, they worked, they loved” (Bro. Amadeus).
- The explanations regarding the concept of “spirit of family” and the spirituality provided by Bro. Steven Baffert and other Brothers.
- The first synthesis of the Institute’s spirituality in the book : *A l’école de la Sainte Famille*” F. Cuttaz, 1951
- The restatement of the Institute’s spirituality in the *Constitutions* and other documents after the Second Vatican Council and the periodic updating of its most relevant aspects in the Institute’s Life Projects.
- The current experience of sharing the spirituality and mission between Brothers and lay people, and the recognition of the value of different cultures.

Along the path followed by the Institute it is possible to distinguish **three** phases, although without a clearly defined succession to separate them precisely, either in time or in content... One can speak of a “devotional” phase, the characteristic trait of which - all others not

withstanding – was prayer; an imitative phase during which the accent was on the moral and ascetic aspect of the Holy Family seen as model; and, finally, a phase in which one attempts to live such a spirituality so as to permeate all aspects of life with the mystery of Nazareth.<sup>1</sup>

In recent years one of the important guidelines given by the Church to religious institutions, and undertaken by ours, has been to share our spirituality and our mission with lay people. This presupposes a re-statement of the spirituality, so that it may be lived not just in its religious life form - the institute of the Brothers of the Holy Family is a religious institute - but in a secular way, within the varied life forms of the secular laity. Hence, the adoption of the expression “Sa-Fa spirituality”.

In presenting it we have chosen the expression: “The links which unite us in Jesus, Mary and Joseph”, used by Bro. Gabriel Taborin from his very first circulars to the Brothers to indicate what he would call, at the end of his life, “esprit de corps et de famille”, which is at the very heart of this spirituality.

The expressions and the texts used to record the Institute’s spirituality reflect the mentality and the forms of expression used by the Church in the course of its history. Therefore, particular attention should be paid to separate the content of the message from its particular form of expression at a given time.

#### **Some questions for reflexion and dialogue:**

- *What is our attitude towards the diversity of groups, associations, congregations, within the Church?*
- *How do we interpret the diversity of tendencies, current thought trends, spiritualities? What criteria do we draw from the Gospels to decide on the relation of these to the Church?*
- *How can a given spirituality help us to lead a Christian life?*
- *What are the characteristics which define Sa-Fa spirituality for you?*
- *What conditions are needed so that a spirituality remains alive?*
- *What are the connections between Sa-Fa spirituality and others?*

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<sup>1</sup> The survey carried out in the Institute - *Encounter with God through his Word, with the Holy Family and with our Founder* (cf. Nazareth, School of Humanity p. 42-71, and in “L’Entretien Familial”, n. 195 pp 677-770, 2008), reveals the depth of this experience and what is the “Institute’s spiritual profile”.





## 2. THE LIVING SOURCES

The entire life of the Church **emerges from the mystery of Christ**, sent by the Father to save men through the action of the Holy Spirit. This is why Christ is always present in his Church. “He is present with his strength in the Sacraments, so that whenever someone baptises it is Christ who baptises. He is present in his Word, as whenever the Holy Scriptures are read in the Church, it is he who speaks. He is present by his love whenever the Church prays or sings the psalms, he who promised: *“Whenever two or three of you come together in my name, I am there with you”*. (Mt. 18: 20) (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 7)

Sa-Fa spirituality **emerges from the same sources as all of Christian life**: The Word of God, the Sacraments, and Prayer and human life in all its relationships and aspects. Accenting some of these elements and emphasizing others contributes to its originality and its own dynamism.

### 2.1 THE WORD OF GOD

*References:*

*Bro. Lino Da Campo: The Holy Family in the New Testament  
Words along the way (Anthology of texts)*

“Your word gives me life”. (Ps 118). The Word of God, proclaimed in the Liturgy, read and meditated upon, whether personally or in the community, is a source of Christian life. The revelation of the mystery of God lies within it, as well as the dynamism needed to live up to it: “God in his goodness and wisdom decided to reveal himself and to let the mystery of his will be known, through which men, through Jesus Christ, the incarnate Word, have access to the Father in the Holy Spirit, thus becoming consorts of his divine nature. In consequence, by this revelation, God, invisible, speaks to men as to friends, moved by his strong love of them, and

dwells with them, to invite them to communicate with him, to receive them in his company". (*Dei Verbum*, 2).

Sa-Fa spirituality underlines the importance of the **Word of God in its relation with "The Word made flesh" in Nazareth**, and concentrates particularly on those passages of the Scriptures which refer to the family constituted by Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Nazareth, but also to those related to the new messianic family of those who believe in Jesus Christ, and on other passages, still, which underline the way through which God gets closer to men and embraces them all in one big family, that of his children.

### **2.1.1 THE GOSPELS RELATING TO JESUS' CHILDHOOD.**

"Jesus went down with them to Nazareth and remained under their authority. His mother kept within her the memory of it all. Jesus continued to grow in wisdom, in stature and in grace before God and before people" (Lk 2: 51-52).

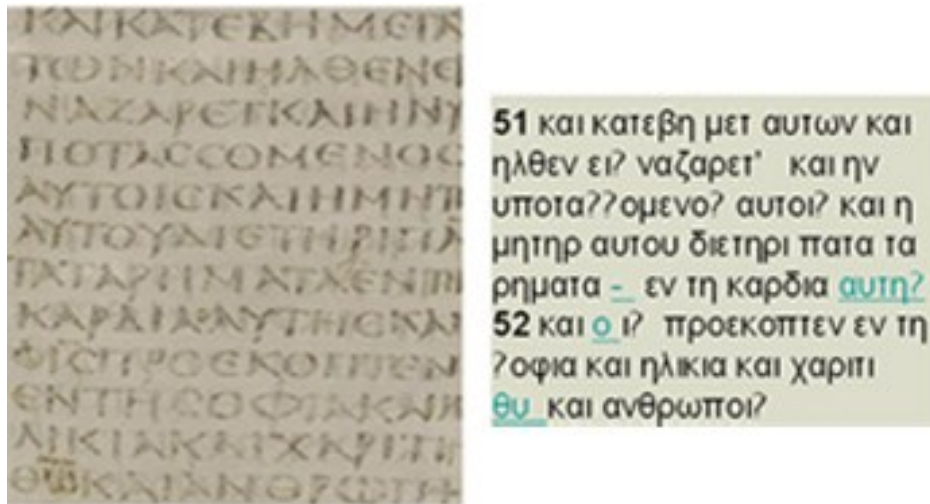
Despite its brevity, **the preceding text constitutes the fundamental text in terms of Nazarene spirituality and the Sa-Fa**. It offers us a historical fact, confirmed in other places in the Gospel, regarding Jesus' family life with Mary and Joseph in Nazareth... Chapters 1 and 2 of the Gospels of Matthew and Luke, which narrate the other episodes of Jesus' childhood, can be placed around this text (which must be completed with the narration of the episode in the Temple at Jerusalem).

In this episode, narrated by Saint Luke in his Gospel, "Jesus lets transpire the mystery of his total devotion to a mission deriving from his divine affiliation". (*Catholic Church Catechism*, 534) The evangelist presents the fact within a Passover frame, which contributes to its inclusion within the larger context of Jesus' life as a whole. According to the latter's first own words in the Gospel He "must be in his Father's house". Such submission to his Father's will guides his very existence (Cf. Lk 4: 43; 9: 22; 17: 25). His journey to Jerusalem on this occasion can be seen as anticipating the other journey during his public life, which will culminate with his passion, his death and his resurrection.

The revelation of Jesus' identity is of particular relevance in the New Testament. First to approach this mystery were Mary and Joseph, having responded from the beginning with their obedience, manifested by their faith, to the instructions given by the angel with regard to the Son to be born and whom they received into their family.

Even though Sa-Fa spirituality tends to favour Jesus' life in Nazareth, it is open to his entire life, seeing in it an inseparable whole. "Every aspect of Jesus' life constitutes a revelation of the Father: his words, his works, his silence, his suffering, his attitude, his speech". (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 516)





Greek text of Luke 2:51-52 from the Codex Sinaiticus

### 2.1.2 SOME PASSAGES FROM HOLY SCRIPTURE

#### THE OTHER FAMILY OF JESUS

*"And looking at those sitting around him he said, Behold my mother and my Brothers, for he who carries out the will of God, that is my Brother, my sister and my mother"* (Mk 3: 34-35; Mt 12: 46 - 50, Lk 11: 28)

It is important to notice that when Jesus calls his disciples he creates a group with the characteristics of a new family, a messianic family in which God is the Father and all are brethren. The essential condition to join it is to adhere to him as a person through faith and through the acceptance of his Word. (Lk. 8: 19-21) The new family into which Jesus calls proves both the great worth and the limits of family as an institution, which, like all other human institutions can never compare with the absolute value of the Kingdom of God. All are welcome into this new family, even those who seemed already lost (Lk 14: 21-23; Mt 10: 6), but not all respond. (Lk 14: 18-20)

To belong to this new family there is needed, therefore, only one personal reality, which has nothing to do with biological fact, namely faith. The vital links created between Jesus and his followers are so strong that they necessarily surpass those based on flesh and blood.

#### ALL BROTHERS

*"But you are not to be called rabbi, for you have one teacher, and you are all brethren. And call no man your father on earth, for you have one Father, who is in heaven. Neither be called masters, for you have one master, the Christ. He who is greatest among you shall be your servant; whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted".* (Mt 23:8-12)

Jesus' words are quoted in the context of a controversial discourse with the Pharisees. The denunciation refers to the deformation of the relationships imposed on the people (Mt 23 1-7). The evangelist's message is surely intended for the Christian community as a whole. The

temptation to turn this innovative fraternal relation into one of dominance and power will always exist. The object of the text is to state what the relations must be within a community experiencing the presence and the authority of the Risen Christ.

The first part of the text contains three prohibitions concerning the use of certain titles: "Rabbi" meaning teacher, Master or guide, and Father. To use such titles may well distort relationships amongst those who have only one Teacher, one Guide and especially one Father.

The core of the message is in verse 8, where, having explained the reasons not to call anyone "Master" "because you have but one master", rather than referring to Jesus' followers as "disciples", he goes on to declare them, surprisingly, "Brothers": "and you are all 'Brothers'". Jesus, the one and only Master, reveals to them that they are all Brothers.

The second part of the text (Mt 23: 11-12) states the practical consequence: become one who serves, like Jesus who "came not to be served, but to serve" (Mt 20: 28). Only those who live by this rule will grow, and help others to grow, and one day "be exalted".

#### COVENANT AND FRATERNITY IN THE BIBLE

The Old Testament introduces the way towards universal fraternity, emerging from the fraternity born of God's People. By making all men from one single first man, "only one beginning" (Acts 17: 26), God has communicated to men a desire for **a primary fraternity in Adam**, (Gen 1-2). But already from the start evil takes its hold on human existence with a fratricide that cuts into such a fraternity (Gen 4).

*God's Covenant with his people implies **communion in one and the same faith*** (Ex. 19), as well as some moral demands for sanctity: "Thou shalt not hate thy Brother...Thou shalt love thy neighbour" (Lev 19:17ss). The Prophets denounce how Israelite society is far from the Covenant ideal because of its hardness of heart and because of the sinfulness of the structures consolidated over time, and discloses its faults in the practice of the Covenant's demands: "No one forgives his own Brother" (Is 9:18), "One cannot even trust one's Brother" (Jer. 9: 3). Jeremiah himself is persecuted by his own family (Jer 11: 18; 12: 6; Ps 69: 9). They recall the consequences of the Covenant: to be part of this Covenant is to have a common Father. (Mt 2: 10). The Covenant establishes a fraternity stronger and more real than being descended from Abraham. (Is 63, 10) The gift of God's law is not enough to establish fraternity: the Law is sacred, but man's heart is perverted. The prophets demand "a new heart" (Jer. 3); "a new spirit" (Ez. 36.). On the Day of the Lord (eschatological salvation) there will be fraternity amongst the peoples. It is then that God will gather Israel and Juda into one single people. Such a fraternity will embrace all peoples. (Is 2: 1-4; 66: 18)

The wise men of Israel described the characteristics of fraternity based on faith: there is nothing more hurtful than being abandoned by your Brothers (Prov. 19:7), a Brother helped by a Brother is like a stronghold (Pro. 18: 19), it is good for Brothers to live together... (Ps 133, 1).

In the New Testament, the prophetic dream of universal fraternity **becomes true in Jesus Christ, the new Adam**. Its realisation in the Church, even in imperfection, is the tangible sign of its final accomplishment.

Born into a human family and dying on a cross, Jesus has become “the first-born of many Brothers”, (Rom 8: 29); he has reconciled the two parties within humanity, the Jews and the Gentiles (Eph 2:11-18); the elder (the Jewish people) must not feel jealous of the younger Brother, welcomed into the Father’s home. (Cf. Lk 15 and Rom 9-11) In order to be allowed into this new fraternity, the condition is no longer to be a son of Abraham in terms of the flesh, but to believe and to fulfil the Father’s will. (Mt 12: 46-50) Such is the effect of the Holy Spirit on the human heart. (Rom 8:18) This is a profound and real fraternity, allowing Jesus, the Risen One to call his disciples “Brothers” (Mt 28: 10; Jn 20: 17); built upon the mystery of Jesus, dead and risen, resembling his Brothers in every way ( Heb 2: 17); universal, not linked to one people or to one culture exclusively. (Jn 17)

Jesus himself, during his life, has set the foundations **for a new fraternal community**: gathering around him a group of disciples (Mc 3); giving precise instructions in terms of the fraternal relationships (Mt 5: 21-26) and fraternal correction (Mt 18, 15); opening the community to all (Mt 5:47) with particular care for the smallest and the weakest (Mt 25: 35-40); trusting Peter with the confirmation of the Brothers (Lk 22: 31); giving them the commandment of reciprocal love (Jn 13), and dying on the cross to gather God’s scattered children (Jn 11).

**Christian love is a fraternal love** ("philadelphia" Gk). It is founded on a rebirth (1Pet 1: 22-23) in order to form the Body of Christ with the other members (1Co 12: 12-27). From within a concrete community, Paul the Apostle gives some instructions: avoid confrontation (Gal 5: 15), support each other (Rom. 15: 1), and be tactful in one’s dealings with one another (1Co 8: 12), build up community and family (Col 3: 12-25). In Saint John’s writings, the word “Brother” has a more universal meaning, equivalent to “neighbour”. Fraternal love is the opposite of Cain’s attitude (1Jn 3: 12-16). Without it, loving God is quite definitely impossible. (1Jn 4: 7-8).

The community made up of the Brothers of Christ is necessarily limited and imperfect... Within it there will be Brothers unworthy of being called such (1Co 5: 11) or who are false Brothers (Gal 2: 4). But despite the imperfections, Christian hope assures us that one day the accuser of the Brothers will be overcome (Rev. 12: 10) and that there will be perfect communion between God and the Brothers in the great family of the Children of God.

### **2.1.3 MARRIAGE AND FAMILY IN GOD’S PLAN**

The Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio* (n.12 and 13) offers a biblical synthesis regarding the significance of marriage and family, a topic at the roots of Sa-Fa spirituality but also fundamental to its pastoral, educational and family-oriented activity.

"The communion of love between God and people, a fundamental part of Revelation and the faith experience of Israel, finds a meaningful expression in the marriage covenant which is established between a man and a woman. For this reason the central word of Revelation, "God loves His people," is likewise proclaimed through the living and concrete word whereby a man and a woman express their conjugal love. **Their bond of love becomes the image and the symbol of the covenant which unites God and His people.**(Hos2:21; Jer3: 6-13; Is54) And the same sin which can harm the conjugal covenant becomes an image of the infidelity of the people to their God: idolatry is prostitution(Ez16:25), infidelity is adultery, disobedience to the law is abandonment of the spousal love of the Lord. But the infidelity of Israel does not destroy the eternal fidelity of the Lord, and therefore the ever faithful love of God is put forward as the model of the faithful love which should exist between spouses. (Hos 32)

The communion between God and His people finds its definitive fulfilment in Jesus Christ, the bridegroom who loves and gives Himself as the Saviour of humanity, uniting it to Himself as His body. He reveals the original truth of marriage, the truth of the "beginning,"(Gen 2: 24; Mt 19:5) and, freeing man from his hardness of heart, He makes man capable of realizing this truth in its entirety.

This revelation reaches its definitive fullness in the gift of love which the Word of God makes to humanity in assuming a human nature, and in the sacrifice which Jesus Christ makes of Himself on the Cross for His bride, the Church. In this sacrifice there is revealed in its entirety that plan which God has imprinted on the humanity of man and woman since their creation (Eph 5: 32), **the marriage of baptized persons thus becomes a real symbol of that new and eternal covenant sanctioned in the blood of Christ.** The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart, and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained, conjugal charity, which is the proper and specific way in which the spouses participate in and are called to live the very charity of Christ who gave Himself on the Cross".

## 2.2 LITURGY

*Reference:*

*Bro. Teodoro Berzal: Letter on esprit de corps and family spirit (2000)*

In the liturgy, the summit and the source of ecclesial life, the Church celebrates above all the paschal mystery of Christ by means of which he accomplishes his work of salvation. It is here also that the true nature of the Church becomes apparent - Christ's body, people and family of God, called to be a sign and a link for human unity, and collaborator in building the Kingdom of God.

Throughout the celebrations of the **liturgical year**, the entire mystery of Christ is unveiled, from Incarnation and Christmas to the Ascension and Pentecost, and the awaiting of the

Lord's return. Sa-Fa spirituality leads us to celebrate especially "Christ's paschal victory, the source of their fraternity. Also, during Christmas time, the Brothers joyfully participate in the intimacy of Jesus, Mary and Joseph as a family". (*Constitutions*, 136)

Bro. Gabriel's strong **sensitivity for** liturgy, his cooperation during the celebrations throughout his life from his stance as a religious lay person, inspires others who follow his charism to participate and to act in response to the liturgy.

The participation in the liturgy also has great formative and catechetical value.

### **2.2.1 THE SACRAMENTS**

The Sacraments are an essential and imposing part of liturgy. Their celebration marks the Christian's whole life. "The seven Sacraments are part of all the stages and all the most significant moments of a Christian's life: They give birth and growth, they heal and confer a mission on the life of every Christian. We may appreciate here a certain resemblance between the stages of natural life and those of the spiritual life". (*Catholic Church Catechism*, 1210)

Sa-Fa spirituality leads us to live with greater intensity the relationship between the Sacraments and the mystery of the Incarnation, to value their insertion in the Christian person's day-to-day living, and the "sacramental quality" of the little gestures of everyday life. "The baptised are consecrated as a spiritual dwelling and saintly priesthood through regeneration and through the anointing of the Holy Spirit, so that through all of their human actions they might offer spiritual sacrifices and announce the wonderful deeds of He who has called them from darkness to his admirable light". (cf. 1Pe 2: 4-10) (*Lumen Gentium* 10)

#### **BAPTISM AND CONFIRMATION**

Through baptism we receive the divine life by virtue of which we become a member of God's family as his children, and are enabled to exercise the common priesthood of the laity. It is the beginning and the basis of a way of life that tends to evolve continually. Confirmation communicates to us the Holy Spirit, who, by means of his gifts, renders us capable of testifying and of performing the many activities and ministries within the Church.

#### **THE EUCHARIST**

"The Eucharist is the efficacious sign and sublime cause of that communion in the divine life and that unity of the people of God by which the Church is kept in being. It is the culmination of both God's action sanctifying the world in Christ and of the worship men offer to Christ and through him to the Father in the Holy Spirit. It is here, in the Eucharist, that we find the highest peak of God's action, through which he sanctifies the world in Christ, but also, of the worshipping of the Christ, hence, of the Father, by men, within the Holy Spirit. Finally, through the Eucharist we already unite ourselves with the heavenly liturgy and anticipate eternal life, when God will be all in all. In brief, the Eucharist is the sum and summary of our faith: 'Our way of thinking is attuned to the Eucharist, and the Eucharist in turn confirms our way of thinking'". (St Irenaeus, *Adv. Haereses* 4, 18, 5) (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 1325-1327)

Sa-Fa spirituality emphasises **the relationship between the mysteries of the Eucharist and the Incarnation**. The Eucharist perpetuates the mystery of Nazareth throughout the centuries independent of any boundaries of time or space, making it forever “now” and present. The sudden appearance of God in the midst of human life continues to occur by means of the celebration of the Eucharist, and, through its celebration it accompanies both the Church and humankind till the end of time.

