Session 1

The Secret of Nazareth

A. Opening hymn and greeting

B. Invocation of the Holy Spirit

C. Reading from the Word of God

He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name (Jn 1:11-12).

The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him. Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom […] He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man (Lk 2:40-42; 51-52).

D. Biblical Catechesis

1. He came to what was his own.

Why does the family have to choose a lifestyle? What are the new lifestyles for today's family regarding work and celebration? Two biblical passages describe the way the Lord Jesus came among us (Jn 1:11-12) and lived in a human family (Lk 2:40-41; 51-52).

The first text presents Jesus to us living among his own people. "He came to what was his own, but his own people did not accept him. But to those who did accept him he gave power to become children of God, to those who believe in his name".

The everlasting Word leaves from the Father's heart, comes to live among his people and becomes part of a human family. The people of God, who should have been the womb that welcomed the Word, proved to be sterile. His own do not accept him; on the contrary, they killed him. The mystery of Jesus of Nazareth's rejection is found in the heart of his coming in our midst. However, to those who do accept him, "he gave power to become children of God".

Under the cross, John sees the fulfillment of what he proclaims at the beginning of his gospel. "When Jesus saw his mother and the disciple there whom he loved" (Jn 19:26), he gave his mother to her new son and entrusted his mother to the beloved disciple. The evangelist comments: "And from that hour the disciple took her into his home" (19:27). This is the "style" that Jesus asks from us to come in our midst: a style that can welcome and generate. Jesus asks the family to be the place that welcomes and generates life fully. It not only gives physical life but it also opens up to the promise and joy. The family becomes capable of

"welcoming" if it preserves its intimacy, the story of each one, family traditions, trust in life and hope in the Lord.

The family becomes capable of "generating" when it circulates the gifts it has received, when it takes care of the rhythm of daily life between work and celebration, affection and charity, commitment and gratuity. This is the gift that is received in the family: to take care of and transmit life in the couple and to the children. The family has its rhythm, like a heartbeat. It is a place of rest and enthusiasm, arrival and departure, peace and dreaming, tenderness and responsibility.

The couple has to build the atmosphere before children arrive. Work cannot turn the house into a desert; instead, the family should learn to live and combine the moments for work and those for celebration. Many times the family will have to measure itself against outside pressures that do not allow it to choose the ideal, but the Lord's disciples are those who live in concrete situations but know how to give flavor to all things, even what they cannot be changed, because they are the salt of the earth. In particular, Sunday should be a time for trust, freedom, encounter, rest and sharing. Sunday is the moment for the encounter between the man and the woman.

Above all, it is the Lord's Day, the day of prayer, the Word of God, the Eucharist, openness to the community and charity. In this way, the weekdays will also get light from Sunday and the celebration. There will be less dispersion and more encounter, less haste and more dialogue, fewer things and more presence. A first step in this direction is to see how we live in our home, what we do in our home. We need to see what our home is like and consider our style of living, the choices we have made in it, the dreams we have nurtured, the sufferings we experience, the struggles we endure and the hopes we cherish.

2. The secret of Nazareth.

In this village of Galilee Jesus lived the longest period in his life. Jesus became a man. As the years passed, he went through many human experiences in order to save them all: he became one of us, he became part of a human family, and he lived thirty years in absolute silence, which become a revelation of the mystery of the humility of Nazareth.

The refrain that opens the passage sketches out the "secret of Nazareth". It is the place to grow in wisdom and God's grace, in the context of a family that welcomes and generates. "The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and the favor of God was upon him". The mystery of Nazareth tells us in a simple way that Jesus, the Word that came down from heaven, the Son of the Father, became a child, took on our humanity, grew up as a child in a family, lived the experience of

religiosity, the law, and daily life cadenced by work days, rest on the sabbath and the calendar of the feasts. The "son of the Most High" who took on the cloak of fragility and poverty, was accompanied by the shepherds and people who expressed the hope of Israel.

However, the Mystery of Nazareth is much more: it is the secret that fascinated great saints like Teresa of Lisieux and Charles de Foucauld. In fact, the refrain that closes the episode says that Jesus "went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them; and his mother kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus advanced in wisdom and age and favor before God and man".

