

# Without a Book of Memories

By Fr. Franklyn McAfee

*A mile inland from the Dead Sea on a plateau adjacent to the wadi Qumran, there once flourished a community of religious Jews called Essenes. Historians today refer to them as the Qumran Community. They were desert dwellers and to a certain degree resembled some Christian monastic communities by living in huts, tents and caves, performing manual labor during the day, and sharing a common meal in the early evening after which they spent the rest of the night in prayer and study before finally retiring. Some hold that many of St. John the Baptist's disciples were members of this sect.*

Believing themselves to be the nucleus of the New Israel foretold by the prophets Jeremiah and Ezekiel, the Essenes of Qumran symbolically divided themselves into twelve tribes, and their religious fervor was marked by a high degree of messianism. They were flourishing during the time of Christ with their community structures within sight of the place where John was performing his baptism of repentance in the Jordan Valley near the Dead Sea which has led some people to believe that the Baptist himself had been associated with them.

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## Perfect Seminary

What a perfect seminary this would have been for the future Messiah—to live among holy men reading and reflecting on the scriptures, practicing celibacy and poverty while awaiting the call to serve the Lord God. However, Jesus did not belong to this impressive fraternity of fellow Israelites and the preparation for His own ministry did not take place within these semi-monastic walls of assiduous prayer and study. Nor did He sit at the feet of any conventional Rabbi in Nazareth or Jerusalem, nor for that matter did He seek His education and formation in intellectual centers at Athens or Rome. Certainly, God had the option of using either the milieu of Qumran or Jerusalem, or Rome or Athens in which His Messiah would be formed and educated, but He chose not to. Rather the Messiah, the Redeemer of the world, would receive the preparation, instruction, and formation for His supremely important ministry in the quiet town of Nazareth—in the sanctuary of His home. "And He went down with them and came to Nazareth, and was obedient to them" (Luke 2:51). Our Blessed Lord's training and formation took place in the everyday world of the family, both in His own family in Nazareth and

in the homes of those who knew and loved His mother and foster-father. Certainly He spent times in solitary prayer, as He did so often during the years of His public ministry, and He did make a spiritual retreat of 40 days in the wilderness prior to the beginning of His public preaching. But for the 30 years that preceded all that, His basic formation took place in the carpenter shop with Joseph and in the kitchen helping Mary. No doubt whatever athletics were popular then, Jesus learned them firsthand from Joseph, His foster-dad, and He also learned the more serious aspects of family life as He supported His mother in her bereavement at the loss of her beloved husband and also during the years of her widowhood.

Too often we erroneously think that all Mary and Joseph did was stand in awe of their Son and learn from Him while angels fixed the food, cleaned the dishes, and scrubbed the clothes. But Christ chose to come among us and be "a man like us in all things except sin." So, He lived and learned like us in the community of His family. He who knew all things learned His Hebrew prayers on the lap of His Jewish mother; He who created the universe learned how to cut wood and make furniture from His devoted foster-father; and in the Virgin Mary's arms, "He slept our sleep and dreamt our dreams."

It was the Father's eternal will that His only-begotten Son, who knew the warmth and companionship of the Trinity, be born into a human family and through that family take His momentous place in the history of mankind. Jesus, then, was no stranger to this smallest of all social groups. He came because of the failure of that first family in Eden. He was locked out of homes



in Bethlehem. He invited Himself to the house of Zacchaeus, and frequently dined at the homes of people who invited Him. He would go often with His mother, and at times with His apostles, to the abode of Lazarus, Martha, and Mary at Bethany. He spoke often and fervently of His own Father. He loved to teach and talk with children. He had compassion on widows and on parents who had lost their children.

### The Importance of Family Life

Recently one of the television networks spent several hours examining the family to ascertain whether or not it would survive; but one does not find the answers to the questions relating to home life until one finds out what God intended for the family. God who gave us families must know something about them not only because He created the family, but also because He deigned to become a member of a family on earth, "born of a woman" as the Apostle Paul reminds us. When we read the pages of the New Testament we can see how important the home and the family were to the Lord and how often His teachings were in one way or another directed toward them. We also see the important role the home played in the formation of the Church, a role to which the Second Vatican Council again calls it to assume more visibly. It is this role that is being threatened today and the Enemy is aiming his biggest weapons at it.