Bread and wine, the **material elements** chosen by the Lord to give Himself to us, already speak of the simplicity, the **immediacy**, and the humility of the mystery of Nazareth. These are the kinds of food laid on the table daily, at least in some cultures, their significance for the celebration notwithstanding. One can state the same regarding the gestures, postures and actions performed during the liturgy corresponding to the celebration of the Eucharist, meant to help us recognise one another as God’s children, his family, gathered by God himself around his table. **The Eucharist forms the Church into family.**

For a long time, and even within the liturgy, the Church has used the words **“Hidden God”**, borrowed from the prophet Isaiah (“Truly, you are a God who hides himself, God of Israel, Saviour!” Is.45: 15), using it to refer both to the mystery of Nazareth and to the mystery of the Eucharist. In terms of the former it emphasises Jesus’ “hidden life” in relation to his “public life”, but also to his human condition with regard to the Word in the Blessed Trinity. Within the Eucharist, it highlights the contrast between the appearance of the sacramental bread and wine and the reality of Christ’s presence. In both cases it is a call to the humility and simplicity shown by the shepherds who came to Bethlehem and through their faith and love discover the world’s Saviour with Mary and Joseph.

Brother Gabriel Taborin’s charism leads him to highlight the central character of the Eucharist in Christian life. His successor Brother Amadeus, states that the creation of the Institute is a fruit of **Bro. Gabriel’s love for the Eucharist**.

Bro. Gabriel’s purpose through animation is to lead God’s people to the Eucharist. Already during his childhood, he experienced the clandestine nature imposed on certain celebrations in the revolutionary era. In going from play to serious responsibility in terms of Christian animation in his parish of birth, his activities as a whole consisted of gathering, preparing, catechising his fellows, and even adults, in order to facilitate their encounter with the Lord, especially in the celebration of the Eucharist.

Throughout his itinerant activity, during which he tried to set the foundations for his Congregation, in his catechetical activities Bro. Gabriel specialized in preparing children for their first communion and in animating the celebration of the Eucharist. In his books, written for the pupils of the Brothers, in those written for families, and even in the ones addressed to the Brothers themselves, there is always a section to be found which is devoted to comment on the Eucharistic mystery, as well as notes, advice, texts and songs, meant to promote participation in the celebration. We are also aware of just how much his experience of the preparation of all aspects of the celebration of the liturgy (cleaning, ornaments in the church,

preparation of the rituals), and of liturgical animation (catechesis, assistance to the priest, singing), determined his charism and the identity of the Institute. It is precisely this aspect of his charism which prevented its fusion with other institutions which limited themselves to other aspects of mission, such as Christian education and catechesis.

#### RECONCILIATION

Through the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, man receives Christ's new life. Nevertheless, this life is carried in "earthen vessels" (2 Co 4: 7). At present, this life remains hidden "with Christ in God". (Col 3: 3) We are still here in our "earthly dwelling" (2 Co 5: 1), subject to suffering, to illness and to death. This new life as sons of God can be weakened and even lost, through sin. "Conversion to Christ, the new birth of Baptism, the gift of the Holy Spirit and the Body and Blood of Christ received as food have made us 'holy and without blemish,' just as the Church herself, the Bride of Christ, is 'holy and without blemish'. Nevertheless the new life received in Christian initiation has not abolished the frailty and weakness of human nature, nor the inclination to sin that tradition calls *concupiscence*, which remains in the baptized such that with the help of the grace of Christ they may prove themselves in the struggle of Christian life. This is the struggle of *conversion* directed toward holiness and eternal life to which the Lord never ceases to call us". (Catechism of the Catholic Church 1426)

Sa-Fa spirituality stresses the connection between the celebration of the sacrament of Reconciliation and the effort to build the community, restoring or strengthening fraternal relations, and integrating this dimension in ordinary life. "The Sacrament of Reconciliation makes real the feast of the Father of the family when the children return to him. The Brothers know that forgiveness of others comes first. Their struggle for conversion becomes a more intimate encounter with God, as well as fraternal reconciliation, a more profound insertion in the body of Christ, and a call to continuous growth". (*Constitutions*, 133)

#### THE DAILY SACRAMENTS OF CHRISTIAN LIFE

The Eucharist and Reconciliation are a Christian's daily Sacraments. Constant and faithful participation in these two Sacraments is underlined in the mystery of Nazareth, which values the gestures and actions associated with ordinary life, as privileged places in our history to have an encounter with the hidden God. The Eucharist and Reconciliation complement each other. The Eucharist is a sacrifice of reconciliation and praise, but one can only access it with a reconciled heart, that is, by removing any obstacles which impede communion with the Father and the Brothers. In order to reap the fruits of the Eucharist, one must first accept the Lord's constant call to conversion. From the fullness of life offered us by the Eucharist we become more aware of our shortcomings and sins, and of all that which in our personal and community life is incompatible with the sacrament we celebrate. This is where effort must be invested in the spiritual and ascetic struggle to walk with renewed loyalty towards the Lord and towards the Brothers.



As a clear sign of the importance granted by Bro. Gabriel to our fidelity in the observance of these two Sacraments there are numerous instructions, warnings and prayers published in the books he wrote for the faithful in the parishes and for the pupils in the Brothers' schools.

#### MARRIAGE

Marriage grants the spouses the necessary grace to form a family, truthfully a "domestic Church", and to continue the vital experience of the Holy Family of Nazareth. "Christian spouses, in virtue of the sacrament of matrimony, whereby they signify and partake of the mystery of that unity and fruitful love which exists between Christ and his Church (cf. Eph 5:32), help each other to attain to holiness in their married life and in the rearing and education of their children. By reason of their state and rank in life they have their own special gift among the People of God". (*Lumen Gentium*, 11)

#### HOLY ORDERS

"For the nurturing and constant growth of the People of God, Christ the Lord instituted in his Church a variety of ministries, which work for the good of the whole body. For those ministers who are endowed with sacred power serve their brethren, so that all who are of the People of God, and therefore enjoy a true Christian dignity, working towards a common goal freely and in an orderly way, may arrive at salvation" (*Lumen Gentium*, 18). Some amongst the Brothers might be priests, according to *Perfectae Caritatis*, 10, and there are priests who can live Sa-Fa spirituality.

## 2.3 PRAYER

One of the most important sources of spirituality is a relationship with God through prayer, whether personal or communal. There are some expressions in prayer where the Nazarene spirituality of the Sa-Fa family is best reflected; otherwise, prayer life as a whole is marked by the mystery of Nazareth. (See below: "In Nazareth they prayed" .).

### 2.3.1 IN THE LITURGY

*References:*

*Holy Family's Mass Collections (none published).*  
*Bro. Lino Da Campo: Circular on some aspects of our Nazarene Spirituality (1993)*

The Sa-Fa family specifically celebrates certain Feasts and Commemorations:

- The Feast of the Holy Family

Bro. Gabriel gave the following fundamental instruction: "The Feast of the Holy Family has been designated by the Founder as the Association's own celebration. This is why it must be

cherished by all the Brothers, who have been honoured by being put under the care of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, having chosen them as their special Patrons". (*New Guide*, 607)

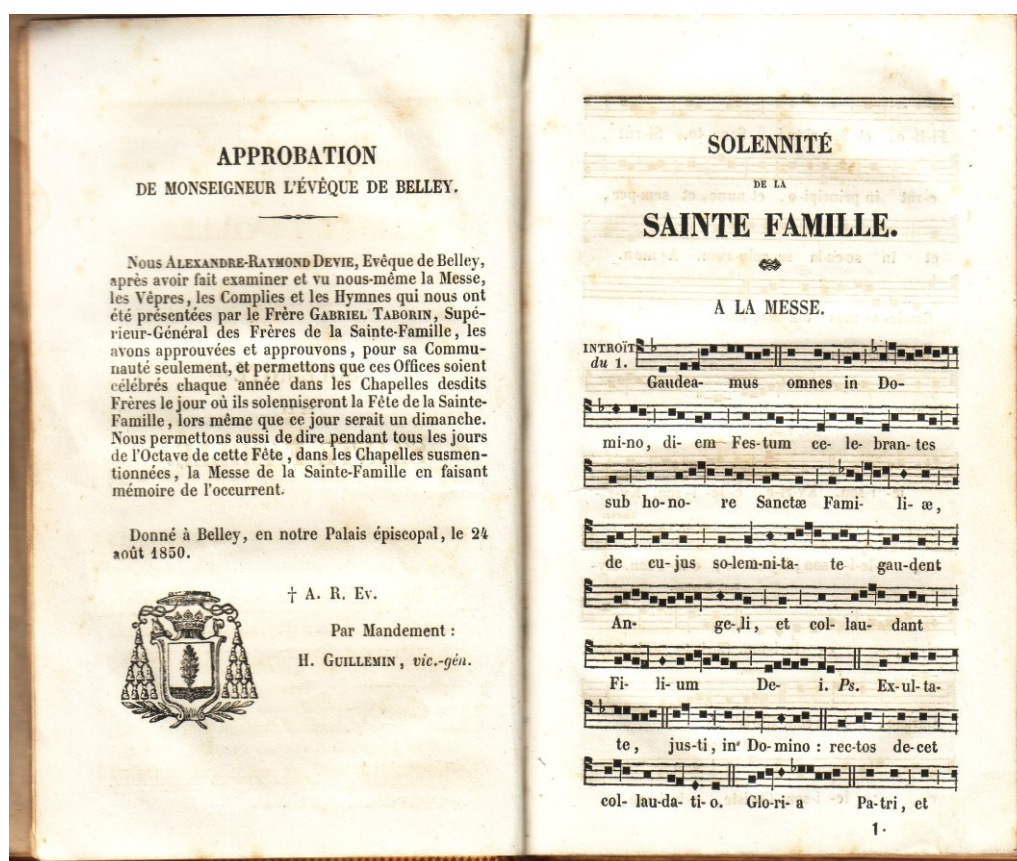
The liturgical celebration of the Holy Family is, by its nature, the most important celebration for the Sa-Fa family, and it has become the clue to the interpretation of other celebrations and memorials included in the mystery of salvation and related to Nazareth in one way or another. During the founder's lifetime the hopes were high for a celebration to be established to honour the Holy Family, at least within the Institute, but hopefully for the Church as a whole, so now we aspire for everyone in the Church to fully rejoice in its celebration, to the same extent as we do within the Sa-Fa family.

The Church provides a splendid synthesis of the mystery of Nazareth through the choice of readings for the Mass dedicated to the Holy Family in each of the liturgical cycles.

Cycle A highlights the paramount fact that, in order to save man, God's Son took on human nature, and lived with his family the salvific experience of Israel. In this way, he accomplishes what has already been revealed by his name: Jesus is the saviour and liberator of all men.

Cycle B has at its centre Christ, "light for the nations", presented at the temple by Mary and Joseph. In this episode the Church proclaims the universality of salvation by greeting the child as a "light of revelation for the gentiles and glory for your people Israel..." (Cf. Lk 2: 32), thus acknowledging the Messiah, the Saviour of all. The Church has understood the prophetic allusion to the passion of Christ in Simeon's words, which gathered in a single prophecy the Son, (Lk 2: 24), "sign of contradiction", and the Mother, whose heart would be pierced by the sword. (Cf. Lk 2: 35)(Paul VI, *Marialis cultus* 20)

Cycle C presents the Christ who begins to unveil his true nature as Son of God, so as to make it possible for every man to participate in his divine sonship. Luke the Evangelist narrates how Jesus is found in the temple, introducing some paschal themes which help to place it within the framework of his life. "Jesus must be in his Father's house". It is this submission to his Father's will which will guide his whole existence. "Here Jesus lets us catch a glimpse of the mystery of his total consecration to a mission that flows from his divine sonship: 'Did you not know that I must be about my Father's work?' Mary and Joseph did not understand these words, but they accepted them in faith. Mary 'kept all these things in her heart' during the years Jesus remained hidden in the silence of an ordinary life..". (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*. 534)



Book belonging to Bro. Gabriel Taborin *Messe et Vêpres de la Saint-Famille*, approved by Mons. Devie

- Other celebrations associated or related to the Holy Family: The Annunciation, Saint Joseph, and Our Lady of Loreto.
- The memorial celebrations of Saint Joachim and Saint Anne, Saint Jean Marie Vianney, and of the holy founders of Congregations of the Holy Family.
- The Liturgy of the Hours. The Church advises Christians to pray the Liturgy of the Hours, which are sung or said by consecrated people and by priests. The commemoration of the Holy Family during Lauds or Vespers is a way of keeping everyone within the Sa-Fa spirituality in communion amongst themselves, and so to the central mystery which inspires this spirituality. It is recited straight after the Our Father, along with the verse, the response and the prayer.

### 2.3.2 IN HARMONY WITH THE LITURGY

The whole prayer life of the Christian community derives in a certain way from the Liturgy, and must remain in harmony with it. (*Sacrosanctum Concilium*, 13)

#### THE INVOCATIONS TO THE HOLY FAMILY

#### References:

- Conference of R. Bro. Amadeus addressing the Brothers at the Belley meeting for the annual retreat of 1885 (L'Entretien Familial, vol. VII pp. 338-344).*
- Bro. Lino Da Campo: Circular on some aspects of our Nazarene spirituality (1993).*

Brother Amadeus said of the invocation: 'O Jesus, Mary and Joseph enlighten us, help us, save us', that we need to resort to the Holy Family in our spiritual needs, everywhere and always, to be enlightened, rescued and saved from danger, because wherever we happen to be at any given time we always need to be guided given our own darkness and ignorance, as we always and everywhere run the danger of damning ourselves, and if we save ourselves it is only thanks to divine help".

By doing so, love from and towards our holy Patrons is nurtured, which results in ever stronger confidence and trust, tighter and more profound bonds between them and us. Knowing them, we can address them as someone we can trust to come to our rescue. They are our trustworthy advocates. They know us and we know their ability, their power and their strength, whereby, despite our smallness and our infidelity, they may help us and remain true to their word.

#### THE LITANY OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Any spirituality today tries to be more bible-oriented, and thus, more theological. All the references in the Litany of the Holy Family have been inspired by the Bible, and are thus rooted in the reality of the plan of God, who became man within a family. In singing or praying the Litany, we nurture our spirit profoundly with God's Word, maintaining us in harmony with the "familiarity towards God" which it implies.

It is not known exactly when this Litany was composed, but it reveals a high degree of contemplation and trust. It gathers its inspiration from the Gospels relating to Jesus' childhood, read and reflected upon with the emotional awareness which comes from realising that the Son of God becomes one of us and partakes of all our struggles, except sin, to deliver us from evil.

#### THE PRAYER FOR THE INSTITUTE

The present form of the "Prayer for the Institute" is as follows: "My God, grant that our Institute be your work not the work of men. Bless it and look after it always and everywhere; do not leave us in the hands of our enemies. Let us give up our own will to fulfil your will here on earth, the way your blessed saints do in heaven. We ask this through the intercession of the Virgin Mary and Saint Joseph, our glorious Patrons, and through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ".

This prayer includes the one written by Bro. Gabriel himself in his spiritual testament, and it shares one of his most profound experiences in prayer, as can be appreciated reading art. 531 of the *New Guide*. The prayer for the Institute starts with the words: "My God, grant that our Institute be..." and it includes the most appropriate desires and requests to obtain God's blessing for the Association. This is why it is to be appreciated by any Brother worthy of the name within the Holy Family. The inspiration for this prayer was received by one of the first Superiors of the Society, and it happened during the Mass at the elevation".

HE PRAYER TO BRO. GABRIEL IN UNION WITH HIM.

Privately we can recite the invocation: "Venerable Bro. Gabriel, pray for us".

It is possible to associate oneself with the communion of saints, asking their constant intercession for the Institute. "If God grants me to go to heaven, once enjoying the repose of Eternal Glory, I shall not forget my beloved community of the Holy Family, nor its protectors and benefactors". (*Spiritual Testament*)

#### SHARING PRAYER INTENTIONS

This is a tradition going back to the foundational years of the Institute (Cf. *Constitutions, the Order of Saint Joseph*, Cap 9 art. 2; *New Guide*: during morning and evening prayer) which has evolved over time, both as to form and to context.

Brother Gabriel sometimes suggested prayer intentions to all the Brothers in his circulars, and so have his successors. Such an experience creates unity in prayer.

#### PARTICULAR MEANS OF EXPRESSION FOR SPECIAL OCCASIONS

Within the context of the annual retreat of the Brothers, there are certain traditional practices: mutual forgiveness, collective renewal of religious vows, Eucharistic celebration on behalf of the dead Brothers, and the singing of the Creed for being sent on mission.

Here is the testimony of the origin of these practices:

"On the day before the end of the retreat, immediately after Night Prayer, Brother Superior will, as usual, address the community, inviting the Brothers and the novices to forgive one another for any wrongdoing they might have incurred against one another throughout the year; he will also invite them all to set a good example for each other, and to love one another more every day in God and for God's sake. This pious and fraternal action will conclude with him blessing them all in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and everyone will reply: Amen". (Rules regarding the retreat, Art. 11, Circular 1847)

"After the Gospel, everyone will sing the solemn Creed, in testimony of their faith in the mysteries and the truths of their religion, keeping in mind that, if the Martyrs and the Apostles proclaimed Jesus Christ, they too should be prepared to shed their blood for the sake of the religion they teach when they catechise the young. In their role as new workers in God's vineyard, and strengthened by the grace of the retreat, they must distinguish themselves from the rest of the world by a life which is holy and entirely devoted to the apostolate". (*New Guide*, 613)

For religious profession and renewal of vows, the Institute has a ritual adopted by the Church itself on December 17, 1990 (Prot. CD 808/90). The life plan *For living in Fraternity* (no.20) contains a description of the ceremony and of the commitment required to join the Nazarene Fraternities Association.

## THE SONGS

Bro. Gabriel conferred a significant value on singing as an expression of faith. He loved singing, and in his writings he gives instructions on how to participate with singing, not only within the liturgy, but on other occasions in life. He had composed both the lyrics and the Gregorian music for the chants corresponding to the Mass and the Office of the Holy Family, so as to solemnly celebrate their feast at the Mother House.

This tradition has been continued since with Bro. Amadeus's "Collection of Songs to Honour the Holy Family" (1887), and with the songs that honour the Holy Family and the Founder in different countries. It is a rich tradition that should be continually renewed.

## 2.4 SIGNS AND SYMBOLS

There are images, signs and symbols (holy cards, sculptures, pictures, etc) more or less artistic, inspired by Sa-Fa spirituality, or seeking to express it. Some of them are official, having been proposed as such by the authorities of the Institute. Others still have emerged at the initiative of one or another association or group of people. The world of symbols plays its role in spirituality.

### THE PICTURE OF THE HOLY FAMILY

Between 1835 and 1840, whilst in Belmont, the Founder had printed and distributed the first holy cards with the image of the Holy Family and the small crest representing the Holy Trinity and the Holy Family. (*cf Positio* pp. 257, 259-260 et Tab.III-IV)

In his circular of August 6, 1861, Brother Gabriel presented the new picture of the Holy Family to the Brothers with these words: "We usually like to have the portrait of those we love and from whom we have received some benefit. Well, is there anyone we should love more than God, the Blessed Virgin and St Joseph, and who, according to our faith, have done us more good than they? It is these considerations, dearly beloved Brothers, which have led us to print a picture representing the Holy Family and the Blessed Trinity. We believed we were responding to your pious wishes by procuring this object which will surely inflame your love and your gratitude towards God and our holy Patrons. You could also give this picture as reward to your students and it could be placed in a book. The prayer at the bottom of this charming and precious picture contains a summary of all that a Christian could ask of God for soul and body, for this life and the next. We are piously convinced that those who recite it frequently with faith and a tender piety towards Jesus, Mary and Joseph will draw down abundant graces upon themselves".

The official painting of the Institute was created by Guglielmino, a teacher of painting at the "Artigianelli" school in Turin, in 1934. It was ordered by the General Council to express the Institute's motto: "In Nazareth they prayed, they worked, and they loved". Its explanation is contained in *L'Entretien Familial* vol 3 n.22 (1935) pp. 95-99. See also other texts in 3.4 *L'existence chrétienne inspirée à Nazareth*. Bro. Stephen Baffert composed the words to a song referring to the same official image.

Today the picture of the Holy Family can be found in every house of the Institute and it is offered to every person who joins the Association of Nazarene Fraternities to be placed in their house and for other occasions.

#### THE INSTITUTE'S SEAL

According to the first copies of the Brothers' Rule of Life the Founder had given a detailed description of the Institute's seal, explaining the symbolism of each element. It is one of the objects which clearly express the central intuition of Brother Gabriel: the relation between the Holy Family and the Blessed Trinity. In the *New Guide*, n°1039, the seal is described like this: "Each one of the houses spoken of in this chapter will have a seal showing effigies of the Blessed Trinity and the Holy Family surmounted by an inscription with these words: Glory to God. At the feet of the Infant Jesus there will be a star and a laurel. Surrounding the seal will be written: Mother House (or Novitiate or Retirement House, as may be) of the Brothers of the Holy Family (here will be indicated the name of the place or the department); the whole to be arranged as for the seal which has been in use since the beginning of the Institute, and which is known. This seal is oval in shape. The one of the Mother House will be forty-four millimeters long by thirty-six millimeters wide, and those of the other houses will be forty millimeters long by thirty-two millimeters wide".



