

North American Lay Fraternities

Letter from Fr. Lenny

Dear brothers and sisters living in your own Nazareth,

If we each have our own obsessions, Nazareth was surely the holy obsession for Charles de Foucauld. His first visit to the Holy Land, to Jerusalem and Nazareth, was just a few months after his confession of conversion with Fr Huvelin. Pilgrimages in 1888 to the Holy Land was a traveler's nightmare. Everything was on horseback, and the accommodations and food would have been a real ordeal for any European. We know Br. Charles spent a month in Jerusalem and a month in Nazareth. He would return to live in Nazareth after his seven years with the Trappists in Akbes, Syria, which was

the poorest and most destitute monastery of the French. It was there in that monastery that he recorded his witness of the Armenian massacres at the hands of the Turks in the surrounding area.

After leaving the Trappists, Br. Charles worked as a gardener/handyman for the Poor Clare Nuns in Nazareth, living for two years in the tool shed of their garden. At first it was a life he always

wanted, but eventually he became restless again and continued his never-ending search for his beloved brother and Lord, Jesus. He realized that the Nazareth he longed for wasn't there.

His own relentless search for *Jesus of Nazareth* took the rest of his short life. Br. Charles slowly realized that wherever and amongst whomever he lived, he was at home with the Holy Family in the Nazareth of his heart.

You can never read and pray enough of just what

Nazareth is for you. Your everyday ordinary and perhaps monotonous life is the very same reality Jesus experienced for thirty years. It was this "mystery" of the Incarnation that never left the contemplative heart and mind of Br. Charles.

You may know I have begun a monthly spiritual conference of sorts for English-speaking people in the USA and six other countries. On the first

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Nazareth

Editor's Desk

At this time of year, many of us are very done with winter, persevering with our Lenten resolutions, and wondering if we will ever get to any of the proverbial "Spring cleaning"! Yes, this is all part of living Nazareth, the vision of our mentor, St. Charles de Foucauld. Of course, the authors of the articles in our issue provide much more reflection on the theme of Nazareth than I ever could! Ciro Piccirillo, the Coordinator of our International Team and substitute coordinator for the North American Region,

invites us to reflect on our Lenten journey as we live our own Nazareths. Carlos Schroder's article helps the reader to understand what exactly Brother Charles was trying to live out in the southern Sahara, and how these years in his life provide us a role model in our own personal lives.

The theme for our next issue (June, 2026) is "Sacred Heart." The deadline for submission of articles is 5/20. May all of you have a blessed

Lent and a joy-filled Easter Season as you live your personal Nazareth in the spirit of Charles de Foucauld.

P.S. You may want to consider sending a donation to the Little Sisters of Jesus Christ, who have only one convent in the United States, which was newly established in 2023 in Delaware. The Sisters care for homeless children, HIV/AIDS patients, and the elderly. You can read more about the Little Sisters of Jesus Christ at lsjc.in.

Fr. Lenny

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Sunday of every month about sixty people gather on the miracle of Zoom where I try to share my insights and journey in regard to St. Charles. We then randomly break up into groups of three where participants can share their Nazareth journey. We have just finished six sessions. They have been recorded, and you may request copies of the presentations and information about them from this email

address: charlesdefoucauldinfo@gmail.com

Please know that all of you are in my prayers daily. In the midst of the chaos we are living in, I pray each day that we can cry the Gospel with our lives.

St. Charles de Foucauld

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Do you have news or information to share? Please send an email to the editor.

The Grace of the Hidden Life: Lent at Nazareth

As Lent begins, we do not step into an abstract spiritual season. We enter it with the weight and grace of our real lives. The daily lives we carry, sometimes marked by quiet joy, sometimes shaped by hidden pain. We carry responsibilities, unfinished conversations, hopes for those we love, and concerns for the Church and the world. We live in a time of rapid change, cultural uncertainty, and quiet spiritual searching. Many around us long for meaning but hesitate before faith. Many believers remain faithful yet wonder how to live the Gospel deeply and credibly in this new landscape.