This is the profound mystery of Nazareth: Jesus, the Word of God in person, was immersed in our humanity for thirty years. The human words, the family relations, the experience of friendship and conflicts, health and sickness, joy and suffering became languages that Jesus learned in order to speak the Word of God.

Where did Jesus' words come from if not from the family and the context of Nazareth, his images, his ability to look at a field, the farmer who sows, the golden harvest, the woman who kneads the dough, the shepherd who lost his sheep, and the father with his two sons? Where did Jesus learn his surprising ability to tell stories, to imagine, to compare and to pray in and with life? Didn't they come from Jesus' immersion in the life of Nazareth? For this reason, we say that Nazareth is the place of humility and hiding. The word is hidden, the seed comes down into the womb of the earth and dies in order to bring God's love as a gift; indeed, God's paternal face. This is the mystery of Nazareth.

3. Family ties.

Jesus lives in a family marked by Jewish spirituality and fidelity to the law: "Each year his parents went to Jerusalem for the feast of Passover, and when he was twelve years old, they went up according to festival custom".

The family and the law were the context where Jesus grew in wisdom and grace.

The Hebrew family and Jewish religiosity, a patriarchal family and a domestic religion – with its yearly feasts, the sense of the sabbath, prayer and daily work and the style of a couple's pure and tender love – allow us to see how Jesus lived his family in depth.

We, too, grow up in a human family with attachments that welcome us and let us grow and respond to life and to God. We, too, become what we have received. The mystery of Nazareth is the whole of all these ties: the family and religiosity, our roots and our people, our daily life and dreams for the future. The adventure of human life starts from what we have received: life, home, affection, language, faith. Our humanity is forged by a family, with its riches and its forms of poverty.

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E. Listening to the Magisterium

Family life brings a unique, new and creative style with it to be lived and enjoyed in the couple and transmitted to the children so that it will change the world. The evangelical style of family life has influence inside and beyond the ecclesial circle and makes the charisma of marriage shine, the new commandment of love of God and neighbor. In an evocative way Familiaris Consortio No. 64 exhorts us to rediscover a more family-friendly face of the Church by adopting "a more human and fraternal style of relationships".

Evangelical lifestyle in the family

Inspired and sustained by the new commandment of love, the Christian family welcomes, respects and serves every human being, considering each one in his or her dignity as a person and as a child of God.

It should be so especially between husband and wife and within the family, through a daily effort to promote a truly personal community, initiated and fostered by an inner communion of love. This way of life should then be extended to the wider circle of the ecclesial community of which the Christian family is a part.

Thanks to love within the family, the Church can and ought to take on a more homelike or family dimension, developing a more human and fraternal style of relationships. Love, too, goes beyond our brothers and sisters of the same faith since "everybody is my brother or sister."

In each individual, especially in the poor, the weak, and those who suffer or are unjustly treated, love knows how to discover the face of Christ, and discover a fellow human being to be loved and served. In order that the family may serve man in a truly evangelical way, the instructions of the Second Vatican Council must be carefully put into practice: "That the exercise of such charity may rise above any deficiencies in fact and even in appearance, certain fundamentals must be observed. Thus, attention is to be paid to the image of God in which our neighbor has been created, and also to Christ the Lord to whom is really offered whatever is given to a needy person" (AA 8). [Familiaris Consortio, 64]

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F. Questions for dialogue in the couple and as a group

Questions for the couple

1. Is our family a place that welcomes and generates life fully in its various human and Christian dimensions?
2. What choices do we make so that our family will be a space to grow in wisdom and God's grace?
3. What kind of family, affective and religious ties nurture the growth of the couple and the children?

Questions for the family group and the community

1. What are the new lifestyles for today's family regarding work and celebration?
2. What choices and criteria guide our daily life?
3. What communication and social problems need to be tackled in order to make the family a place of human and Christian growth?
4. What cultural difficulties are encountered in transmitting the forms of the good life and faith?

G. A commitment for family and social life

H. Spontaneous prayers. Our Father

I. Closing hymn