The seal of the Institute  
in the time of Brother Gabriel

#### THE INSTITUTE'S COAT OF ARMS

This was also created to represent in an official way the Latin version of the institute's motto : IN ORATIONE LABORE ET CHARITATE \* PAX. In the symbolic explanation one may read: "In our communities, under the protection of the Holy Family, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, prayer rises to heaven and radiates over the work, in fraternal charity, the grace of peace". The Savoy-Bugey cross evokes the place of origin of our spiritual family. A presentation with complete explanation may be found in *L'Entretien Familial* (vol.5 pp 430-437).





The Institute's coat of arms:  
the original is kept in the Gabriel Taborin House

#### THE INSTITUTE'S BADGE

The Brothers wear it to express what we want to portray in presenting ourselves before the Church and before the world.

- the cross of our religious consecration;
- J. M. J.: the names of our Patrons, and therefore the living source of our spirituality and our spirit;
- the star with three lines radiating from it : faith guides our life and our apostolic mission. The three lines recall the Trinity and the Holy Family. (*L'Entretien Familial* vol. 16 p 551).



The Institute's badge

## THE PLACES WHERE BRO. GABRIEL DWELT AND HIS TOMB

The places in which Bro. Gabriel lived, and his tomb in the chapel of St Anne in the cathedral of Belley are “memorial places” which help to better understand the history, the geography and the period in which the charism of the Institute flowered. The pilgrimage to the places where the Institute was founded is an experience of spiritual renewal and of contact with Brother Gabriel. His bones have been preserved in the cathedral of Belley since 1998. There are other memorial places also in the Institute where his patrimony may be found and which are to be kept and valued.



The tomb of Venerable Bro. Gabriel Taborin in the chapel of St Anne, Belley cathedral

## 2.5 THE LIFE EXPERIENCE

All Sa-Fa family spirituality is rooted in Bro. Gabriel’s life experience, and in the experience of those who have shared his charism throughout the years.

### 2.5.1 BROTHER GABRIEL TABORIN’S LIFE, CHARISM AND MESSAGE

## LIFE

Bro. Gabriel's life is a continual source of experience for those wishing to live his charism and the spirituality that emerges from it.

The many biographies and studies on Bro. Gabriel Taborin have attempted to gather the main aspects of his life and to pass them on, although each of the authors has offered them from their personal perspective and according to their particular purpose.

Amongst **the biographies** one should particularly note his autobiography: Bro. Gabriel's *Historique*. Although unfinished, it is of the utmost value in order to know and understand what he went through up to his arrival in Belley. (1840) One must also mention Bro. Amadeus's Circular (26/11/1864) in which he gives a good summary of Bro. Gabriel's life and reveals his Testament. Another, of the same value, was written by Bro. Fredrick Bouvet. Written under the classic "life and virtue" model and in the style of his time, it is the first complete testimony of Bro. Gabriel and his work. The writing of this biography was organised by Bro. Amadeus shortly after Bro. Gabriel's death, gathering statements from the Brothers but also from people not related to the Institute. Bro. Fredrick wrote his book from these sources, and a commission of five Brothers took it upon them to review it. As a final testimony on what had been written, the biography was read publicly in the Mother House in front of the Brothers who had known the Founder. This biography has been used as a reference for all others written later on.

Amongst the studies related to Brother Gabriel, which might help to deepen our knowledge of different aspects of his life, we must refer to those written as theses or studies by the Brothers as part of their university degrees. Amongst those, mention must be made of the *Positio*, written in view of the beatification process, which has been ratified through the approval of historical and theological consultants, and finally by the pontifical decree concerning the heroic virtues of Bro. Gabriel Taborin. Also Bro. Enzo Biemmi's thesis: *The challenge faced by a religious lay Brother in the XIX century*.

Along with these writings there are others which reveal or which concentrate on particular aspects of Bro. Gabriel's life and works. (Cf. the bibliographies).

The Belley Files (ASFB) holds a good number of complementary documents with many details regarding his life and that of the first Brothers.

The most important moments in Bro. Gabriel's life are as follows:

#### **THE BELLEYDOUX PERIOD (1799 - 1824).**

Gabriel is born in Belleydoux in 1799 to a Christian family, which strongly imprinted its seal on him. During his formative years he becomes aware of the awakening of the laity as a consequence of the French Revolution. While still very young he starts a range of activities in his parish of birth. He moves from childish play of a religious nature to a period of growing responsibility: he moves from cantor to sacristan, to catechist, to school-teacher in his village.

In this context, Gabriel soon discovers God's call to religious life. In response to this, he seeks a religious community, but not finding one to his desires, he is led by circumstances to create one himself.

### **ITINERANT LIFE PERIOD (1824-1829)**

The "long experience" of Belleydoux continues in other parts of the diocese of Saint-Claude, and later, Belley, making him available to the parish priests as a teacher and a catechist; he attempts to "teach others" those same activities. The first concrete form his lay religious vocation takes is the Brothers of Saint Joseph.

### **BELMONT PERIOD (1829-1840)**

After overcoming many obstacles he founds the Institute of the Brothers of the Holy Family. Bro. Gabriel finally managed to incarnate his project: he depicts the Brother's identity in the Guide, Rule of Life and Action approved by the bishop, Mons. Devie, he forms groups of postulants and novices and sends the first Brothers as sacristans to the Belley Cathedral, and as teachers to several schools.

### **BELLEY PERIOD (1840-1864)**

He arrives at this episcopal city, the seat of the diocese, with a numerous community. Bro. Gabriel dedicates his life, till his death, to the formation of his Brothers and to consolidate the congregation. He obtains approbation from Pope Gregory XVI and King Charles Albert, King of Sardinia. He frequently visits the schools and parishes where the Brothers work. He writes books addressed to the children, the young and the families, where he combines cultural promotion with evangelization. He gathers the Brothers once a year to promote the spirit of family and to monitor their pedagogical, human and spiritual development. He personally looks after the new institutions and the building of the Mother House. Although missing the contemplative life, to which he only has access at the Tamié monastery, he encourages those of the Brothers working in favour of education in the poor rural parishes of the countryside, and those assisting the liturgy in the churches of some of the big cities, with an open mind to "all kinds of good work". His missionary drive leads him to send four Brothers to the United States of America. He seeks financial support from individuals and institutions for his Institute, and, despite much opposition and lack of understanding he comes across people who both appreciate and value his works, such as Jean Marie Vianney, the saintly priest of Ars. Gabriel's life is strongly signed with the cross, taking on himself the cost of a choice of life which is a call for a stronger fraternity not only for the Church but for the world.

### **PERSONALITY**

Brother Gabriel's personality can be described as that of an animator of the Christian community, and also as the formator and Superior of religious lay men, who, in turn become animators for parishes and schools. **But his life can be described in simple terms by saying that he simply knew how to be a Brother.**

Brother Gabriel is above all **someone who instils enthusiasm**. Since his childhood he proves himself capable of calling, gathering and guiding a group of people. He suggests a series of activities and initiatives to help the self-awareness of the local parish community, and he can instil it with enthusiasm for its own development and growth. He operates from within the

group: he is simple, close and straight to the point. He does not impose his views based on his studies and his knowledge, but rather through his firm beliefs and his experience. He can conceive and present a life plan based on the Gospel, passing it on and sharing it in many different ways, from a simple pamphlet to a letter or a conversation, and finally taking shape as “The New Guide”. A strong and determined character, never ashamed of expressing his own beliefs, nevertheless he can accept advice and guidance, having the courage to start afresh after failure, and persevering with his project throughout, albeit adjusting it to the changes in the Church or in society during his life.

**As the founder, as a religious superior, and as a formator**, he came to know every Brother and accompanied each one, from early on in his vocation up to his death; personal dialogue and group talks, letters, visits, annual meetings, circulars, such were his favourite means of formation. Through these he knew how to suggest the aims, stimulate growth, correct deviations, consolidate convictions, overcome difficulties, and create the sense of being part of a body and of a family, as well as how to organize the Institute and delegate responsibility. In his writings, especially in the various versions of the Rule of Life, he managed to convey a well defined profile to match the identity of the Brother as a lay religious, through the various lay ministries and a series of activities meant to favour the building of the Christian community and foster evangelization; amongst them he favoured Christian upbringing, catechesis and service to the church. He found in the Holy Family, image of the Holy Trinity, the ideal and concrete model of any community, and he successfully proposed it to the Brothers and to the families as the meeting and the focal point of a spirituality valuing simplicity in human relationships, humility and self- giving to others, unity and obedience, a life of work and silence, faith and trust in God. As a down to earth and practical man, he managed to synthesize and present to schools the best pedagogical methods of his time, writing books and offering teaching resources, giving invaluable instructions to the catechists and the Brothers employed in the churches, and he wrote several summaries of Christian doctrine to aid catechesis, completing them with liturgical texts, prayers, chants and advice on Christian life and how to participate in the liturgical celebrations.

He died as a **Brother**, proposing to all the ideal of Christian fraternity: “You bear the sweet name of Brothers; let no-one call you anything else. Titles inspire and impose respect; this name, in contrast, suggests only simplicity, kindness and charity”. (*Guide* art. 112)



Bro. Gabriel Taborin

#### WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF HIS TIME

#### *References:*

*Bro. Enzo Biemmi: The challenge for a lay religious in the XIX century: Bro. Gabriel Taborin*

The life of Bro. Gabriel developed within the social and ecclesial context of the first half of XIXth century France. Given the elements of the culture of his time, and faithful to the Holy Spirit, he accomplishes an original vital synthesis. **His vocation as a religious lay man stands out as a third pole between the very well established dual components of the Church: the clergy and the laity.** On behalf of the Gospel, and because of the pastoral urge, his Brother status simply demanded a new definition of roles and powers **in a much more evangelical and fraternal direction.**

One must distinguish in Brother Gabriel those elements which he was aware of in himself and those which he carried unknowingly. He was aware of his passion for the Gospel, for the education of the young: he nourished deep within himself this conviction, which he never gave up, that his work was God's will, and that nothing and no one could ever take it away from him. He was utterly convinced that his work was a service both to the State and to the Church, to the Christian person and to the world; he also knew that the XIXth century Church needed him and the Brothers to educate and teach the children in the parishes across France.

He was, unknowingly, the bearer of a novelty that was coming to destabilize the established balance and that was a call from the Spirit to the Church and to XIXth century society. It was necessary to redefine and to organize themselves more transparently with regard to the Gospel and its demands. He was, in this sense both a modern and a traditional man, within the purest tradition of monks, useful and troublesome, demanded and rejected. His “religious laity”, far from being a simple functional response to the social and pastoral needs of a restoration parish, constituted an invitation to restructure the Church founded on the equal dignity of God’s children.

The paradox is even stronger when we find ourselves facing a man that has nothing revolutionary about him, and whom we could on the contrary define as conservative: he preaches obedience to the Church; he belongs with the majority of French Catholics of the XIXth century who cultivate an extreme veneration for the Pope. In his final testament he avows having revered everything taught by the Church. There is nothing in his writings to suggest that he was an innovative character or that he loved “novelty”. Throughout his life he remained unblemished as far as his ecclesial spirit was concerned. At the end of the conflicts which emerge in his letters to the bishops, he confirms his submission to the Church and to its representatives, and his readiness to comply. He goes to extraordinary efforts to defend a value which does not belong to him, and his belief that such a value must be lived in communion with the Church and be acknowledged by the Church. This is, in the end, the profound meaning of his constant search for recognition of his Institute and for its Rules.

He does not, therefore, seek independence, nor does he doubt the authority of the Church, nor obedience to its Magisterium. On reading his writings one rather concludes the opposite: **He demands, rather, that what he is bringing be acknowledged by the authorities and might be exercised. Implicitly, this requires a redefinition of balances and relationships.** The charism knocks at the doors of the Church, and demands to be received and valued, to be given a place, and that its value be acknowledged. Burdened with this suffering, he fights his battle to the end on these two fronts: a proven loyalty to his Institution and a tenacious will to belong to the ecclesial community.

The unconditional welcome by a large number of priests, including the priest of Ars, Jean Marie Vianney, one of the most significant, does not alter the situation, but is rather the exception that proves the rule. The hierarchy of the Church finds it difficult to integrate Brother Gabriel and his Institute into the system. On the other hand, priests in rural areas, far from diocesan centres and worried more about their flock’s salvation than about power and personal privilege, welcome and value him. Pastoral concern is the ground for common effort in the service of the Gospel, and it calls for an evolution in relationships, roles and powers.

#### CHARISM

*Reference:*

*Bro. Teodoro Berzal: The Transmission of the Charism. (2007) (L’Entretien Familial n 194, p. 433-437)*



The many aspects of Brother Gabriel's charism gradually became apparent in the course of his life. We may roughly distinguish three moments where the essential aspects of his charism appeared.

**IN BELLETDUX, THE ECCLESIAL ASPECT:**

Bro. Gabriel's experience consists of his progressive insertion into his Christian and human community through collaboration with the Parish Priest and with the municipality in the activities related to education, catechesis and liturgical animation.

These activities place him within the Church as a lay man who both responsibly and strongly takes it on himself to carry out the activities derived from his baptism and his confirmation.

But he soon feels called to religious life. This call makes him first seek and then create a congregation where he can live his lay experience as a religious.

His charism appears in his global perception of several interrelated activities of both a Christian-ecclesial nature (liturgy and catechesis), and a human and social one, (education through schooling), with a missionary approach.

It is this last aspect of his charism that determines the *apostolic nature* of his spirituality.

**IN BELMONT, THE SPIRITUAL ASPECT:**

In Belmont Bro. Gabriel succeeded, after several attempts in other places, in founding a religious community, the seeds of the Institute.

It is here that he moves from Saint Joseph's patronage to the Holy Family's for his new-fledged Institute. From the very first *Constitutions* the Holy Family of Nazareth appears as the first and most immediate reference for the spirituality, the life style and the activity of the Brothers.

The Holy Trinity and the Holy Family become the primary reference for forming the community .

The life and the history of the Institute itself are interpreted in the light of the mystery of Nazareth. "Here we bore some resemblance to our holy Patrons, Mary and Joseph, when they went to Bethlehem". (Fr. Gabriel Taborin, *Historique*)

His charism is expressed in the essential intuition of the spirituality: the connexion between the community, the Holy Family, and the Holy Trinity.

This particular aspect of his charism determines the *family nature* of the spirituality.

**IN BELLEY, THE VITAL ASPECT:**

Brother Gabriel's most prominent activity was to enliven and govern his Institute through an extended network of relationships, both internal and external. As a true craftsman of communion, Bro. Gabriel employed all the means available to him. The most prominent were:

- The building of the Mother House, to serve the purpose of the annual meetings of all the Brothers and for sending the Brothers on mission from there to the communities. The Mother House was also the place of initial formation (both spiritual and pedagogical) and a place for the retreats of the older men.
- The writing of the Rule of Life, including the organisation of the Institute, the norms for all, and the explanations regarding the meaning of the Brother's life in all its aspects.
- The promoting of a spirit of family, through circulars, letters and other means of communication, visits to the Brothers and to the Schools, meetings and the pooling of goods.
- The fulfilment of the mission of the Institute becomes apparent in the charism and in the development of the "family spirit", "born out of charity, and hence from God, who is charity itself", thus leading all the members of the congregation, where this spirit prevails, to have only one heart and one spirit.
- This aspect of his charism imprints on the spirituality its character of communion.

**WRITINGS**

*References:*

*Bro. Teodoro Berzal: Guide, way, angel, treasure: Bro. Gabriel Taborin's writings (2010)*

The accomplishment of the mission to which he felt called from his early childhood leads Bro. Gabriel to produce a series of **writings through which he passed on the same message as through his own life: the meaning of being Brother.**

The writings, as a whole, enjoy an in-depth unity: they express the person's vital message. But at the same time, they are extremely varied, because of the extent of their genres, dates and forms of publication. Some were delivered to the printers directly by the author; others have remained in their manuscript form for a long time.

In order to facilitate an understanding of this *Taborinian corpus*, the writings have been grouped into five categories, according to their nature and their intended recipients:

- Autobiographies and testaments
- To the Brothers

- To the students and the faithful
- Various writings
- Correspondence

The reading of his writings supposes a way of approaching Brother Gabriel, the person, which differs from the interpretation of his life in biographies, thesis and articles of a historical nature. In the writings we find precisely that which he aimed at saying or telling us, if we want to make his message our own. The writings of Brother Gabriel allow us to not only to get to know his beliefs, his ideas, and his intuitions, but also, in a variety of ways, and from a range of view points, the large and small characteristics of his personality and of his charism. What truly matters is to know how to take the path that leads to the person.

Throughout his writings, Bro. Gabriel is presented to us as:

- a witness to God's love as follower of Jesus, attentive to the Father's will, eager to respond to his vocation, to cooperating with God's plan and to guide others by way of the Gospel.
- a man of the Spirit, capable of embracing a charism characterised by fraternity, the spirit of family, the activities related to the field of education, of catechesis, of liturgical animation, and of making it fruitful by passing it on to others,
- a prophet of his time, well rooted in his time, as well as in his geographic and cultural setting, but at the same time instilled with the inner strength required to leave his land and propose values and a way of life - "consecrated laity" - not easy to grasp in its time but which has enjoyed its future.
- a companion on the way and a guide, a Brother amongst his Brothers who passionately lives fraternity, and has a permanent word to say to those walking along with him.

Through his writings, Brother Gabriel actually does no more than to pass on, sometimes in an original fashion, at others simply following what was already established, what he himself has learnt from his readings, from his activities as teacher and catechist, Founder and Superior of a Religious Congregation.

Amongst the sources of his writings, we can name:

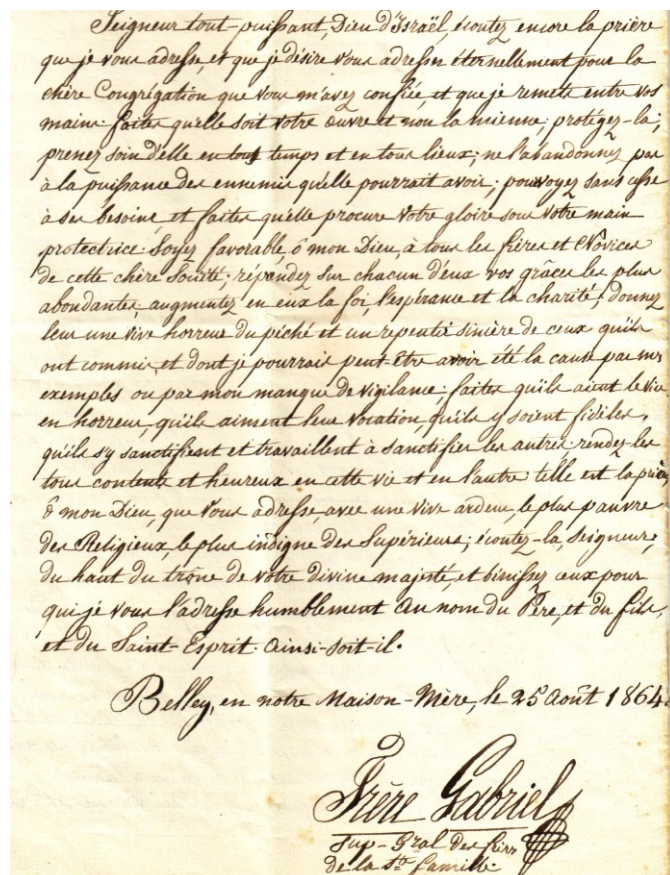
- *Holy Scripture*, to which he often refers, whether explicitly or implicitly and through some commentaries;
- the diocesan *catechisms* and other doctrinal syntheses which he himself learnt and taught so successfully;
- the most popular and commented *spiritual authors* of his time; among them the most relevant are: *The Imitation of Christ*, Saint François de Sales, Saint Vincent de

Paul, Saint Alphonsus Marie Ligouri, and the writers of the so called French School of Spirituality, whose source is Cardinal Pierre Bérulle (1575-1629); amongst them Saint Jean Baptiste de la Salle must be acknowledged especially because of his pedagogical writings.

- *authors dealing with religious life themes*, the Rule of Saint Benedict and the monastic tradition, the Jesuits Alfonso Rodríguez, Jean-Baptist Saint-Jure, and Jean Pierre Médaille.

To these written sources, sometimes difficult to get hold of because of a lack of systematic studies, one must of course add the personal mediations during his formation that, for Bro. Gabriel and during his youth, were F. Charvet, the Parish Priest of Belleydoux and of Brénod, and during his mature years, Mons. Devie, along with the preachers at the retreat in the Mother House, the community's spiritual directors, and quite a number of priests, such as Fr Roland, and those bishops with whom he had contact.

The reader who today approaches Bro. Gabriel's writings **with the same spirit of simplicity and generosity with which they were written** will certainly find in them a word of encouragement and of wisdom which, though coming from the past, may well help him walk in the present. They are, of course, of primary importance for the understanding and the interpretation of the Taborinian charism.