In the midst of all this, a simple question arises from the heart: “Where are You, Lord, in what I am living?” The mystery of Nazareth offers a gentle but profound answer. Before preaching, before miracles, before gathering disciples, Jesus lived thirty hidden years in ordinary life. He worked. He prayed. He obeyed. He grew. *“He went down with them and came to Nazareth... and He grew in wisdom and stature”* (Luke 2:51-52). Those hidden years were not a delay before the “real” mission. They were its foundation. Nazareth reveals that God chooses what is quiet, patient, and unseen. The Son of God embraced the rhythm of daily life. He did not hurry toward visibility but allowed love to mature in silence.

Lent invites us into that same movement. It is not a season of dramatic or heroic gestures. It is a return to the essentials. A descent into simplicity. A willingness to let God work beneath the surface of our activities and in the heart of our inner experiences. In the spirit of Nazareth, Lent becomes less about doing more and more about becoming truer.

Saint Charles de Foucauld, our beloved brother, understood this deeply. After his conversion, he was drawn not to the extraordinary works of Christ but to His hidden life. Nazareth became his compass, desiring to imitate Jesus in obscurity, in humble presence, in quiet fidelity. He believed that the renewal of the Church and the transformation of the world began in the silent transformation of the heart.

To live Lent in this spirit means allowing God to reshape us in small, concrete ways: in the patience we show at home, in the attention we give to someone who feels overlooked, in the discipline of private daily prayer or in the choice to listen rather than react. In a culture that prizes visibility, power and quick results, this path may seem insignificant. Yet the Gospel tells us otherwise: the Kingdom grows like a seed hidden in the soil. Its power lies in its quiet perseverance, in its hidden potential to germinate and bear fruit in its own time.

Nazareth reminds us that God is already present in the ordinary spaces of our lives. He precedes us there. He waits for us there. He accompanies us there. He is not found only in exceptional moments but in the steady faithfulness of each day. Lent, then, becomes a school of attention: attention to God’s presence, attention to the movements of our own hearts, attention to the needs of others. Through prayer, fasting, and acts of charity, we are not trying to achieve something impressive. We are consenting to be purified. We are making room for Christ to grow within us. Father, I abandon myself into your hands...

Our world is marked by tension, division, and noise. The Church herself walks through purification and renewal. In such a time, Nazareth becomes prophetic. It calls us back to humility, coherence, and fraternity. It reminds us that authentic witness is born from interior unity. Brother Charles dreamed of being a brother to every person without exception. That dream was shaped in silence and sustained in hidden fidelity. His life shows us that holiness is possible in the ordinary, that love transforms quietly, and that presence itself can be deeply missionary.

As we begin this Lenten journey, may we choose Nazareth. May we trust the slow work of grace. May we allow Christ to purify our intentions and widen our hearts. May we discover that God is closer than we imagined, not in the spectacular, but in the silent and faithful rhythm of daily life.

Nazareth is not behind us. It is before us. It is within us. During this season of Lent, it becomes the path by which we seek the Lord each day.

Your Brother from the North,

Ciro Piccirillo

Coordinator, International Team

Lay Fraternities of Charles de Foucauld

Nazareth by Carlos Schroder

What is Nazareth? From a Catholic perspective, the temptation is to assume that Nazareth is a place, and a historical place at that, the geography where Jesus spent his childhood. That is true, but a partial truth; a small part of a much larger whole. Thinking of Nazareth as just a series of coordinates is where we err. Brother Charles invites us to go beyond that polished surface and focus on Nazareth as the specific spatial and temporal location in which we encounter ourselves. Our place in the world.