The recent Apostolic Exhortation on the family, "Familiaris Consortio" by Pope John Paul II stresses that the family must be renewed and the sacredness of marriage protected against the secularizing pressures of today's society. A recent study made of young men attending seminaries on the East Coast

showed what one would expect; that an overwhelming majority of them came from intact families, i.e. homes with both parents and most of them were from families that had several children. If the

family disintegrates then vocations both to the priesthood and the religious life will also decline.

Back in the early 60's during the Garabandal apparitions family life was still relatively strong and the



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assault on it had not yet reached its full fury. But the seeds of destruction had been sown and the decline was about to begin. At the time it might have surprised some that Our Blessed Mother would single out wedding rings as special objects to kiss. Seen in the context of those days especially in pro-family and staunchly Catholic Spain, it appeared that the Blessed Virgin was doing this to reaffirm the sacredness of the marriage vows. Looking back, these gestures now seem more to have been motivated by a glance toward the future attack on marriage and the family. What the Vatican Council was going to teach in words, the Virgin Mary was going to teach in gesture. The fact that many marriages which had been strained or fractured were strengthened and healed as a result of the kissed wedding rings underlines the prophetic nature of the gesture.

We should remember that at Fatima Our Lady revealed that many marriages were not of God and that more people go to Hell because of sins of the flesh than for any other reason. The kissing of wedding rings (which are sacramentals) was Mary's positive counterattack against the Satanic forces that seek to destroy marriage and the family. In 1960 almost 85% of Catholics attending Mass every Sunday considered pre-marital sex immoral. In 1981 the percentage had dropped to 34%, and this among Catholic young people who go to Mass every Sunday! Something is seriously wrong.

At Garabandal, the Virgin Mary warned that many bishops, priests, and cardinals were on the road to perdition and taking many souls with them. Consider the dissent coming from within the Church on such matters as contraception,

abortion, sterilization, adultery, divorce, and homosexuality. Consider also that this dissent is tolerated, even agreed with by some members of the Church hierarchy and one can see how painfully accurate Our Lady's mournful 1965 statement has become. Pope John Paul II reminded the bishops of Nicaragua recently that the Church's greatest enemies were those within her.

## Testing Ground

The number of young couples living together before marriage is increasing rapidly. One of the reasons is that the couple is afraid of divorce and they see this cohabitation as a "testing ground" as to whether their marriage will be lasting. Noble as this intention may be, the couple still is living in serious sin and no lasting marriage can be built on such a foundation. Although the "experts" and the media endorse this living together situation, studies show that when these couples eventually marry a majority of them will end in divorce. As one psychiatric social worker who has worked for years with engaged couples told me, "Living together is the worst possible form of marriage preparation."

## The Impact of TV

Television has broken down our moral system by removing the shame felt about certain actions. So adultery is not always wrong, homosexuality is another legitimate lifestyle, sex is for recreation, etc. When you realize that a study showed that 40% of youngsters interviewed replied that they preferred the television set to their own father, you can begin to imagine the disastrous situation that still awaits us when

these kids get old enough to marry.

Because of the economy many mothers have to work, and many teenagers have to hold down part-time jobs. Dinner is no longer the time for family discussion and fellowship but is served on the run. Vacations are no longer family events and children are being raised without a book of memories. Couple this with a culture that stresses (via music and movies) that young people are totally separate from the adult world and we get a deep, seemingly unbridgeable gap between parent and child. This gap, this lack of a two-way communication is one of the reasons for the increase in teenage suicide attempts.

## The Antidote—Garabandal

Add to all these woes the fact that the majority of crimes are committed by those 18 years of age or younger, and a government study which shows that 70% of seventh graders drink, one might be tempted to become a monk in the Mojave Desert. But God will not abandon His people. The fulfillment of the Garabandal Message will rectify the situation. Certainly all problems will not disappear but the Church will be strengthened to effectively proclaim Christ's message about the family and marriage, and the world will respond.

After all it is fitting that the Lord Jesus use His mother as an instrument to renew and defend the Christian family. "When Jesus saw His mother and the disciple whom He loved standing near, He said to His mother, 'Woman behold your son!' Then He said to the disciple 'Behold your mother!' And from that hour the disciple took her into his own home." (John 19:26-27)—and also into ours. □