The last page of the Spiritual Testament of Brother Gabriel Taborin

### 2.5.2 THE HISTORY AND ACTUAL LIFE OF THE INSTITUTE AND OF THE SA-FA FAMILY

#### References:

Fr. Teodoro Berzal: *El Instituto de los Hermanos de la Sagrada Familia vive en el tiempo* (2010)

In the beginning, the history of the Institute and Brother Gabriel's life were inseparable, but gradually his work and his life became differentiated. "The history of our revered Founder is identified with that of our congregation up to the present," declared Brother Amédée Depernex on March 18, 1865, in a letter asking the Brothers to write their souvenirs of Brother Gabriel.

In the XIXth century after the death of the Founder, Brother Amédée became the leader and strove to transmit the heritage received. The principal events of this period were: the approbation of the Institute by the French government (1874), the revision of the Rule and its approbation by the General Chapter (1882), the sending off the first Brothers to Uruguay (1889) and the creation of colleges there. In the last part of the century the laicization of education in France became law, and a narrow-minded application of that law to the contract of Associations plunged the Institute into serious crisis, as it did for other religious congregations.

The start of the XXth century was marked by the reaction to this extremely difficult situation (dissolution of the Institute in France), by the loss of a third of the Brothers, the closing of houses of formation in Europe, by the General Administration's removal into Italy and new activities opening up in that country, as well as by foundations in Tunisia, Spain and Argentina.

Up to the end of the Second World War the administration and normal life of the Institute were interrupted by various events both external and internal, thus hindering its development during this period. Among the former were the wars: European, World, Spanish, and among the latter the internal crisis caused by the resignation of Brother Martin Dumas in 1932. But at the same time there was the definitive approbation of the *Constitutions* (1936) and the work done by Brother Stéphane Baffert to deepen the spirituality of the Institute.

There followed for our Institute, as for many others, a period of stability, of institutional consolidation, and of growth, but at the same time we must equally acknowledge some rigidity.

It was also the moment for establishing new Provinces, the beginning of our presence in Africa (1958) and the introduction of Brother Gabriel Taborin's cause of beatification.

With Vatican Council II a new period opened up in the life of the Church, in religious life and for the Institute. A new style of religious life, born from the Council, provoked a period of renewal but also of crisis, with many Brothers leaving. The process of conciliar renewal called for a return to the sources which inspired the charism of the Institute, formulated in new *Constitutions*.

In the last decades of the century new energy was generated by widespread foundations in other countries which could offer life and new expressions of the charism of the Brothers of

the Holy Family. Moreover throughout the Institute ways developed of forming closer ties, of collaborative co-responsibility between Brothers and those laity who wished to share the spirituality and the mission of the Institute in different ways.

The history of the Institute is a constant source of reflection and meditation for understanding in concrete ways how to incarnate the charism, for discovering how, in different places and at different times, conditions may favour or retard its development, for distinguishing the criteria needed for discernment and for making decisions vis-a-vis the future.

“In giving the history of the Brothers of the Holy Family, it’s not a question of writing the life of the one who is naturally the Founder. We simply want to make known how great God is in his works, and how, to accomplish them, he uses often the weakest instruments, the simplest and least learned of men to do great things which surpass the expectations of men and are useful for entire nations”. (Text on a loose sheet written by Brother Gabriel with the title: *Conversation historique*)

### 2.5.3 THE RULE OF LIFE

#### References:

*Bro. Lino Da Campo: Circular on the Constitutions (1986)*  
*Commentary on the Constitutions of the Brothers of the Holy Family (2002)*

The *Constitutions* of the Brothers and the *Life Plan of the Nazarene Fraternities* have a specific section devoted to spirituality. **Each one of these fundamental documents presents the spirituality of the Sa-Fa in its dual religious and secular-lay versions.** In addition, one must take into account all of these documents because the spirituality is contained there in a concrete manner to motivate the different aspects of personal, communal, and institutional life. Each member of the Institute, whether a Brother or an associate, will refer to them according to his or her state of life.

There are certain expressions therein which may help us to understand these documents, both as a source of our own spirituality and in terms of their connection with this and other texts.

**They constitute a Project of Life according to the Gospel.** "The Rule proposes a way of life inspired by the Founder’s life and by his teachings, and confirmed through its approval by the Church". (*Constitutions*, 279) We may, in fact, say that the Rule constitutes for us an actual translation of the Gospel. The Founder, in the *Proclamation of the New Guide*, wrote: “We give it to you in the name of God; receive it, then, with due respect, considering it as a second Gospel”. And, sometime later: “This is what has led us to ask you to see the book containing our Rules as a second Gospel”. (*New Guide, Introduction*)

**The *Constitutions* define the identity of the Institute within the Church** as a “Religious Institute of Brothers” with the possibility of the presence of a few priests and of some associate members. Their practical norms as well as the theological motivations in them can

be explained in terms of a particular situation within the Church. Our identity is conceived in an ecclesiology of communion, typical of Vatican II, where the parties (local churches, states of life, particular charisms, etc) open up and communicate with the whole, and the whole becomes incarnate in concrete situations.

The *Constitutions* are **the stable expression of the charism and the fundamental text of the spirituality** of the Institute. The *Constitutions* state how, concretely, the Brother's communal life is organized, providing him with the appropriate means of achieving sanctity according to the charism of Brothers of the Holy Family. The rest of the texts actually in use, such as the Directories or the General Chapter decisions, as well of the ones from the past, as also those relating to the Institute's tradition, even the books written by the Founder, must be read in light of the present *Constitutions*. It is thus that they offer us a valuable contribution for incarnating them according to the times and the place.

The *Constitutions* must be **understood and lived in the light of the New Covenant**. Their strength comes from the act of profession - Covenant between God and Man, between Man and God, between the Brother and the Institute, between the Institute and the Brother. It is important to move from an Old Covenant mentality to the New Covenant mentality, if we wish to understand the assertion by the Founder at the beginning of the *Constitutions*: "Remember, dear Brothers, that exact observance of the Rule sanctifies the Brother. It is his glory, his ornament, his wealth, his beauty, his happiness".(Circular n. 21, 1864)

The *Constitutions* indicate the tension created between the proposed ideal and the means offered to achieve it, between the great doctrinal and spiritual guidelines and the concrete norms for the different aspects of life. The *Constitutions* point out the minimum required and the maximum, which opens one up towards the perfection of charity (sanctity). Thus is marked out the spiritual path which invites to constant growth.

The *Constitutions* open up, on the one hand, towards the Gospel, acknowledging it as the "supreme rule", and on the other hand towards the diversity of cultures and mentalities experienced by each of the Provinces (which the provincial directories and life projects address), and towards the concrete reality of each community (community life project) and of each individual (personal life project).

The rule expresses awareness of itself by the Institute as a community called by the Holy Spirit, gathered in the name of Jesus and consecrated to the Father.

What is stated about the *Constitutions* may be applied by comparison to the Life Plan for the Nazarene Fraternities.

#### **2.5.4 THE INSTITUTE'S DOCUMENTS**

Bro. Gabriel started to write a series of circular letters aimed at helping the animation and direction of the Institute, and in which he kept people informed, but which also stated his beliefs as well as some of his significant intuitions regarding the spirituality. He also started to publish the biography for the Brothers of the Institute upon their deaths, as a testimony and homage to their memory, but also to maintain the link with those preceding the rest in

reaching the Father's House. It is in these biographical notes that the concrete characteristics of the spirituality as lived by the Brothers throughout the years are to be found. Both collections, the circulars written by the Superiors and the biographies of the deceased Brothers, have been maintained up to this day, along with the documentation on the Chapters and other texts, often published in the official journal of the Institute, "L'Entretien Familial". A spiritual heritage has been built from which Sa-Fa spirituality can be nourished.

### **2.5.5 THE LIFE AND TEACHINGS OF THE CHURCH**

Starting from the Second Vatican Council and gathering ideas which had started to develop even before, the Magisterium of the Church has focused on **topics close to the Sa-Fa spirituality** as regards one or another of its aspects.

**Permanent awareness of the life and the teachings contained in all the Universal Church documents** as well as those pertaining to the particular churches is an attitude to be cultivated always, as an element of permanent formation and as one of communion with all elements of the Christian community.

We point out some of the topics and documents closest to Sa-Fa spirituality.

#### **- THE HOLY FAMILY:**

Starting with the Apostolic Brief of Leo XIII *Neminem fugit* (1892) with which he erected the Holy Family Association, the popes have more or less directly and in several documents, referred to the Holy Family and to the mystery of Nazareth. We can quote *Speaking at Nazareth* (1964) Paul VI and John Paul II's Trilogy *Redemptor Hominis* (1979), *Redemptoris Mater* (1987) and *Redemptoris Custos* (1989).

#### **- CONSECRATED LIFE**

The significance of consecrated life in the Church was expressed in the Council documents: *Lumen Gentium* (chaps V) and the Decree *Perfectae Caritatis* regarding its renewal and the possibility of introducing priesthood in the lay Institutes. In *Evangelica Testificatio* and other documents conciliar topics are developed which deal with consecrated life. The aspects of communal life were presented in *Fraternal Life in the Community*. In the Apostolic Exhortation *Vita Consecrata* there is a theological and spiritual synthesis developed from the Synod on Consecrated Life, with its trinitarian structure and its teachings on the spirituality of the vocation of the Brother (n. 60), and the spirituality shared between the religious and the laity.

#### **- THE LAITY**

The Council documents on the apostolate of the laity, *Apostolicam Actuositatem*, taking as backdrop the Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, laid the foundation of a new understanding of lay participation in church life and its relationship with the world. The vocation and mission of the laity in the Church were summarised in the document *Christifideles laici* which followed the 1998 Synod.

#### **- THE MINISTRY OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION**



The Council's Decree on Christian education *Gravissimum educationists momentum* was followed in the post-conciliar period by a series of papers on the importance of Catholic schools in the mission of the Church (The Catholic School (1977), the religious dimension of education (1988 ) indicating how to build the educational community and the functions of each of its components, lay Catholic witness to the faith in school (1982), *Consecrated Persons and their Mission in Schools* (2002), and in the context of a mission shared: *Educating Together in Catholic schools* (2007).

#### - CATECHESIS

Ecclesial and pastoral renewal has led to a renewal of catechesis as well. The Catechism of the Catholic Church, the exhortation *Catechesi Tradendae* and the *General Catechetical Directory* are universal reference texts, but each country has in turn made an effort to develop catechetical programmes appropriate for all stages, increasingly aware of the importance for Christian communities and families to share in this responsibility, and reinstating God's Word and liturgy as catechetical ground for all. Today catechesis is also seen as a first announcement of the Gospel.

#### -LITURGY

The reform of the Liturgy, with the Eucharist and the Word of God as central to it, the celebration of the Divine Office, the communal character of the celebrations, and the inclusion of the Feast of the Holy Family within the liturgical year, are yet other elements adding to the richness of our spirituality.

#### - FAMILY

The teachings of the Church on marriage and family have been given new impetus ever since *Gaudium et Spes*. Some of the milestones of such teachings are the encyclical *Humane vitae* (1968) and the *Familiaris consortio* exhortation (1981). Also related to the topics around the theme of the family pertaining to the protection of life and the present difficulties therein, see for example *Evangelium vitae*, 1995.

#### - MISSION "AD GENTES"

Missionary activity continues to be one of the most central concerns of the Church in the world today. The guidelines contained in the conciliar decree *Ad Gentes* were expanded in the Exortatio *Evangelii nuntiandi* (1975) and later in the encyclical *Redemptoris Missio* (1990) along with other documents which help to present Christian faith without neglecting interreligious dialogue.

#### - THE OPTION FOR THE YOUNG AND THE POOR

The attention of the Church towards the needy and its teachings on social justice have been expressed in such writings as *Sollicitudo rei socialis* (1987) or *Centessimus annus* (1991), on the Centennial of *Rerum Novarum*. The *Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* (2005) summarises these teachings.

## **2.5.6 THE WORLD AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

**Spirituality tends to become incarnate according to times and culture**, adopting the most congenial values and rejecting counter values, in order to express itself in new ways. Spirituality is a place of intercultural dialogue.

The Institute was born in France, in the first half of the XIXth century, and originally adopted the cultural forms characteristic of those years, especially in the rural areas.



The Holy Family taking the maté (Villa Sagrada Familia, San Antonio de Arredondo, Córdoba, Argentina)

This period is marked by the spreading of the ideas generated by the French revolution, in contrast to those of the Restoration, which encompass a return to the “old regime”, but also by the development of industry and its social consequences. The achievements in terms of agriculture and the increase in trade were important, but the rural areas characteristically sought refuge in tradition in all aspects of life. Emigration and colonialist expansionism were also important. The intellectual and cultural trends are tainted with romanticism.

During the XIXth century and in terms of French culture, particularly in the countryside, the Institute stands firm. But it starts opening up to the Latin-American world: its establishment in Uruguay and later in Argentina opened it to a new language and meant a more direct access to life in big cities, demanding it adjust to other types of institutions, the “colleges”.

Throughout the first half of the XXth century our presence in America is strengthened and other European cultural scenarios open up: Italy, Spain. During the second half of the XXth century and the beginning of the XXIth, the cultural diversity of the Institute has increased significantly. The Institute’s presence in Africa is a significant cultural step forward; it extends

its presence in Latin America: Brazil, Ecuador, Mexico and Colombia. And during the period between the end of the century and the beginning of the XXlth, it extends to Asia (The Philippines, India) with a wide range of cultural perspectives.

When it comes to globalisation, the balance between the appreciation of cultural diversity and the need to remain open to universality must be weighed carefully.

**Sa-Fa spirituality has benefited from the gifts of each individual person having lived by it and with the values,** never exclusive and sometimes obscured by other counter values, of the cultures within which they have become incarnate.

From the beginning in Europe, through:

- love of work and a sense of responsibility for the different activities, sometimes reaching a certain degree of rigidity ;
- the appreciation of the formation and of appropriate organisation in all fields of activity;
- generosity in terms of the “ad gentes” mission;
- the effort towards integration both to the local Church and to society;
- the building up of democracy based on equality and on the dignity of every individual.

Later in Latin America through:

- a deeper appreciation of relationships and affection, not excluding some instability;
- the importance hospitality with people and group sharing;
- proximity to the people, sharing their religiousness, their hopes and their struggle for justice and liberty.
- the central positioning of women in the consolidation of families, and of “mother earth” in relation to nature.

Later in Africa through:

- the nurturing of a multiplicity of relationships between amongst people, to the point of dispersion;
- the central positioning of family and caring for life at all levels;
- wisdom to adjust to all sorts of difficulties;
- the religiosity totally impregnating life
- the meaning of celebrations and festivities.

And lately, in Asia, through:

- opening up to contemplation, and trying to overcome dualities and dichotomies to be able to interpret reality in a context of serious inequalities and injustice.

Nazarene spirituality tends to approach other cultures attentively and respectfully and to appreciate and integrate any new and authentic values they might possess; it may also be itself presented via the cultures’ own forms of expression, thus contributing to mutual growth

and to render the Institute's unity more dynamic in an ever more global world, "so as to attain that all humans may join in the unity of God's family" (*Lumen Gentium*, 28).

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION AND DIALOGUE:**

- *Which characters and what particular situations of ours have most contributed to our understanding the Sa-Fa spirit of family?*
- *Which amongst the Bible passages most nourish our spiritual life?*
- *What particular passages in the life of Jesus and of Bro. Gabriel's life most inspire us in building up our community/family? - Which writings best represent Sa-Fa spirituality?*
- *What is the value of the symbolic (non textual) expressions of our spirituality?*
- *How do we interpret the diversity of expressions and of forms of Sa-Fa spirituality?*



## 3 THE CONTENTS

### 3.1 THE IMAGE OF GOD.

*Reference:*

*Bro. Teodoro Berzal: The image of God amongst the Brothers in the Institute of the Brothers of the Holy Family.*

*Bro. Teodoro Berzal: Circular on the Esprit de Corps and Spirit of family (2000).*

#### 3.1.1 GOD-FAMILY, LOVE COMMUNITY.

The focal point of Sa-Fa spirituality, that is to say the family consisting of Jesus, Mary and Joseph in Nazareth, teaches us to discover in **the One God the family consisting of the three divine persons**, thus introducing us to the central mystery of our faith and of Christian life.

Jesus in the Gospel reveals to us the true face of God, using over and over terms which refer to family. He uses the word “Abba”, “father”, to talk to God, in a context similar to that in which a child may intimately address his father. Parallel with this is the use of the word “Son”, which Jesus uses when talking about himself. Finally, the Holy Spirit is always presented in the Gospel as intimately related to the Father and to the Son.

Jesus invites us to enter into the mystery of divine communion, in which each one of the three persons entertains a vital relationship with the other two, accompanies them, lives for them, acts for them, is in them. “The Father is with me” (Jn 16: 32). “I live thanks to the Father” (Jn 6: 57). “As you, Father are in me and I am in you” (Jn 17: 21). Based on these Gospel grounds, and already starting in Genesis, where man is presented as an image of God in terms of a being in relation to others, the Fathers of the Church and the Christian writers have never hesitated in appealing to **the symbolic image of the family to speak about the mystery of the Trinity**. God is a communion of persons united by love in the circle of life.

The symbolic image of the family used to talk about God offers the advantage of putting us in front of a concrete reality and of a human experience largely shared, but it also allows one to

use a collection of profoundly interactive relationships, such as paternity, motherhood, sonship, relations between spouses, fraternity. From the point of view of Christian faith, there is not just a symbolic similarity between the Holy Trinity and the Holy Family, but a real participation in their life, given that such has been God's plan from Creation and Redemption, to the fullness of the Kingdom. (Cf. *Familiaris Consortio* n. 11 and 15)

### **3.1.2 THE HOLY TRINITY, THE HOLY FAMILY AND THE COMMUNITY.**

Bro. Gabriel expressed in simple and concrete terms **the link between the Blessed Trinity and the Holy Family**, as an essential point of his Institute's spirituality, as follows:

"The Society of the Brothers of the Holy Family has been established to honour the Blessed Trinity. For its associates, its celebration will be the second most important day, and they must pray the Glory to the Father thrice, in the morning, at noon and in the evening; they will also say it once more when their work is finished and at the end of their prayers, and so that all their actions may find favour with God, they will take care to think at the same time that it is in the name of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit that they must start and finish them... The Society has also been established to honour the virtues of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and to obtain their protection during life and in the hour of death. This Society shall be known only as the Congregation or Order of the Holy Family, and in no circumstances will it be possible to unite with or be associated to any other congregation or order. The Associates will celebrate annually the Feast of the Holy Family on the Thursday before the Octave of the Nativity of the Virgin. This shall be the first and most important feast day in the most relevant of the houses of the Society and in the other houses authorised to have a chapel." (*Constitutions*, 1836 art. 1 and 2) The present *Constitutions* (art. 90) say: "Community life is rooted in the Trinity which brings the Brothers into its mystery of love by the action of the Father who calls them, of the Son who gathers them into himself, of the Holy Spirit who unites them to each other".

Even though the similarity, and the strength of the sign, between the Holy Trinity and the Holy Family, lies mainly in the analogy of the relationships, there is also a correspondence between the persons themselves. The personal identity of Jesus, perfect man and Son of God in the two mysteries, that of the Trinity and that of the Holy Family, constitutes the point of union, enabling us to apply to both although for different reasons, the name of "Family of God".

Mary, through her divine maternity, is linked in a unique manner to the three persons in the Trinity. She received in her womb and gave birth to the Son of the Father by the work of the Holy Spirit. The Gospel also shows Joseph's total readiness to undertake the mission of father to Jesus, as Mary's husband.



Image of the Holy Family and the Blessed Trinity distributed by Bro. Gabriel at Belmont

No less appealing is the intuition that unveils both in Mary and Joseph the face of God who is at the same time Father and Mother. Love takes human form in Joseph and Mary's tenderness, paternal and maternal, towards Jesus. So did Jesus understand this to be when, one day, he having revealed his unique link to the Father in the Temple at Jerusalem, he submitted to Mary and Joseph. "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be at my Father's house? They did not understand what he meant. Jesus went back to Nazareth with them, and he remained obedient to them". (Lk 2: 49-51)

"The Brothers recognise in the Holy Family "the most perfect fulfilment on earth of the community of love which is the Blessed Trinity". The *Constitutions* (art. 6), as a point of comparison, propose the term "community of love" to refer to the relationship between the Holy Family and the Blessed Trinity. This is the place of encounter which allows us, in the analogy of faith, to pass from the earthly and necessarily limited reality of the family of Nazareth to the divine and infinite reality of the Trinity.