This is another way of saying that the idea of spectacular deeds and actions is neither the more common nor the more reliable strategy to make it to Heaven, however we choose to imagine being fully ourselves in God. Rather, carrying out our daily responsibilities among those around us is the surest, most obvious way to achieve God's dream for us. We are usually tempted with images of nearly impossible sacrifices and renunciations, but these are merely a way of showing off how much we love God, how much we are giving up for Him. In other words, all that more often than not amounts to is a narcissistic exercise to please our egos, a show we put up for others and for ourselves.

When we consider what we are called to do, called to be, what comes to mind are the words of brother Charles: "It is not necessary to teach others, to cure them or to improve them; it is only necessary to live among them, sharing the human condition and being present to them in love." To be more precise: we should take seriously when Jesus tells us "[not to] worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own." (Matthew 6:34) And not just tomorrow, but the next hour, the next moment. Not because there are no reasons to be concerned about what may happen in the future, but because if we do not pay full attention to the present moment, we are missing life.

But we are afraid. We are afraid of living our lives. We are afraid that other people will look at us and think us crazy. Afraid that if we do not do like everybody else does, everybody else will judge us. Afraid that if we don't spend most of our time worrying about the future, the future will condemn us for our lack of planning. Afraid that if we move towards a life that reflects as much as we can the life of Jesus in Nazareth, we will walk away from everything good this life has to offer.

It is not that our fears are unfounded. They are not. Some will think us crazy, some will judge us, some things we will lose. But faith lived in our personal Nazareth does not mean a life devoid of fear. Rather, it means that we will be strong enough to carry ourselves with our fears through desolate nights and doubts.

So, here's a plan for a life in our personal Nazareths: Start the day in prayer, consider the work ahead, do it as if the work itself were a prayer. When it comes time to rest or eat, do it also as a prayer. In sharing the day with others - any others - think of them as Jesus and act accordingly. Finally, when the day is done, give thanks for the day and await the next day. And the next. One day at a time. One Nazareth at a time.

Editor's Note: Carlos Schroder was born in Buenos Aires, Argentina. He received a doctorate in Comparative Literature at the University of Maryland. A former professor, the author works as a freelance editor and translator. Additionally, Carlos continues his work with APDH (an Argentine human rights group). As a current resident of Washington, D.C., Carlos tries to travel and spend as much time as possible in Buenos Aires. He is also a writer and a poet.

Desert Ramblings by Arlene Moeller

Within the last few years, there was a meme on the internet that depicted St. Joseph laboring in his workshop. Near him was one-year old Jesus on the floor playing with jumbo, thick iron nails. Hmm...Wait until Blessed Mother gets home!! I plainly see the metaphor, but I can't help shake my head due to being a parent myself as well as a retired Child Protection Social Worker.

Today I searched on the internet, "St. Joseph the Carpenter" and found more unsafe conditions in St. Joseph's work area. For instance, one image depicts St. Joseph holding a knife, which appears to be a half inch away from one-year-old Jesus who is sitting in front of him, straddled on a board.

Another photo shows St. Joseph using a nice-looking wooden hand plane against the surface of a table. Jesus, estimated to be about age three or four, is watching intently with his hands resting flat on the table (palms down). No joke. His fingertips on his right hand appeared to be near the edge of the hand plane!

But it becomes even scarier...While St. Joseph is using a hand plane tool on a piece of wood, Jesus is sitting on the table next to him, holding his very own tool just like daddy!

Now to the topic of Holy Cards...A search using the words, "Holy Family of Nazareth" produced primarily happy, pious portraits of the trio. There were a few where St. Joseph was working in his workshop with Blessed Mother and Jesus hanging out. In one image Mary holds a one-year-old Jesus in her arms while he feeds an overweight lamb. Joseph looks at them while he works. To be fair, the photos we select for albums (old-fashioned or digital) usually portray the best of us. We typically do not take photos of our families irritated or angry. However, St. Joseph and Blessed Mother were fully human. Most likely they each had their less than stellar moments.....By the way, did the Holy Family own a dog or a few cats?