This is what Bro. Gabriel had expressed in using the traditional term "Earthly Trinity" to refer to the Holy Family. "The sole family directly connected with heaven, this "Earthly Trinity", as Saint Bonaventure and Saint John Damascene called it, presents itself to our love for many reasons: Jesus is the new Adam, Mary, the new Eve, and Joseph, the guardian of those two precious pearls, all three constitute our treasure". (*Circular* n. 2, 1847)

### **3.2 THE MYSTERY OF NAZARETH: MARY AND JOSEPH AS A FAMILY**

Bro. Gabriel used to express himself thus: "If, my dear Brothers, it is true indeed that there *where your treasure is, there is your heart* (Mt. 6:, 21) the heart of a Christian, not to mention that of a religious Brother of the Holy Family, should often, or, rather, always, be under the

humble roof of Nazareth, in the bosom of this august Family which gathers within itself all the virtues, divine and human” (*Circular* n. 2, 1847). Following in his footsteps, the tradition at the Institute has emphasized within the mystery of Nazareth its family dimension: “But it is above all in terms of its being a family that Jesus, Mary and Joseph are the Patrons of this Institute”. (*Constitutions*, 1882, art. 125)

It is a synthesizing statement by John Paul II which best helps us to place the Holy Family within the Christian mysteries: “Directly immersed in the mystery of Nazareth, the Nazareth Family is in itself a particular mystery”. (*Redemptoris Custos* n. 21) In fact, none of the Christian mysteries can be understood in depth except in relation to all the others. **It is, hence, very important to place the Holy Family in relation to other moments of salvation history.** The central positioning of the Holy Family at the heart of our spirituality will be highlighted through the light thrown upon it by the rest, and on the other hand it will be revitalised in the sense that this connexion with the central core of Christian faith will become clearer.

### **3.2.1 A FAMILY**

Jesus’ family appears to be **a typical rural Palestinian family of his time**: it lived according to Israel’s faith, and it shared the hopes and the struggles of its people. It bears hope of salvation for the poor of Yahwe (“anawim”). (*Catechism of the Catholic Church*, 64)

The essential element of its cultural and religious identity was committed practice of the law contained in the sacred books: keeping the Sabbath and other feasts (for a Jewish person, his calendar is his creed, it is said), yearly pilgrimage to Jerusalem; for the boys, presentation and circumcision, and for all, receiving a traditional name, also education in the synagogue till puberty. Insertion in the world of work was achieved through the learning of a trade, often passed on from father to son: both Joseph and Jesus were carpenters.

Family ties were important, well beyond the most immediate circles, often spreading out beyond the town of Nazareth. The Gospels have passed on genealogies where Jesus’ “brothers and sisters” are mentioned. Tradition has also passed on the names of Mary’s parents, Anne and Joachim.

Like so many other families, the family of Jesus knew difficult moments at the start, then in the flight into Egypt, and probably too in the circumstances of every day life where quiet moments would alternate with difficult ones.

### **3.2.2 BETWEEN CREATION AND REDEMPTION.**

According to Revelation, man is the centre and the peak of all creation, created in the image and likeness of God, and all creatures have been created for him. But God did not create man all alone, he created man and woman. Thus, man is a social being, and the relationship between man and woman is the first expression of communion among humans (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes* 12; 24). Despite the wounding by sin, the reciprocal gift of man and woman in



marriage is a sign of the love of God. As it is stated in the preface of wedding mass: "In the union of man and wife you have imprinted the image of your love".

This is why, at the time of the full revelation of God's love in Jesus Christ, the latter becomes incarnate and his redeeming work begins within the family constituted by the marriage of Mary and Joseph. Paul VI explained this relationship between creation and redemption: "So it happens that at the threshold of the New Testament, the same as at the beginning of the Old Testament, there is a couple. But whilst the first couple, Adam and Eve, bore the evil which thus spread to the rest of the world, the second couple, Mary and Joseph, are at that height from which sanctity spreads to the rest of the world. Our Saviour has begun this work of Salvation through the virginal and holy union where his almighty will to purify and sanctify the family, the sanctuary of love and the cradle of life, is expressed".

Born into a human family and having grown up as part of it, Jesus formed a new family made up of those who follow him and believe in him (Lk 8. 21), based not upon the links of flesh and blood, but beyond them (Jn 1. 13), and which finds its new beginning at the foot of the cross, through the maternal and filial relationship established between Mary and John. (Jn 19: 25-27)

### ***3.2.3 WITHIN THE BOUNDARIES OF THE NEW COVENANT.***

Jesus' teachings on marriage do not solely refer to God's original plan: "What therefore God has joined together, let not man put asunder..". (Mc 10a: 2-12) In continuation of a tradition already begun by the Old Testament prophets, which presents marriage as a symbol of God's love for his people, Jesus, from an eschatological perspective presents the fullness of the Kingdom as a wedding celebration. (Mt 22:2-14; 25: 1-12) He thus expresses God's definitive acceptance of his commitment to humanity, and receives from humanity the assurance of total fidelity.

Saint Paul relates marriage to the union between Christ and his Church: "Husbands, love your wives as Christ has loved His Church and delivered himself up for her". (Ef. 5: 25) Marriage, thus, in the light of Easter, becomes one of the sign-sacraments of the New Covenant: "For as God of old made Himself present to His people through a covenant of love and fidelity, so now the Saviour of men and the Spouse of the Church comes into the lives of married Christians through the sacrament of matrimony. (Gaudiun et Spes 48)

From this perspective we can say that the family founded through the marriage of Mary and Joseph is an image or prototype of the Church in as much as it anticipates the reality which it signifies. Fully involved in the Mystery of the Incarnation, Mary and Joseph's wedding, a true marriage, willed by God and destined to receive his Son, already contains the revelation and the participation in the "great mystery" to which Saint Paul refers, the union of Christ with his Church, already announced in Genesis. (Gen 2: 24)

### ***3.2.4 GOSPEL OF THE "FAMILY".***

John Paul II used this expression in his “Letter to Families (1994), along the lines of similar ones: “*Gospel of Work*”, “*Gospel of Women*”. Through such terms one can highlight, on the one hand, what in Revelation can be found around a particular subject; on the other hand, propose to the world today the Christian Truth, keeping in mind pastoral reality and spiritual growth.

The Holy Family is first and foremost the Gospel lived and already realised; it sets forth and proposes certain values to families, to communities, to groups, which go beyond any particular cultural or social limitations.

Despite its fragility and the crises affecting it in this contemporary world of ours, the family today is designed, from a Christian point of view, to constitute a community of people, to be there to stand for life, to participate in the development of society and in the life and mission of the Church (Cf. *Familiaris Consortio*). In this context, the Holy Family presents itself as the “the beginning of many other holy families” (Letter to Families 23). It is the most original and the simplest expression of the Church, it accompanies families, the domestic Church, in the reply of each one of their members to God’s call, in the acceptance of the Word to turn it into life and deliver it to the world, in the day-to-day work and suffering, in the sharing of joy and of sorrows. Its close and accessible presence is always proposed as a point of reference for life and as an aid in our growth in God’s Kingdom, both in each person and in their work places, their homes, the social and cultural entities where they interact, etc.

But **there are many different ways of being family**. Jesus in the Gospel mentions the family relations (father, mother, brothers, sisters) established by those accepting his word. (Cf. Mc 10: 29-30) Throughout the history of the Church religious communities have found in the Holy Family a point of reference, along with the primitive community of Jerusalem, and the group of Jesus’ followers. (Cf. *Fraternal Life in Community*, n. 18) “The response of love from Jesus to the Father, by Jesus, united with Joseph and Mary in the home of Nazareth (*Constitutions*, 23); virginity “totally consecrated to the service of Love for the salvation of the world”( *Constitutions* 29), the life of work, of sharing, of poverty, simplicity, humility (*Constitutions*, 39); the faith and obedience of Jesus, Mary and Joseph who “realised the plan of God for each one of them by living together as family in Nazareth” (*Constitutions*, 58), are some of the most important motivating factors in a life consecrated and at the service of men.

In fact, any family, group or community wanting to give priority to communion of life based on simple and close knit personal relationships, in a life of daily work and humility, open to God’s Word and committed to the building of a fairer, more fraternal world, will be able to find a strongly motivating inspiration and a solid support in the Family of Nazareth.

From these concrete although prophetic realisations one can extend one’s view to broader horizons. Anyone seeking to live as in Nazareth knows that the most important achievements start in darkness. It is to this broader perspective that Jean Paul II invites us when he states in

his *Letter to Families* (n. 13) that “the family is at the centre and the heart of the civilization of love”, or when, in a speech at the UNO (1995) he presented the idea of promoting a **“family of nations”** saying: “The concept of ‘family’ brings to mind something far beyond functional relationships or the mere convergence of interests. Family is, by definition, a community founded on mutual trust, in reciprocal trust, and on sincere respect. In a family there is no oppression by the strong; rather the opposite, the weakest of its members, precisely because of their weakness, receive twice as much warmth and support”.

### 3.3 A WAY OF CONCEIVING THE CHURCH: GOD’S FAMILY

**Reflecting the image of God-Trinity, the Church can be seen as the family of God’s children.** It is the Family -God who in the dynamics of his love, by sending his Son and the Holy Spirit, forms the Church-Family.

The Trinity, being the perfect communion of persons in perfect unity, whenever it acts always necessarily brings communion and unity. This communion of people, this “multitude” gathered through the unity of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit, is the Church. (*Lumen Gentium*, 4) The Church, hence, derives from the Trinity. It responds to the Father’s design who “determined to gather the faithful in Christ and in the holy Church. (*Lumen Gentium*, 2). It is founded on Jesus Christ who, through his passion, death and resurrection make the faithful one sole Body; and it is the work of the Holy Spirit, who, through the Sacraments and gifts, constantly vivifies and renews her.

Deriving from the Trinity and as fruit born through the mission of the divine persons, the Church can only be accomplished in time in the image of divine communion. The diversity of ministries, of charisms, of activities, proceeding from the same Spirit must co-exist in unity of love and its evangelising mission. The same diversity, arising from the particular local expressions and incarnations, finds its fulfilment in the unity and catholic nature of the Church.

Vatican Council II, amongst the many images of the Church picked out that of **“family” to speak about the “intimate nature of the Church”**: “More often the Church is referred to as “God’s edifice” (*1Cor.* 3, 9). The Lord compared himself to a stone, discarded by the builders, but which has become the corner stone (Mt 21: 42; cf. Acts 4: 11; 1 Pe 2: 7; Ps 177: 22). It is on this foundation that the apostles erect the Church, receiving from it endurance and cohesion (cf. *1Cor* 3,11) This construction is referred to under different names: God’s House (*1Tim* 3:15), where his family dwells, God’s dwelling in Spirit (*Eph.*, 2:19-22), God’s Tent among men (*Rev* 21:3) and, above all, holy temple, which the Holy Fathers see represented in the sanctuaries of stone, and in Liturgy also the Church is compared to the holy City, the new Jerusalem. In the Church we become, in fact, living stones. (*1Pe.* 2:5) Saint John sees the holy city in the context of the new earth, as descending from Heaven, from beside the Lord, dressed as a bride adorned for her spouse. (*Rev* 21:1ss) (LG 6)

Speaking about the ministry of the shepherds of the Church, the Council refers to them in terms of family. "Exercising within the limits of their authority the function of Christ as Shepherd and Head, they gather together God's family as a brotherhood all of one mind". (LG 28) And again, speaking of the value of unity in diversity: By divine institution Holy Church is ordered and governed with a wonderful diversity. "For just as in one body we have many members, yet all the members have not the same function, so we, the many, are one body in Christ, but severally members one of another". Therefore, the chosen People of God is one: "one Lord, one faith, one baptism"; sharing a common dignity as members from their regeneration in Christ, having the same filial grace and the same vocation to perfection; possessing in common one salvation, one hope and one undivided charity. There is, therefore, in Christ and in the Church no inequality on the basis of race or nationality, social condition or sex, because "there is neither Jew nor Greek: there is neither bond nor free: there is neither male nor female. For you are all 'one' in Christ Jesus. Therefore, from divine choice the laity have Christ for their brothers who though He is the Lord of all, came not to be served but to serve. They also have for their brothers those in the sacred ministry who by teaching, by sanctifying and by ruling with the authority of Christ feed the family of God so that the new commandment of charity may be fulfilled by all." (LG 32)

The Assembly of the Bishops for Africa (1994) assumed, precisely, as a guiding idea for Evangelization the **concept of the Church-Family with all its theological, human and pastoral meaning**: "The Synod has not only spoken about inculturation, but has also applied it concretely, taking it as a guiding idea for the Evangelization of the Church in Africa as the Family of God. Within it the synod Fathers have recognised an expression of the nature of the Church as particularly suitable for Africa. Indeed, this image accentuates the caring for others, the solidarity, the warm relationships, the welcoming, the dialogue and the trust. The New Evangelization will hence, tend towards *the construction of the Church as a Family*, any kind of excessive ethnocentricity being excluded, in an effort to promote, on the contrary, reconciliation and true communion amongst the diverse ethnicities, favouring solidarity and sharing, both of the workers and the resources of the particular churches, without any undue ethnic-based considerations. It is desirable that theologians work out the theology of the Church-Family, in all the richness of the concept, and that they develop its complementarities by means of other images of the Church". This supposes a profound reflection on the biblical and the traditional heritage which Vatican Council II has compiled in its Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium*. This admirable text presents the doctrine about the Church by resorting to images from the Holy Scriptures, such as Mystical Body, God's People, Temple of the Spirit, Flock and Fold, the Dwelling of God among men. According to the Council, the Church is the bride of Christ, and our Mother, the Holy City, the first fruits of the coming. We must take into account these illuminating images in developing, in accordance with the Synod, an ecclesiology centred on the concept of the Church as the Family of God. Only then will we be able to appreciate in all its richness and its depth the opening statement of the Conciliar Constitution". (*Ecclesia in Africa*, 63)

Taking up an expression from the *Constitutions* of the Brothers, we can say that in the Sa-Fa family, as “in the body of Christ, there is a diversity of members, of gifts and of ministries, united by charity”. (*Constitutions* 121) It is important that each one find his own vocation and identity, and, through mutual respect and working with others, create unity.

**The particular characteristics of each state of life** have been expressed thus: “In the unity of the Christian life the different vocations are like the rays of Christ, the only light.

The *laity*, by virtue of the secular nature of their vocation, reflect the mystery of the Word Incarnate especially as Alfa and the Omega of the world, the foundation and the measure of the worth of all things created.

The *sacred ministries*, for their part, are living images of Christ, chief and shepherd, guiding his people within the times of the “already but not yet”, while awaiting his return in glory.

To *consecrated life* is entrusted the mission of pointing to God-become-man as the eschatological goal towards which everything tends, the splendour before which all other lights fade, the infinite beauty which, by itself, can alone fully satisfy the human heart”. (*Vita Consecrata* 15) “In this harmonious ensemble of gifts, each one of the fundamental states of life is entrusted with the mission to express, within its own category, one or another dimension of the unique mystery of Christ.

If *lay life* has the specific mission to announce the Gospel amidst temporal realities, in the field of ecclesial communion *those having received Holy Orders*, especially the Bishops, perform an *irreplaceable ministry*. The Bishops are entrusted with shepherding God’s People by teaching the Word of God, the administration of the Sacraments, and by exercising the sacred power at the service of ecclesial communion, which is an organic communion, hierarchically ordered. As a means of conveying the sanctity of the Church, an objective excellence must be acknowledged regarding consecrated life, because it reflects Jesus’ own life. This is the reason why consecrated life is a particularly rich manifestation of the richness of the Gospel, as well as a more perfect fulfilment of the purpose of the Church, which is to sanctify humanity. Consecrated life in, a way, anticipates the future, when the fulfilment of the Kingdom of Heaven, now already here in form of seed and in mystery, is attained; when the children of men will no longer take husbands or wives, but will dwell as angels of the Lord. (cf. Mt 22: 30) Indeed, the excellence of perfect chastity for the sake of the Kingdom, considered indeed as “the door” to consecrated life, constitutes an object of the ceaseless teachings of the Church which nevertheless holds in high esteem the call to married life, where the spouses become “witnesses and partners in the fruitfulness of the Church, both as a symbol of such love as the love with which Jesus loved his Church and gave himself to her”. (*Vita Consecrata* 32)

### 3.4 LOOKING AT THE WORLD

The spirituality of the Sa-Fa family is oriented towards seeing the world as the house in which lives the big family of the children of God, and where God's kingdom is developing; it also enables an evaluation of diverse cultures by the light of the Gospel.

Born from the creative action of God who gives life to everything which exists, the world is the fruit of his love, and God remains in communication with the world to bring it to fullness. The Christian faith believes that the world is a gift of the Father, created through the Son ("through him all things were created") and in the Spirit, who gives life to everything. Creatures also carry within them, from their origin, the mark of the Divine Trinity, especially present in man, who was created "in the image and likeness of God", and to whom was given the care of, and the responsibility for this world.

The community of believers "already present in this world, is composed of men, that is, of members of the earthly city who have a call to form the family of God's children during the present history of the human race, and to keep increasing it until the Lord returns...That the earthly and the heavenly city penetrate each other is a fact accessible to faith alone; it remains a mystery of human history, which sin will keep in great disarray until the splendour of God's sons, is fully revealed. Pursuing the saving purpose which is proper to her, the Church does not only communicate divine life to men but in some way casts the reflected light of that life over the entire earth, most of all by its healing and elevating impact on the dignity of the person, by the way in which it strengthens the seams of human society and imbues the everyday activity of men with a deeper meaning and importance. Thus through her individual members and her whole community, the Church believes she can contribute greatly toward making the family of man and its history more human. (Gaudium et Spes 40)

### 3.5 THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE INSPIRED IN NAZARETH

#### *References:*

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- Bro. Steven Baffert: The Icon of the Holy Family, l'Entretien Familial, 22 (1935) pp. 95-99*
- Bro. Lino Da Campo: Circular one some aspects related to our Nazarene spirituality (1993)*
- Bro. Enzo Biemmi: At Nazareth they prayed, they worked, they loved. L'Entretien Familial n.171 p.416-426*

The Church has presented us with Jesus' life as a school of Christian life: "Nazareth is the school from which we can start understanding Jesus' life; it is the school where one starts learning about the Gospel. Here we learn to see, to listen, to meditate, and to penetrate the profound and mysterious meaning of this simple, humble and charming manifestation of

God's son amidst men. It is here, perhaps without even becoming aware of it, that one can learn to imitate this life". (*Paul VI, Talk at Nazareth 05-01-1964*)

The vital expression which distinguishes the motto of the Institute, "In Nazareth they prayed, they worked, and they loved one another", was coined by Bro. Amadeus Depernex, based on a spiritual experience of his which is retold in *l'Entretien Familial* - n. 12 (1930). You can also find there the explanation for the wording. In the 1882 Rule it was stated: "But it is in as much as they constitute a family that Jesus, Mary and Joseph are the Patron Saints of the Institute; in Nazareth they prayed, they worked, and they loved one another; hence, the Holy Family Brothers must join prayer to work, and reproduce in the congregation and in every small community, through the union of their hearts and their caring for one another, the unity, the respect, the mutual love, which so impressed the angels at the Nazareth house (art. 125).

Later on, Bro. Steven Baffert commented upon the wording of the motto, in order to explain the meaning of the official icon of the Institute, which pictorially reflects the motto. Other comments have followed, aiming at illuminating the most outstanding dimensions of Christian life which are imprinted with the mystery of Nazareth. The **relationship and the unity between the three parts of the motto** have from the beginning been pinpointed: "The three words must be understood as if they were but one... one must gather that prayer accompanied work and love, that work was gifted in prayer and love, that love was in their work and in their prayer" *l'Entretien Familial* n. 12 (1930) p.70. "The official picture represents the Holy Family at work, in an atmosphere of prayer and love." (*L'Entretien Familial* n. 21 - 1935- p. 96). The heraldic interpretation of the motto of the Institute states: "Prayer radiating peace, in work and in charity".



The official picture of the Institute which can be found in Villa Brea (Chieri, Italy)

### **3.5.1 IN NAZARETH THEY PRAYED**

Transcendence dimension - faith / to be sons and daughters

Let us look at the picture

The three persons are united by the sole act of Jesus' obedience, whom Joseph orders and whom Mary admires. But Jesus, who is the linking bond in the icon, is also the figure which most overtly expresses prayer. His ear is open to what Joseph, his father on earth, tells him to do, but his eyes are clearly turned up to his Father in Heaven, who truly orders him through Saint Joseph.

Mary does not forget, not for a second, that divine relationship of her Son with the Heavenly Father, and it is precisely this intimate wonder at seeing this humble obedience coming from the great God which keeps her attentive eyes on her Son's every movement. Saint Joseph, even though in command, doesn't forget that his son, formed in his workshop, carries in him the light of God. That is why, although he appears to be telling him what to do, his look is that of one humbled by the wisdom of his Creator, in an attitude of prayer, of homage, of worship.

This first part of the Institute's motto refers directly to the life of prayer, but also to the whole dimension of the life of faith of any Christian, within his or her reality as a son or a daughter of God, and it might even be opening one up to the transcendence common to every human being.

Man as a human being is open to others and to the "other" meaning "neighbour". He is capable of knowing himself, of possessing himself, of freely giving himself to others and of coming into communion with others. He is also "capable of God". Man is someone always on his way somewhere, always involved in some Plan, moved by the invisible strength of his desires, his aspirations, his ideals.

When God suddenly and surprisingly makes his appearance in the midst of Mary's life, by means of an angel, and in that of Joseph's, in his sleep, they each had their hopes, their aspirations, their desires; they even had a project to live together. The angel's message troubles Mary, makes her think, then come to a generous "Yes" which alters her whole intimate universe. From there on she believes that nothing is impossible to God, not even to have her, a virgin, conceive a son who is to be called Son of God. Joseph too, has plans of his own. When these seem affected by what is said about Mary, he becomes worried, he doesn't know what to do. And it is precisely then that God intervenes in his life too, to unveil a new horizon to him. This Son Mary is expecting is the work of the Holy Spirit. Joseph believes,



obeys and receives Mary, now pregnant of a Son whom he, Joseph will name “Jesus”. He thus attunes his project with God’s own, the Saviour of man.

In Nazareth Mary and Joseph experience the faith and the hope of the people of Israel, but such an event founds their family on a new basis. Jesus’ presence already introduces the Nazareth family into the reality of the new Covenant. Such a founding experience also provides new prospects for their relationship with God. As would have been the case for any Jewish family or individual in Israel, the essence of the family’s prayer for Jesus, Mary and Joseph would have been expressed through the Psalms, throughout the different rhythms of the celebrations: daily- domestic, weekly- at the synagogue, and annual- during the various festivities and the pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

Sa-Fa spirituality underlines in Nazareth **certain characteristics marking prayer life:**

- In Nazareth we can **learn to pray the “Our Father”**. This prayer must have been born in Jesus’ mind and heart at Nazareth. When he teaches it to his disciples, he is doing nothing but to transmit what for him as for Mary and Joseph must have been the way to address God as a Father. The “Our Father” is the simplest and the grandest expression of our faith.
- In Nazareth the Holy Family experiences **prayer and openness to God in ordinary life**. It is an invitation to live in the presence of God everywhere and always.
- Fidelity to a personal and a communal prayer rhythm is necessary, but one must tend to the “prayer of being”, that constant communion which is communication with the Father. In Nazareth they lived permanently in the presence of Jesus.
- In Nazareth we can enter **familiarity in our relationship with God**. It is from Jesus and with Jesus that we can learn to be close to the Father; from Mary and Joseph we can learn familiarity in our relationship with Jesus. As was stated by the Curé of Ars: “Prayer is an amiable friendship, an amazing familiarity. It is the intimate conversation of a child with his father”.
- In Nazareth we can learn **the sense of consecration** (God’s act which consecrates man who gives himself to him) in the gift of themselves by Mary and Joseph to look after Jesus, as well as Jesus’ consecration to his Father for the Kingdom.
- Bro. Gabriel’s prayer experience, marked as well by the mystery of Nazareth inspires our life of prayer. A layman deep within, **Bro. Gabriel lives openly the lay life**, totally aware of his radical dependence on God. In him trust in Divine Providence expressed itself vigorously.
- Bro. Gabriel is a concrete man and a man of action, but he carries a nostalgia for contemplative life. His prayer expressions are those common to all religious life in his time, close to those of the people and with a remarkable enthusiasm for Liturgy. His

writings are full of exhortations to prayer: meditation methods, prayer notices and formulas, and instructions on how to participate in the Liturgy. As is stated by Bro. Federico Bouvet: "In his meditations and prayers he always invoked the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit". On starting the pious practices he would say: In the name and for the Glory of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit". "Glory to the Father, to the Son and to the Holy Spirit, now and always, forever and ever. Amen". Often during the day he would repeat these words. When one truly loves one rejoices in repeating the same invocations (*Vida* p.469)

- Bro. Gabriel's invitation to come under the roof of Nazareth often entails **an introduction to meditative prayer**. Rather than to meditate more profoundly about it, whether intellectually or affectively, it is a matter of remaining in their presence, letting them transform us deep within.

The spiritual way of a prayer life, assumed from the mystery of Nazareth, passes through distinctive steps:

- It all starts with God's initiative in appearing in the midst of our lives and calling us into a relationship with him.
- His presence brings peace, joy and security, (Lk 1, 18, Mt. 1,20) and the promise of a new life (Lk 1:32;Mt 1: 21)
- But it reveals to us our limits, our smallness, (Lk 1) and our sin.
- Between the desire of fulfilment and the shady zones of our being, the moment of free decision is forged (Lk 1: 38), the leap towards faith which involves our whole existence.
- To move forward in the path of prayer with the family in Nazareth is to undertake "the pilgrimage of faith" (*Lumen Gentium*, 58); sometimes long and tedious it means going through the cross and leads us:

to integrate and to overcome sensitivities and rationalising, ridding ourselves of anything hampering our relationship with God

to walk in the dark, certain that beyond the exile and the desert stands the house where the Father awaits us.

And all this within the normal circumstances of our lives, involved in the day to day relationships and in the business of our work and of our mission.

### 3.5.2 IN NAZARETH THEY WORK

Incarnation-hope dimension / to be men, women

Let us look at the picture.

It seems good to look at the Holy Family at work, but doing so in an atmosphere of prayer and love. Hierarchically charity is the greatest virtue and prayer its best expression. But work is more readily accessible to human nature, and at the same time that it occupies so much of our lives, it is also a form of prayer and an exercise of charity.

Let us look at the picture. At a first glance we see the Holy Family at work. Saint Joseph is at the carpenter's bench. Mary is sitting in front of him, her sewing on her lap. She is sewing. The hand holding the needle has momentarily stopped. The mother contemplates her obedient son Jesus who, at his father's request, has just taken a hammer and a piece of wood, and is now listening to his legal father's orders".

This second part of our motto considers the relationship between the person and his or her work, in all its aspects: work to earn your living and to change the world, work in order to accomplish one's ecclesial and social mission, work so as to live in a more humane and responsible manner, work to develop a project and to do so in a harmonious relationship with nature, acceptance of limitations in acting even when they might completely impede any activity; hope in the coming Kingdom of God, despite evil, despite the shortcomings and contradictions we witness in the world.

Work is a means for **an individual to be able to wholly express him or herself in dignity**. Professional work and all other activities position us in a web of relationships of a personal, communal, professional, pastoral, familiar and amical nature...Work entails a regularity of activity, a fidelity which can become monotonous, and puts to the test our motivation and our goals for acting, but which gives us the opportunity to mature in our sense of commitment to others, to ourselves and to God.

There is an aspect of both effort and work which tends inwards. We are our own planting ground. Human growth doesn't happen without a certain methodical and ascetic effort.

According to the Book of Genesis, man was created by God in relation to nature. The Bible presents the creation of the world with a liturgical structure of six working days and one of

rest. This “rhythm” adopted by God is also valid for men, created in his own image. In Nazareth, with the new Adam, earning one’s keep will again mean to **participate in the creating and providential activity of God**, a sign of Covenant as well as a sign of that creative resemblance.

**Incarnation is the utmost expression of our God’s approximation to men.** Such an approximation is a constant within the history of Salvation, which culminates in the permanent presence of Christ amongst his disciples (“I am with you always until the end of the world”, Mt 28: 20) and in the Trinitarian indwelling (“He who loves me will keep my word and my Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home in him” Jn14: 23). In Nazareth Jesus tells us just to what extent he has become “in solidarity with every man”; as workers themselves, Joseph and Jesus belong to the category of those who work; Jesus is known as “the son of the carpenter”. In Mary we can see the prudent and strong woman described in the Book of Proverbs. (31: 10-31). Nazareth shows us how incarnation consists of gradually assuming everything human: the humanization of the Son of God, his gradually becoming man.

Sa-Fa spirituality underlines, in the light of the mystery of Nazareth, **some characteristic notes by which to live one’s professional and apostolic work of service, within the conditions of one’s own state of life.** In Nazareth the carpenter’s son also learnt the trade of being a man like the rest of men, whilst preparing the announcement of the Gospel.

- The Holy Family’s long stay in Nazareth implied the assumption of the ordinary rhythm of life, such as its times, its places, its activities, the meeting over and over again with the same people... “The Word of God, through whom all things were made, become flesh himself and dwelling on earth, he entered the world’s history and dwelling on Earth assuming it and recapitulating it on himself. It is he who reveals us that God is love (1Jn 4: 8), whilst at the same time teaching us that the fundamental law of human perfection is the new commandment of love. Thus he reassures all those who believe in divine charity that it is not a waste of time to open to all men the paths of love and to try hard to institute universal fraternity. He warns them at the same time that this charity is to be sought not solely on the big occasions but in the ordinary life”. (*Gaudium et Spes*, 38).
- The pattern of family life established by Mary and Joseph with Jesus sets a model for collaboration in mission characterised by acceptance of the Word of God made flesh and the plan of salvation, attention to each one’s growth, taking up tasks responsibly especially in times of difficulty, and participation in the mission of the community with the gifts and qualities of each one.
- In Nazareth Jesus assumes that which is human to announce the good news of the Kingdom of God to men, his brothers. Jesus uses for himself titles and comparisons taken from the world of work: shepherd, vine worker, doctor, sower, (Cf. Jn 10:1ss; Mk 2: 17; 4: 3) etc. And he presents the apostolate as a job, a harvest, (Mt 9:37; Jn

4:38) or fishing (Mt 4:19); he knows the jobs of those he chooses. (Mt 4: 18) His whole behaviour supposes the world of work, the peasant in his fields (Lk 9:42), the woman sweeping the house (Lk 15:8). He judges it abnormal to bury the talent rather than make it produce (Mt 25:14...).. It is a concrete application of the great principle underlined by *Gaudium et Spes*. "It is by evoking the most common relationships of social life, and using the language and the images of common everyday life, that He has revealed the Father's love and the magnificence of their vocation." (*Lumen Gentium* 4) ?

The lay dimension of Brother Gabriel's vocation, in line with the mystery of Nazareth, places him squarely in the reality of the world. He founds a congregation of Brothers trying to provide an answer to the society of his time from within the Gospel. His sense of the concrete leads him to organize his congregation, to ask for the recognition of both the civil and the religious authorities, to abide by the laws, to build a house for all, worrying about the finances and about the welfare of the Brothers and of the communities. In his exhortations and his writings he place great emphasis on professionalism at work (teaching, church ministries, manual) and on the dynamism in the work of catechesis and evangelisation.

Bro. Gabriel completely devotes himself to the fulfilment of the mission which God has entrusted him with, although he does from the beginning realise that only if it is God's work will he accomplish it, and by the end of his life he says: Lord almighty, God of Israel, hear my prayer which I address to you on behalf of the humble Congregation which you have entrusted to me, and which I now leave in your hands. Let it be your work and not mine, protect it, guard it always and everywhere". (Spiritual Testament)

Nazarene-Taborinian spirituality consists of undertaking the task and accepting the difficulty of becoming men in this world, of becoming more humane, avoiding all sorts of spiritualism and any avoidance of one's responsibilities. Concrete life is our place of worship: "On behalf of God's tender love, I exhort you my brothers to offer your own life as a living sacrifice, consecrated, pleasing to God, as your authentic worship" " (Rom 12,1).

**The spiritual path of the life of work and of apostolate** invites us to take some steps within the Sa-Fa spirituality:

- **Evangelisation starts through a process of incarnation.** As with Jesus' life, it is fidelity to the mystery of Nazareth that gives coherence and authenticity to our mission. We must learn that life dedicated to activity, to the mission of evangelization, to serve others, demands a constant Nazarene dimension of silence and meditation, of prayer

and of free communal life moments.

- The inculturation of the Gospel is primarily a never-ending process of detachment, of self-emptying, of lowliness, of "kenosis"...but not losing one's own identity, in order to assume a new situation, a new reality, a new culture. " For an authentic inculturation to take place it is necessary to have an attitude similar to that of our Lord when he became incarnate and came to us lovingly and humbly"(VC, 79). (*Vita Consecrata*, 79).
- Apostolic action leads us to keep an open mind with regard to the changing reality in which we live, to be responsive, to remain sensitive to the new situations faced by the Church and by society, to redefine our life projects and our projects in terms of action periodically, and to remain faithful to the Gospel and to its recipient, knowingly distinguishing between those secondary aspects that can be dispensed with and the essential elements of identity that should never be lost; it also leads us to open up sufficiently so as to, from one's own experience and through one's own experience, open up to others and to global reality.
- The **mystery of the incarnation raises our human potential** and empowers us from within. Far from rejecting such potential, Christian love leads us to its fulfilment. This implies seeking the evolution of individuals and of the communal and institutional situations, from where they stand, involving oneself personally in the change processes one promotes, without forcing the life and the rhythms of grace.
- Whoever intends to live the mystery of the Incarnation is extremely aware of the significance of the way one treats and communicates with people, seeing them, each and all, as God's sons and daughters, **and not separating the human aspects from the spiritual, and vice versa**; he or she values the apparently insignificant moments of presence and of free action; he or she has a simple and transparent language, and resorts to pedagogical methods accessible to those in the group he/she animates; he or she gets personally involved in the processes or changes he promotes, avoiding criticising from outside; he or she nurtures the so called relational virtues: gratitude, forgiveness, service, amiability...

**Ordinary life puts our Christian existence before the touchstone of concreteness;** the theoretical assertion of the values and ideals of justice, peace, solidarity find their verification throughout our lives, in significant gestures of understanding, of generosity, of tolerance towards those with whom we share a home, or with whom we deal day to day. The mystery of the Incarnation always sends us back to the reality of life.

Christian life, marked by the mystery of Nazareth in its work and apostolic dimension, follows an itinerary which comprises:

- a conscientious acceptance of the mission entrusted to us by God;

- the freely assumed loyalty to our daily commitments according to one's own life status and profession;
- the hope that what we sow in our daily life in terms of our life testimony and with our words has unsuspected echoes both for us and for others;
- the elaboration of projects and the responsibility over institutions that last in time: educational institutes, insertion in parish activities, programmes of catechesis, formation initiatives...
- the acceptance of failure, of misunderstanding and, at certain moments, the limitations that hinder the activity.
- the integration of the three dimensions of the action: all is the work of God and work of man in relationship with others.

### **3.5.3 IN NAZARETH THEY LOVE EACH OTHER.**

Dimension of communion – charity / to be brothers and sisters

Let us look at the picture.

Mary and Joseph's love of each other, and their unity in Jesus, have both been expressed in a very suggestive manner through their proximity and their relative distribution on the canvas.

Let's notice how Mary has brought her stool close to her husband's working bench. She has left but a small gap which Jesus has promptly filled in with his own person so divinely appealing. Jesus appears as the linking bond between the two saintly spouses, whilst, at the same time, joining them together in their gaze, their physical and their spiritual gaze, focusing on him.

The three people are united in a single act of obedience by Jesus whom Joseph instructs and Mary admires.

The third part of the motto of the Institute refers to the **world of relationships**. Relationships between people within immediate spheres of life (community, family, groups and

associations), and relationships in the ecclesial and social spheres, open to a universal dimension.

If the two first parts have underlined our openness to God, and our responsibilities in this world, this third part demands that we grow into that openness and that responsibility, through fraternal bonds between us, and with the men and women we meet on our way.

In a world that tends to understand itself globally through the media, but which is divided in so many ways, where interpersonal relationships may be hard to establish and to maintain, to live as Brothers and sisters becomes a salvation experience, and this is the first testimony we are called to give.

Family and communal life both find their inspiration in the life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph. But those who, for whatever reason, live in situations of solitude, of separation, of brokenness or of poverty, whether at a family or a social level may also be inspired.

God's appeal to Mary and Joseph, together with their generous willingness to cooperate with his salvific design, **added a new dimension to their mutual relationship**, as they became aware that each of their destinies was joined to that of the one who was to be born.

The life of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, just as that of the members of God's people was formed and directed by **the great commandment of love**, constantly repeated in prayer: "Listen, Israel: Yahweh our God is one. You must love the Lord with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength. Let the words I enjoin on you today stay in your heart. (Dt 6: 4-6) Heart, mind and strength indicate the whole person.

This way of loving is what guides us in understanding what love is. Jesus himself explained its meaning with his whole life and with his Word: **To love as the Father loves**. (Jn 15: 9) Jesus' relationship to his Father unveils for us love exchanged ceaselessly and without boundaries. And in the heart of the New Covenant, he asks that we love as he has loved us. (Jn 13: 34) **But besides this the most important of commandments there is another equivalent one: "You shall love your neighbour as you love yourself"** (Mt. 22, 26 – 40).

Mary and Joseph entered this new dynamic of love in complete openness to God and total self-giving, in reciprocity and sincerity, to all. In Nazareth, the relationship of maternity, paternity, sonship, conjugality, familiarity, were lived out in a deep harmony of the love of God and the love of neighbours. And there "Jesus grew both in body and in wisdom, gaining favour with God and people". (Lk 2: 52)

Sa-Fa spirituality underlines certain characteristics of love within the Nazarene family:

- An exclusive love for the Lord Jesus, and thus a universal love with regard to the Brothers. Mary and Joseph are totally centred in their love of God through Jesus, hence fully open to all: Mary and Joseph are totally centred round this love of God in Jesus, and thus totally opened to all: Mary will be invoked as Mother of the Church



and Joseph as the Universal Patron Saint of the Church.

- Love which is expressed in tender relationships where wedlock, paternity, maternity and affiliation are received and delivered as a gift, void of any intention to dominate others. It is love which does not impose itself, “poor” in its expressions but sublime in content. This love teaches us to receive everything and to receive everyone as gifts with a grateful (Eucharistic) heart.
- It is love that relies on the Word of the Lord, and counting on it, organises its self-giving to God and to others. It can then understand the Father’s love, who loved the world (us) so much, he sent his son (Jesus) to save us, and now sends us to save our Brothers. In one word, it is love that relies on the Father’s love, is based on it, seeks to render it understandable, amiable, love -creating.
- Love which is fertile in terms of its readiness to take action, and the presence of the Holy Spirit. Mary appears to us as "capable" of conceiving God. Mary is the fertile soil which produces the loveliest wheat, Jesus. Mary and Joseph reveal the fruitfulness of love, through their self- denial, in order that God’s will be fulfilled.
- An active love, seeking to search and to find Him, who strengthens all other ties. Mary and Joseph make their way back to the temple together, looking for Jesus amidst relatives and friends, speak to us about such spirituality, the spirituality of the search and the restless heart till we find the beloved lost one whom we have lost.
- A diligent love, since at Nazareth everyone was there to serve the others.
- A missionary sort of love: Jesus, Mary and Joseph, in their family relationship, not only enlighten us as to the educational function of our mission, but also encourage us to reflect on our mission itself. Jesus’ order: “Go” (Mt 28, 19), had already been accomplished by Mary when she visited Elizabeth, and it can also be hinted at through the various journeys of the Nazareth family (Mary and Joseph go to Bethlehem for the census: they travel to Egypt, to Nazareth...) One would say that the Nazarene family’s spirituality is on the one hand pilgrimage and on the other hand it is stable, it is both a “nomadic” and “home based” spirituality. What truly matters is that in each the main reason to move on or to stay is always Jesus and man’s sake. Mathew’s final words in the sending of the apostles to their mission are Jesus’ own: “Look, I am with you every day always, till the end of the world”. (Mt 28: 20). As in Nazareth, Jesus will always be with us, fulfilling the meaning of the name “Emmanuel”: God-with-us. We may consider the whole world as an immense Nazareth, a house inhabited by Jesus’ presence. And this not only for thirty years, but always. The purpose of the mission is to make the world truly inhabited by Jesus, the same as at Nazareth.

Bro. Gabriel's experience, **characterised by his relationships to others as a Brother**, invites us all to live in fraternity:

- In Belleydoux, his family and parochial life experience allowed him to grow into a set of relationships both intense and open; he wasn't yet a religious when people started calling him "Brother".
- He founded a congregation of Brothers and discovered the profound meaning of being called "Brother": Titles inspire and demand respect, but the name "Brother" just conveys simplicity, bounty, charity. It is the name that Jesus Christ, the immaculate lamb who was sacrificed to save human kind, chose to be called himself, when he chose to convey his immense bounty and his love in one word: "Go and tell my Brothers to go to Galilee, that there they shall see me". Hasn't the Divine Saviour, through that gesture, named thus, with such an amiable name, those whom he convokes to live in community, that once a part of it, they might follow his evangelic advice?" (*New Guide* 6).
- He had to suffer lack of understanding in order to persevere in his vocation as a Brother within the Church.
- Personally and with his Brothers, Bro. Gabriel made himself the brother of the poor coming to the help of those in need whether of faith, education or the necessities of life; he knew how to share his own life. (cf Fr Roberto Cabello: "*El Hermano Gabriel y los pobres*")
- He left for his Brothers in his will, the motto to act as Brothers to each other as well as towards others: "I recommend to all the Brothers, for the sake of the love and of the care I have always felt for them, to love one another throughout their lives, and to encourage each other to do good". (*Spiritual Testament*). He summed up this certainty in the expression: "esprit de corps and family spirit". (July 2, 1864)

Sa-Fa spirituality invites to an ever open way to growth in the world of relationships, which comprises:

- the welcoming and the acceptance of others as a gift from the Father, interested not just in what he or she is, but in who each one is.
- the effort to create circles of communion and of humanity in the places where we dwell and in those where we do our pastoral or our professional work.
- concern to mediate in conflicts working towards peace and for the reestablishment of relationships between people, through dialogue and reconciliation.
- care for all that which promotes the family spirit (communication and information, attention to detail in ordinary life, etc.)
- service of Brothers who are in need, whether close or far away

- fostering of filial relationships with God, and fraternal relationships with everyone.

### 3.5.4 THE CHARACTERISTIC VIRTUES: HUMILITY, SIMPLICITY, UNITY, OBEDIENCE, AND SELF-GIVING

Reference:

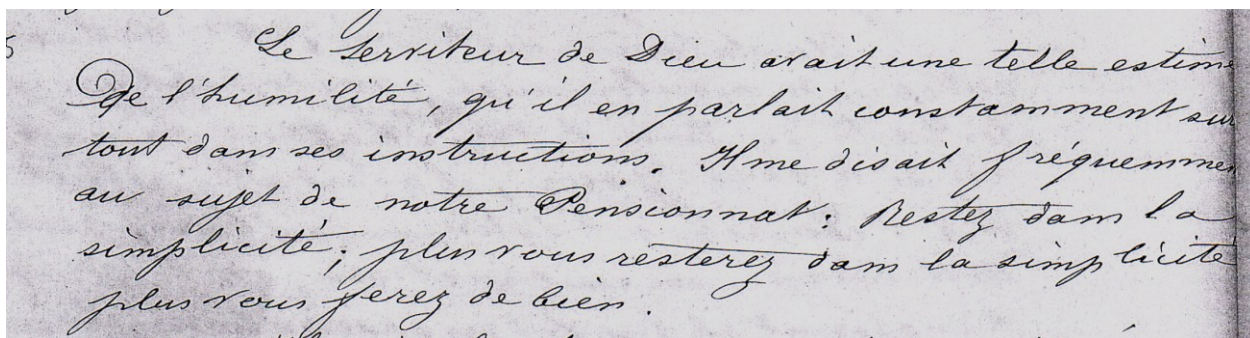
*Bro. Steven Baffert: Circulars and Conferences, the Institute's Spirit. Conferences for the 1934 retreat*

*Bro. Lino Da Campo: Circular on certain aspects of our Nazarene Spirituality (1993)*

In the tradition of the Church the exercise of Christian life is expressed in the theological and the moral virtues, all of which are mere manifestations of the first and most important one: charity.

Bro. Gabriel stated that the “spirit of family”, vital core of the Sa-Fa family spirituality, is born out of charity, and hence from God, who is charity itself.

The tradition of the Institute has preserved as an important reference for our spirituality the words which the Curé of Ars often used to say to the first Brothers: “Remain humble and simple; the humbler and the simpler you are, the greater the good you will do”.



The words of the Curé of Ars to the first Brothers, according to a text of Bro. Athanase Planche.

Bro. Gabriel listed the **characteristic virtues of the Brothers**: “The virtues characterising a true Brother of the Holy Family are a vivid faith, prompt obedience, an ardent and disinterested zeal, profound humility, constant purity, and, finally, the love of work, of retreat and of silence” (*New Guide*, art. LXXIII). “The Brothers must show a holy enthusiasm in the practice of all virtues, but especially of those proposed to them in the Rule. **Humility, simplicity and modesty must be the character of the Institute of the Holy Family.** The Brothers must always have a special predilection for these virtues, following the example of the venerable family of Jesus, Mary and Joseph, and they shall always proceed in such a way as to ensure that everything they do and everything they possess has that mark (*New Guide* 245 -246).

The two essential references for living the family spirit are Christian charity and the spirit that prevailed in the home of Nazareth. (1936, *Constitutions*, art. 114) Loyal to this tradition, Bro. Steven Baffert explained that the “family spirit is a way of living Christian charity”, and that, taking into account the Nazarene inspiration of the Institute, it is expressed in the five virtues prescribed in the Rule: humility, simplicity, obedience, unity and self-giving.

Bro. Steven suggests that we turn our eyes towards Nazareth to find those five virtues in the decisions which guided Jesus, Mary and Joseph, whether in terms of their mutual relationships, or in terms of their relationship to God. Such a view leads us to confirm, in agreement with the *Constitutions*, that “Humility, simplicity, obedience, unity and mutual self-sacrifice constituted the soul of the relationships amongst Jesus, Mary and Joseph; and it is precisely such a soul which each one of the Brothers of the Holy Family must try to form and to reproduce, so that God the Father may be pleased to contemplate our Congregation, just as he was pleased to contemplate the family in Nazareth. And, after some practical considerations, he concludes: “We believe we have defined the Spirit of our Institute: a spirit of charity in the shape of a spirit of family. The virtues which characterise it are: unity and self-sacrifice. The virtues which support it are: humility, simplicity and obedience. It is born of God’s love and it is crowned with profound devotedness and fraternal love, first for our Brothers and then for our neighbours”. (p.93)

Later on Bro. Steven proposes the acquisition of such Christian attitudes, though the expressions pertaining to those times, by saying that “ the family spirit must penetrate our heart, our will, our piety, our virtue, our behaviour, the zeal of all the Brothers; so that this spirit becomes our common way of thinking, for each and all of us”.

In order to live the spirit of family within **the tradition of the Institute we have used the expression of the “little virtues”**. Bro. Steven named and explained the ones that follow: courtesy, affability and consideration, charitable overlooking of others’ faults, indulgence and patience, equableness of mood and holy joy, compassion and attentiveness in serving. He proposed as well the **essential means to cultivate them**, with the help of divine grace: **“suppleness of spirit”** and **“delicacy of the heart”**. By suppleness of spirit” he implies the ability to see something from someone else’s point of view, taking into account his age and his mentality, not believing that one alone possesses the truth, always observing a sympathetic attitude towards others, keeping calm. By “delicacy of heart” he means consideration and attentiveness, affability in dealing with others, trust and joy.

Today these “small Nazarene virtues” may be expressed through a long list, which remains open: joy, amiability, friendship, love, harmony, charity, chastity, apostolic zeal, commitment, communion, trust, contemplation, joint responsibility, perseverance, sensitivity, dialogue, discernment, discretion, availability, dialogue, listening, self denial, fidelity, fraternity, generosity, hospitality, humility, initiative, justice, loyalty, persistence, prudence, responsibility, respect, simplicity, service, silence, sincerity, work, unity... naturally, such

positive attitudes are opposed by as many negative ones, against which we will always need to fight, and which can be summarised as selfishness, individualism, gossip, distraction both in terms of relationships and in terms of reading, in the lack of mutual understanding, the inability to understand oneself, in the lack of union with superiors, and with one another.

The spirit of family may undergo more or less difficult trial phases, and longer or shorter periods of darkness. These can always be overcome through dialogue and reconciliation. The spirit of family may always be renewed under other forms and expressions better adapted to cultures and mentalities, provided their link to their genuine inspiration remains.

In reality it is a question of living what we ask for in the prayer of the Mass for the Holy Family: “You have willed, O Lord, that the Holy Family be our model; grant us the grace to practice, as they did, the virtues of family and to be united in the bonds of your love, before we come to dwell with you in joy for all eternity”.

#### **SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION AND DIALOGUE**

- *How can we summarise the key elements of Sa-Fa spirituality?*
- *The text presents us with some key ideas: God, the Church, the Nazareth mystery, Christian life... Which others would you add to these?*
- *Make a small lexicon or short list of Sa-Fa spirituality words.*
- *Which particular aspects of Sa-Fa spirituality most directly concern individuals, families, religious communities?*
- *Which aspects of Sa-Fa spirituality have the greatest impact in the Church and the world today?*
- *Write and share your personal interpretation of the official picture of the Holy Family.*



## 4. METHODS

Sa-Fa family spirituality has its own methods and characteristic ways of experience and transmission. Rather than original methods, it is a matter of ways and means of passing on the charism, some dating from long ago, and others more recent. Each of them pertains to a particular field and requires discernment in its use.

### 4.1 DAILY LIFE GUIDED BY THE “SPIRIT OF FAMILY”

Some of the expressions in article 14 of the *Constitutions* offer everyone a practical and simple way of living Sa-Fa spirituality in daily events through the practice of the spirit of family:

*The spirit of family, core of the spirituality of the Brothers, animates the relationships amongst them and constitutes the principle of stability and of unity of the Institute. It distinguishes their way of doing things, it guides them in their mission amongst men, it characterises their educational work and it reinforces the links of human solidarity wherever they are sent.*

The spirit of family is the way of being and of doing of those who live the Nazarene spirituality in the Sa-Fa family.

The first step is to discover that the “spirit of family” already exists as a natural component of human coexistence, of the family and of interpersonal relationships. Rather than introduce something new, the purpose is to listen, to become available to serve those already existing links of human solidarity, and to try and assist their development and their cohesion, until what is lived in one’s own community or in one’s own family, is what is seen in the Family of Nazareth and, finally, in the Holy Trinity.

Above all one must consider the spirit of family as a gift, which develops our ability to live hospitality, and the sense of being free, the gratefulness, which value the fact of being accepted and formed within a family, within a community. But one must also take into account the need to make efforts and to overcome, which highlight our responsibility to grow, to witness to and pass on the gift for the good of all.

To enter into the dynamics of the spirit of family means:

- an increasing level of familiarity in our relationship with God-Trinity and with people;
- the awareness of the evangelical message “You are all Brothers” in order to pass it on;
- a constant effort to be welcoming and to build communion among our families and our communities, and in those ecclesial and social realms where we dwell, always trying to establish familiar and fraternal type relationships;
- the ability to elaborate, to experience and to revisit a communal life project at its various levels;
- the care not to quench, nor to hamper, even the dimmest possibilities of an agreement, a reconciliation, to restart a fraternal relationship;
- the sensitivity and the solidarity towards those who are going through precarious or particularly difficult family situations, especially towards the weakest and the smallest;;
- hope that the day will come when the big family will be formed with all men, the children of one and the same Father.

#### **4.2 THE READING AND THE MEDITATION OF THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIGHT OF THE MYSTERY OF NAZARETH**

*References:*

*Bro. Steven Baffert: the Spirit of the Institute. Conferences for the 1934 retreat*  
*Bro. Teodoro Berzal: Back to Nazareth, (notes for meditation, liturgical cycles A, B, C)*

An expression taken from the Acts of the Apostles guides this method for the reading of the Word of God: “What Jesus experienced and taught” (Acts 1: 1). It finds expression in the *Constitutions* as: The Brothers learn to meditate and to live the Gospel in the light of the mystery of Nazareth, where Jesus started to enact what he would later preach” (*Constitutions*, 7). Moreover, one must always take into account the great principle stated by the Fathers of the Church, according to which Christ himself is present in each of his mysteries.

A passage from the second Conference, prepared by Bro. Steven Baffert for the 1934 retreat gives us the clue for a reading of the mystery of Nazareth in the light of the Gospel, and, by extension, in the light of the whole of the Word of God. This is the text:

*“The life of the Family in Nazareth: The Holy Family Brother’s Gospel:*

But, someone might ask, how can anyone meditate on the hidden life of Jesus of Nazareth and on his family life when we have no details about it, if the Gospels say so little or are almost silent in this respect? We reply that one can meditate on the thirty years of Jesus’ hidden life by looking at the written Gospel. In order to study the thirty years of hidden life it suffices to project onto them the light of each one of the truths expressed in the Gospels’ messages. The truths in the written Gospel are like so many reflectors casting light on the obscure years of the lived Gospel.

Let us use an example: Jesus states in the Gospel: “I am the way, the truth and the life”. Let us apply these words to our Saviour’s childhood, to his obedience, to his silence, to his obscure and hard work, to his relationships of submission, of respect and of tenderness towards Mary and Joseph. We can contemplate, to help us, an icon of the Holy Family which represents Jesus complying with his duties of respect, affection and obedience to Mary and Joseph. Let us, our eyes fixed on the image, listen to Jesus telling us, by his example, with his heart, with his grace: “See, my son, how I behave towards my father and my mother, see how I love them, respect them and obey them. I do so in order to show you the way, and you know that my example is the only way to salvation. Any man and any religious seeking to make you opposed to your Superior is off the path and away from the truth, and if you follow him you and he will both fall into the ditch. My example of love and obedience gives the way to those who follow it. Those wanting to go their own way find death”.

Just a moment of reflection should suffice to understand that this method is fruitful and that it will unveil many wonders to us in a field which at first sight may appear to be empty.

The outcome, once the light of the Gospel is cast on the hidden life of our Saviour, might at first surprise us, but reflecting on it may render it clear. The Jesus in the life of the family and in the workshop in Nazareth is the same one who preached at Capernaum and on the shore of the lake of Tiberias. Now, Jesus couldn’t have preached a doctrine different from what he lived in Nazareth. His conduct and his preaching are identical. And his preaching is inevitably the most beautiful expression of his life, particularly that hidden part of his life at Nazareth, which the Holy Spirit seems intent to allow discovery by those chosen to study and know it, as is the case of the Brothers of the Holy Family. *Let us, therefore, meditate on the hidden life at Nazareth in the light of the Gospel; we will learn there, as did Saint Therese of the Infant Jesus, the spirit of family in the spirit of the holiest family that ever existed.*

These considerations by Bro. Steven Baffert indicate a path, a reading and a meditation method: “the thirty years of Jesus’ hidden life can be meditated upon by resorting to the whole Gospel”. We could say that **such a path can also be walked in the opposite direction,**



that is, beginning from the mystery of Nazareth and going towards various passages of the Word of God in the Old and in the New Testaments. Such an itinerary would follow these steps:

- the reading of the text,
- a synthesis of the core message of the reading,
- meditating and interpreting the message in the light of the mystery of Nazareth, and
- reflecting on our own life, which remains open to discernment, to prayer and to contemplation

In certain places the process begins with an analysis of the reality being lived by the group. One could also have a community sharing on the Word of God.

*To summarise : Lectio divina* could take place by answering the following questions:

What is the text saying?

What is the text saying to us?

What does the text say to us in the light of Nazareth?

### 4.3 INTERPRETING AND DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES WITH “NAZARENE EYES”

Discernment is a concrete exercise of Christian life, which aims at discovering God’s will in any given situation. Its contents are varied: charisms, signs of the times, the organization of communal or of group life, pastoral options etc. can all be the object of discernment.

Discernment demands certain requirements on the part of the person(s) or community. Living discernment supposes a certain maturity of Christian life, and at the same time, the inclusion in one’s own life of elements of growth and of formation. Practice enables us to enumerate a number of criteria that helps those wanting to enter a process of discernment.

Nazarene Spirituality confers certain characteristics on the individuals, groups and communities who practise it, and it offers some specific criteria **to those wanting to incorporate the “Spirit of family” into the practice of discernment in order to capture the signs of times and of places “with Nazarene eyes”**. The expression “Nazarene eyes” translates the point of view of he or she who lives the mystery of Nazareth, and who tries to see and to interpret a given situation in order to discover God’s will and to implement it in his or her life. When the heart has the Nazarene seal, it is possible to read the Gospel, the reality of life and one’s own history with “Nazarene eyes”.

Here are some of the criteria for practising discernment starting from the mystery of Nazareth:

- ask oneself if the situation considered includes the dynamics of the Incarnation: the divine becomes human to enable us to grow from within and to surmount it
- there are situations where the Gospel is lived before being announced (as in Nazareth)
- the “transcendence” values are united to the “condescendence” ones, which makes us become more humane.
- the act of faith in the mystery of the Incarnation (“without separation, without confusion”) also applies to human activities and in view of the Reign of God.
- the maturing and the growing processes are slow and gradual; exceptional leaps are exceptional.
- anything which hurts or destroys the individual, the family, or social relationships, is negative.
- any good news brings hope.
- check on the links that might be established with the beatitudes.
- ask oneself always when facing any situation, what “the Nazarene thing to do” would be.

#### 4.4 BUILDING THE COMMUNITY

The *Constitutions* as well as the *Life Project of the Nazarene Fraternities* and other documents of the Institute propose to their members to enter **into a dynamic process, that is, to design projects at different levels**. This supposes a dynamic vision of individuals and of groups, and it establishes a path open to the future:

- to define a life project,
- the life experience within which, for a given period of time, the project will be implemented,
- timely review of the implementation of the means designed to attain the projected goals,
- designing a new project.

In the Institute the right time for such dynamics is during the community meeting and the General and Provincial Chapters. The Institute has been living this type of organization ever

since the new *Constitutions* were introduced. This is a way to practice communal discernment. The meetings at the various communal levels (local, provincial and general) and the projects associated with them are two complementary aspects.

A project is associated to each one of the aforementioned community levels:

<b>Community, fraternity, local pastoral group</b>	<b>Community meeting</b>	<b>Community's Life Project</b>
<b>Province, commissions,</b>	Provincial Chapter	Province's Life Project
<b>Institute, instances of the Institute</b>	General Chapter	Institute's Life Project

Each individual creates his own Life Project.

The content of the projects embraces the various aspects of communal and group life which take into account the reality they relate to:

- community and personal prayer life,
- community or group life, relationships
- mission activities
- organisation and finances

The most important requirements to enter the dynamics of project elaboration and to participate in the process of communitarian discernment are as follows:

- a right intention and a desire to discover God's will,
- the clear identification of the object of discussion,
- to be as informed as possible about the matter,
- to participate in the dialogue,
- to be involved in the various stages of the process: information, deliberation, decision making...,
- to respect and to welcome mediation and authority.

Nazarene Spirituality accentuates certain aspects of the process of communitarian discernment:

- equality of all participants based on fraternity,
- simplicity, honesty and active participation in the dialogue,
- the acceptance of God's will through human mediation.

## 4.5 THE SHARED MISSION

*References:*

*The Sa-Fa Institute's mission today (2001)*

*Educational Project of the Brothers of the Holy Family (2011)*

The Sa-Fa family in continuity with Bro. Gabriel Taborin's work inserts itself within the mission of the local Catholic Church along with the activities highlighted by his charism (in the fields of Christian education, catechesis and animation of liturgy). The mission of the Institute is shared in different ways by the people of God, by those pertaining to various states of life (religious, lay, priests). This reality emphasizes communion for the mission of the Church in society, and it includes in the realities of life, certain forms of pastoral discernment and of modes of action conducive to cooperation and to the sharing of responsibilities.

### SHARING MOTIVATION

The activities of the mission may be shared **for different reasons and at various levels.**

- Collaboration in the promotion of human values and respect for the project is a common base.
- Participation in the dialogue between faith and culture constitutes a field for cooperation where debate is possible as well as proposals of inculturation, and the openness to other realities.
- The activities may be assumed as a mission of the Church through which one witnesses, announces and explicitly presents the Gospel.

### SHARING CHARISM

**Bro. Gabriel Taborin's charism strongly underlines fraternity.** A relationship with him is the point of encounter for those who, for different reasons, join the Sa-Fa family, and have the Holy Family of Nazareth as their reference point.

In the ecclesial field the institute's charism underlines the "common dignity of all the baptised" and the complementarity of all vocations. The activities of mission are assumed as true ecclesial ministries.

### TO SHARE IS TO RELATE AND TO COLLABORATE

The shared mission lends attention to the relation to, and collaboration between, priests, Brothers and lay people, in order to facilitate the integration of all into the various activities.

Some means that help the development of the shared mission are:

- maintaining an open relationship based on the family spirit which shows itself in the concrete details of everyday life in simple, close relations
- seeking ways and places to meet
- intensifying pedagogical and religious formation, and, in a joint effort of the religious Brothers and the laity, looking more profoundly into Bro. Gabriel's charism

- promoting an atmosphere of mutual respect and of mutual welcoming, helping one another
- sharing responsibilities
- creating and animating groups of young people, of parents, of teachers
- sharing times of prayer and celebration.

#### THE INSTITUTE'S EDUCATIONAL PROJECT

In the educational field, the "Educational Project" of the Institute presents a way of building up the educational community with all its components, community of Brothers, teachers, students, families, supporters, associations, making it possible for the school to fulfil its mission both in terms of culture and of evangelization, characterised by the family spirit.

### 4.6 FORMATION AT ONE WITH OUR OWN CHARISM

#### *References:*

*Formation Guide for the Brothers of the Institute of the Holy Family (1998)*

*Forming oneself for life in fraternity (2007)*

*Bro. Lino da Campo: Circular on The role of the Holy Family in the Formation of the Brothers (1988)*

The Sa-Fa family has documents providing formation instructions corresponding to the different states and stages of life, for various groups and individuals: for the Brothers there is the *Formation Guide* and the various plans for formation; for the Nazarene Fraternities, the book *Forming oneself for life in fraternity*. The pastoral plans also provide formation guidelines to be taken into account.

Sa-Fa spirituality...

... imparts a characteristic tone to the formation goals:

- configuration with Christ, particularly in terms of affiliation and of fraternity
- communion with the Church as the family of God
- assimilation of the charism of the Institute as a characteristic and dynamic factor
- preparation for mission, as of Jesus in Nazareth

... marks of all the dimensions of formation:

- the charismatic dimension presupposes all the others: personal, communitarian, cultural, Christian, religious, and is like the bond of union between them
- Sa-Fa spirituality offers living models of identification that are the Holy Family of Nazareth and Bro. Gabriel. And also, the life of the Brothers, of the communities, and of the Institute with the ordinary and extraordinary means of formation, characterises the means of formation and its dynamics with certain features
- personal and group accompaniment are inspired by the educational activity of Mary and Joseph, in order to become both closer and more profound

- accompaniment has as its reference (taking into account the mentality prevailing at the time), the form of accompaniment followed by Bro. Gabriel, especially with Mons. Devie, and the one he employed with the Brothers, in order to become more fraternal and persevering
- the personal and communal project with the possibility of entering a precise process for growth along with the contents of the charism and of the mission of the Institute
- discernment adds the family spirit to the common criteria
- prayer, listening to the Word of God and participating in the Sacraments also benefit from the tradition of the Institute
- personal and communitarian “asceticism” stress the virtues that support the family spirit.
- community life is central to formation
- apostolic activities lived in the light of the mystery of Nazareth

Reference to the **Holy Family is essential throughout the various stages of formation.** In each of the various stages involved the one formed is encouraged to have an “experience” of the Holy Family. To have such an experience means:

- to have a clear and mature perception of what the Holy Family is and of the place it has in his or her own life
- that our feelings, thoughts, our will, and all other expressions of our life are to be in line with those of the Holy Family
- to achieve an intimate and dynamic unity with the Holy Family, living together with them in reciprocal presence
- to feel part of the Mystery of Salvation, which, having begun in Nazareth continues today to be fulfilled in the Church and in the world.

We can reach this deep experience little by little. It is like the fruit acquired after a long spiritual maturing. But how can one attain a profound and conscious relationship with the Holy Family? How might we achieve what Bro. Gabriel asks of us? “The heart of a Christian, especially that of a Brother of the Holy Family, must often be found under their humble roof at Nazareth, in the bosom of that august Family, which gathers together all the virtues, human and divine”. (NG 607).

#### THE VOCATIONAL CALL

What Luke states about Mary, (acceptance and availability to God’s plan), Mathew states about Joseph’s vocation. Joseph displays some aspects which seem closer to the problems of those who, accustomed to a certain structure in the faith, must welcome a new plan of God for their lives. His “Fiat” does not simply echo Mary’s, but embraces the historical and legal coming to earth of the Son.

#### THE IDEALS AND THE ENTHUSIASM OF THE BEGINNINGS

After the annunciation Mary goes and visits Elizabeth in her home. She goes there to serve, to show her love in a practical manner, with concrete actions. But this encounter with her cousin gives her immediate opportunity to recount the marvels of the Almighty. The Magnificat is the prophetic announcement of a religious, social and political ideal, a synthesis of what will later be the message of the Gospel.

#### DISCOVERING THE COMMUNITY

For he or she who draws inspiration from the Holy Family of Nazareth it is fairly easy to perceive the complementary nature of Mary's and Joseph's spiritual experiences, whether because they both converge in Jesus, or because the three together, Jesus, Mary and Joseph, express the absolute need felt by everyone to integrate normally into the humanity of a "family" whether natural or spiritual. This is the case of a religious community, whose internal unity does not derive from ties of blood but rather from the sharing of certain spiritual values.

#### WHEN THE FIRST ORDEALS OCCUR

After Jesus' birth his parents presented him at the temple. There, together with the acknowledgement of the Son as the Messiah, the way in which the work of redemption will be accomplished. Mary listens: Jesus will be a sign of contradiction, and she herself will also become linked to his destiny. A sword will pierce her heart. The design of Jesus' work and death demands suffering, and so will the design of those who, like Mary and Joseph, are called to take part in the work of salvation of men. The persecution of Herod and the flight into Egypt is already a clear initial sign for the Holy Family.

#### THE INTERNAL ORDEALS

After the flight to Egypt and the other ordeals coming from without, Mary and Joseph undergo an internal ordeal with the loss of Jesus in the temple. There they experience anguish (Lk 2, 48) and have no peace till they find their son. The temple episode is already a clear reference to the great trial of the paschal mystery.

#### THE UNITY OF LIFE

The ordeal of losing Jesus at the temple is followed in Mary and Joseph's life by a period of intense and profound communion with their Son, "who continued to grow in age, in wisdom, and in grace under their authority". (Lk 2: 51-52).

The journey of formation in a life marked by the experience of the Holy Family has the following key points of reference:

*"After the "Yes" in Bethlehem, a vocation to a new life;*

*after the "Yes" in Nazareth, humility in the activity of faith*

*the Brother reaches the supreme hour of the "yes" of the cross*

*the last step of total conversion to the Lord, who is life and resurrection  
(Constitutions, 185).*

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION AND DIALOGUE:**

- *What is our experience of reading and understanding the Word of the Lord from the starting point of Nazareth?*
- *To what extent does this “Nazarene-ness” pervade our personal and communal criteria for discernment?*
- *Where, practically speaking, do we find the family spirit in the area of our pastoral work?*
- *In our on-going formation, which experiences have helped us the most in assimilating the charism of the Institute?*





## 5 THE PURPOSE

The purpose of any Christian spirituality is to help one another **respond as a community to the call to sanctity received through our baptism and addressed to all**. “All the Christian faithful, no matter their conditions, the duties of their state or the circumstances of their life, but precisely through them all, are sanctified day by day, so long as they accept it all with faith from the hand of the heavenly Father, and so long as they cooperate with the divine will, making apparent to all, even in their daily work, the charity with which God loved the world” (*Lumen Gentium*, 41; Cf. L.G.11).

In the growing process of individuals and of groups Sa-Fa spirituality accentuates on the one hand the link between personal maturation and the mystery of the Incarnation, and on the other hand, the vital relationship between personal growth and the on-going life of the Church .

### 5.1 HUMAN MATURITY AND CHRISTIAN SANCTITY

Human growth and the call to sanctity walk the same road.

Human sciences tell us that human maturity (whichever phase of life might be considered) consists of the integration of all the elements pertaining to one’s own personality and history, including lights and shadows, strengths and fragilities. It is an internal liberation process which has as its starting point the acceptance of that which the person has received and of the reality surrounding him or her, till one reaches full accomplishment: to become what one is. Such is the path to true happiness.

**Christian sanctity is the total fulfilment of the gift of the divine life received through baptism.** Growth is God's work: of the Father, who, by sending his Son and the Holy Spirit calls us all to the sanctity of Jesus Christ, who through the gift of his life and through his word calls all to follow him; and of the Holy Spirit, who, through his actions and through his gifts, is the most important agent of our sanctification. But sanctity is also the work of man, who goes from his increased awareness of the gift received to the elimination of all obstacles impeding his growth, and through his constant effort to cooperate with the divine action. The crucial point for growth lies in the personal encounter with God in Christ, which leads to the unveiling of one's own reality and of the possibility of a veritable transformation, in communion with him and with others. "He, who follows Christ, the perfect Man, perfects himself ever more in his own dignity as a human being". (*Gaudium et Spes*, 41)

Maturity, both human and Christian, consists of living in peace with oneself and with others, with nature and with God. The growth needed to attain it is to become like children who expect everything from their Father, and to increasingly identify with the feelings of the Son.

The first step of this journey is the acceptance of one's own reality and the welcoming of God's plan in one's own life.

**As in Nazareth**, where Mary and Joseph acknowledged themselves humbly before the Lord and accepted to become part of his plan of Salvation: "Behold the handmaid of the Lord, be it done to me according to your word". Like Jesus, who, who started to unveil his identity by stating that he had to be in "his Father's house", thus already announcing his whole life's journey, up to the cross and the resurrection.

**Like Bro. Gabriel**, who having discovered from a very young age his vocation as a Brother, remained loyal to it till the end, despite difficulties and lack of understanding.

## 5.2 PERSONAL GROWTH AND CHURCH DYNAMICS

Just as the life of individuals and of groups, the life of the Church is part of history. It had a start on Jesus' first coming, and it will come to an end on his second arrival, although its full reality implies a "before" that beginning, and a "beyond" after that end. It has been given everything from the start, but not everything has been fulfilled. The Church moves between the "already" and the "not yet".

The time of the Church is the time of summoning and of evangelization, the time for witness and for celebration, of hope and of the building of God's Kingdom coming into this world. "From this source the Church, equipped with the gifts of its Founder and faithfully guarding His precepts of charity, humility and self-sacrifice, receives the mission to proclaim and to spread among all peoples the Kingdom of Christ and of God and to be, on earth, the initial budding forth of that kingdom. While it slowly grows, the Church strains toward the

completed Kingdom and, with all its strength, hopes and desires to be united in glory with its King. (*Lumen Gentium*, 5)

**Growth in Christian Life implies as an essential element communion with God's Family**, which undergoes times of freedom and of desert, of monotony and of setbacks, of fresh starts, and of fulfilment.

But relationship with the Church, even keeping an open and universal mind, is concretely implemented **through a Christian community with its own characteristics**. Sa-Fa spirituality has always considered it important to insert itself within the local Church, contributing the characteristics of its own charism and mission.

Even though incorporation to one or another Christian community sometimes emerges spontaneously, personal discernment for living the different ways of belonging is an important exercise demanding a certain maturity.

### 5.3 THE STAGES OF THE JOURNEY

In the spiritual life, each person undertakes the journey in a personal way. The essential elements of Christian life (sacramental life, listening to God's Word and prayer, practise of the theological and the moral virtues, a sense of Church, commitment to mission, etc... are not always assimilated at the same levels of growth. **It matters, though, to be aware that one is always on a journey** although the path may not always be straightforward and despite the fact that each individual moves at his or her own pace.

By the light of the mystery of Nazareth we can pinpoint the main milestones of the spiritual journey.

#### 5.3.1 THE EMERGENCE OF LIFE

Between the Annunciation in Nazareth and Jesus' birth, and in the years that followed there is a blossoming of life. This might symbolize the beginning phase.

**Those who start**, based on the Sacraments of Christian Initiation, experience the joy of the first encounter and of the acceptance of the gift. Vocational discernment follows, together with the first ecclesial and social commitments, all of which imply a personal life project.

The attraction to God and the desire for interiority, on the one hand, and on the other the lack of inner freedom over one's passions cause the first struggles.

Growth depends on the implementation of concrete means: sacramental life, assimilation of the Word of God in meditation, attention to one's own conscience, and the effort of self

improvement, communal integration, accompaniment, and, above all, a huge desire to faithfully respond to God's will and to grow.

### **5.3.2 THE SILENCE OF NAZARETH**

The long years during which the Holy Family was in Nazareth are an image of continuity, of deepening, and of a lengthy maturation.

Spiritual maturation is achieved by intensifying one's personal relation with Jesus Christ and through faithful docility to the Holy Spirit, who acts within the person but also through mediations.

The acquisition of profound convictions, the implanting and the practice of the virtues of a Christian life demand much time and constant effort.

Our desires to be united to God, to walk in his presence, of interiorising his Word, to live the values in the Gospel, are hampered by dissipation, by shallowness, and by all the other human weaknesses. This is why the internal struggle between grace and human freedom intensifies.

In everyday life and in the interaction with the people nearest to one, the individual emerges as him or her true self, along with his or her virtues and darker sides, their strengths and frailties. The Nazareth "desert" is a place of continuous struggle so that the strength of impulsions, of desire and of passion, might be put to the service of others and of personal growth.

Transformation of the individual implies certain steps which might be more or less slow:

- to move on from the false concepts of God, of oneself and of others, especially those particularly close to us, to move more certainly towards the truth
- to move from legalistic formulations and oppressive inhibitions towards an ever greater interior freedom
- to move on from just wanting to implement one's own projects, to an integration of what is given to us and that which we can contribute to the wellbeing of all
- To move on from the individualistic adhering to one's own way to sharing it with others, accepting to be accompanied and to accompany others
- To move on from discursive prayer dominated by reason and thinking, towards a more affective, simple and vital prayer.

- To become capable of interpreting one's own life in terms of the "history of salvation".

As the person matures he or she undertakes responsibilities both in the Church and in society, which require his/her energy, work ability and creativity.

### **5.3.3 PASSEOVER**

But the day comes when Nazareth gives way to Jesus' other family and to the Church. It is the moment of Passover, of Easter, which helps us to understand all the phases of crisis implied by growth.

**Transition from one stage to the next normally implies periods of more or less accentuated crisis.** Calm periods intermingle with other destabilizing ones of breakdown during which a new situation is being forged.

The psychological, relational, social factors potentially conducive to crisis are many and varied. To be able to interpret and to live such periods is of capital importance for spiritual growth. From a Christian point of view, these are forms of communion with Christ in his journey from death to life.

The essential point of the transformation occurs within the individual himself, and in his relation with God. The person receives a new light that at the same time obscures his perception of the past. This is why at first the individual experiencing the crisis feels lost, in darkness.

Moving on towards an adult faith which motivates one's whole life and renders it dynamic, towards a hope that remains firm, even when put to the test, towards a charity that becomes complete gift of oneself, may be achieved through a lengthy evolution, although it very often happens in periods of crisis. In order to live through such periods, docility is crucial (letting God act and allowing someone trustworthy to guide you) but also patience based on hope.

Crisis may be personal, but also collective.

It is important to understand the phases of the process one is going through, but more so to have a living model of reference.

Bro. Gabriel Taborin, after his first life experience at Belleydoux and having accepted God's call to religious life, sought to start a religious community. Having discerned a final decision

with the help of Monsignor Devie, he devoted himself to the implementation of God's project for it: to live as a Brother and to found a congregation of Brothers with the Holy Family as their holy Patrons. This led him to rejoice in seeing "God's work" take root and grow, but also to be seriously tried and to be misunderstood till his death as a Brother, leaving a solidly implanted Congregation.

"The profile of the Founder, as drawn by the first Brothers, is an important reference point in their efforts for continual spiritual renewal and growth.

«His living and nurtured faith were a direct result of his solid hope and his love of God. From this triple source of his faith, his hope and his love emerged in him:

- a tender devotion for the Patron saints of the Institute, Jesus, Mary and Joseph
- submission to the Church and to its ministers
- his enjoyment of ceremonies of the divine cult
- unwavering firmness in difficulties and trust in God
- a spirit of prayer from which he expected everything
- an ardent zeal for God's glory and for the salvation of souls
- true humility which attracts heavenly blessings, and
- understanding of repentant sinners and forgetting of injuries".

(Bro. Frederic Bouvet, *Life; Constitutions* 9)

A more complete spiritual profile of Bro. Gabriel can be found in the *Summarium* of the *Positio* which has provided the base for the proclamation of his heroic virtues, officially acknowledged by the Church.

## 5.4 TOWARDS WHOLENESS

Human maturity is the result of a never completed process, through which the individual develops his/her potential, integrates his or her experiences, both the positive and the negative ones, harmonises and unifies all aspects of his or her existence, to the point where he or she feels completely in agreement with self. A mature Christian person is one who fully accepts the gift of being God's child and relates fraternally to everyone.

Christians are always on the way, and the last stages of Christian life are never moments of repose but of even greater dynamism.

Some of the signs of a Christian life which is reaching towards wholeness are:

- prayer becomes simpler and more contemplative: there is a constant walking in the presence of the Lord and in union with him.
- inner freedom and purity of heart are expressed in the care and consideration, in flexibility and openness to all.
- individual capacity for receiving and for gratitude, for worship and for praising increases.

There is an experience of balance between:

- Activity and passivity, both in one's relation to God and towards fellow men.
- Personal journey, community and ecclesial life.
- Aspirations and great desires, and the realities of life, with its boundaries and fragilities.

Faith is expressed in a love which unifies and gives life, and becomes evident through the fruits of the Spirit (joy and peace, kindness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control), as well as in hope that increasingly aspires to its fulfilment in eternal life.

#### **5.4.1 PEACE**

In the first reproduction of the official picture of the Institute one can see written at the bottom this motto: IN ORATIONE, LABORE ET CHARITATE\* PAX. It summarises the life of the Holy Family at Nazareth and of those who share the spirituality of the SA-Fa family.

In the Bible "peace" is both the most profound of man's aspirations and the greatest gift he may receive from God. To obtain peace is at the same time to restore things according to their original order and at the same time lead them to their fulfilment. Peace is the best expression of happiness and well-being in our day-to-day existence. It reveals the condition of an individual in harmony within self, with others, with nature and with God. Peace is the sum total of possessions. Although it is true that there is an ongoing struggle for peace, together with the fight for justice and a blessing for the "builders" of peace in relationships amongst men; peace is a gift from God, "peace to those whom he loves" (Lk 2:14), a paschal gift (Jn 20: 19), "a fruit of the Spirit" (Gal 5: 22), and expectation of eternal life (Rm 8: 6). "Christ is our peace". (Eph 2: 14)

**SOME QUESTIONS FOR REFLEXION AND DIALOGUE:**

- *What is the interrelation between our journey and that of the Church? What do we receive and what do we give? Do we experience being on a journey in a pilgrim Church?*
- *How have we lived our moments of crisis? How have they made us grow?*
- *Are we aware of anyone having achieved wholeness? Which characteristics of our spirituality do they possess?*



# INDEX

<b>PRESENTATION.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>1. INTRODUCTION: THE SA-FA SPIRITUALITY .....</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>2. THE LIVING SOURCES.....</b>	<b>7</b>
2.1 THE WORD OF GOD .....	7
2.1.1 The Gospels relating to Jesus' childhood. ....	8
2.1.2 Some passages from Holy Scripture .....	9
2.1.3 Marriage and Family in God's plan .....	11
2.2 LITURGY .....	12
2.2.1 The Sacraments.....	13
2.3 PRAYER .....	16
2.3.1 In the Liturgy.....	16
2.3.2 In harmony with the Liturgy.....	18
2.4 SIGNS AND SYMBOLS .....	21
2.5 THE LIFE EXPERIENCE.....	24
2.5.1 Brother Gabriel Taborin's Life, Charism and Message.....	24
2.5.3 The Rule of Life.....	35
2.5.4 The Institute's documents .....	36
2.5.5 The Life and Teachings of the Church .....	37
2.5.6 The World and cultural diversity.....	38
Some questions for reflexion and dialogue: .....	41
<b>3 THE CONTENTS.....</b>	<b>42</b>
3.1 THE IMAGE OF GOD. ....	42
3.1.1 God-Family, love community. ....	42
3.1.2 The Holy Trinity, the Holy Family and the community. ....	43
3.2 THE MYSTERY OF NAZARETH: MARY AND JOSEPH AS A FAMILY .....	44
3.2.1 A Family.....	45
3.2.2 Between Creation and Redemption. ....	45
3.2.3 Within the boundaries of the New Covenant. ....	46
3.2.4 Gospel of the "Family" .....	46
3.3 A WAY OF CONCEIVING THE CHURCH: GOD'S FAMILY.....	48
3.4 LOOKING AT THE WORLD .....	51
3.5 THE CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE INSPIRED IN NAZARETH.....	51
3.5.1 In Nazareth they prayed .....	53
3.5.2 In Nazareth they work.....	56
3.5.3 In Nazareth they love of each other. ....	60
3.5.4 THE CHARACTERISTIC VIRTUES: HUMILITY, SIMPLICITY, UNITY, OBEDIENCE, AND SELF-GIVING .....	64
Some questions for reflexion and dialogue .....	66
<b>4. METHODS.....</b>	<b>67</b>
4.1 DAILY LIFE GUIDED BY THE "SPIRIT OF FAMILY" .....	67
4.2 THE READING AND THE MEDITATION OF THE WORD OF GOD IN THE LIGHT OF THE MYSTERY OF NAZARETH .....	68
4.3 INTERPRETING AND DISCERNING THE SIGNS OF THE TIMES WITH "NAZARENE EYES" .....	70

4.4 BUILDING THE COMMUNITY .....	71
4.5 THE SHARED MISSION.....	73
4.6 FORMATION AT ONE WITH OUR OWN CHARISM .....	74
Some questions for reflexion and dialogue: .....	77
<b>5 THE PURPOSE.....</b>	<b>78</b>
5.1 HUMAN MATURITY AND CHRISTIAN SANCTITY .....	78
5.2 PERSONAL GROWTH AND CHURCH DYNAMICS .....	79
5.3 THE STAGES OF THE JOURNEY .....	80
5.3.1 The emergence of life.....	80
5.3.2 The silence of Nazareth .....	81
5.3.3 Passover .....	82
5.4 TOWARDS WHOLENESS .....	83
5.4.1 Peace .....	84
Some questions for reflexion and dialogue: .....	85