In his book entitled *The Sacred Journey*, Frederick Buechner gives me the words with which I would like to start this lecture. He says there that “all theology, like all fiction, is at its heart autobiography, and that what a theologian is doing essentially is examining as honestly as he can the rough-and-tumble of his own experience with all its ups and downs, its mysteries and loose ends, and expressing in logical, abstract terms the truths about human life and about God that he believes he has found implicit there”.

What I am doing here has certainly more than just an autobiographical touch. It represents a good look into my journey and expresses my aim, my struggle and my adventurous attempt to capture and to embrace a trembling understanding of who God is; of what He is doing, and how He is doing it. It is also an attempt to capture more about who I am. Of my vulnerabilities and my unbelief. About my calling and the challenge to design it in the frame of this generation of which I am a part and to whom I have been sent.

At the heart of this presentation you will see me struggling with the privilege and the responsibility of doing theology. This, after all, is the task entrusted to all of us in the Christian family. All of us are part of this beautiful hermeneutic community that is willing to offer its life and its work to God in adoration.

There are three branches of my vocational tree that I want to share with you today. These should be seen as I go on sharing with you about the task of doing theology. The first one is, I am less arrogant today than I was yesterday. I think so, and I hope so. I know that such an affirmation could sound arrogant, but still I dare to say it. I say this as a confession and as a conviction. Very often arrogance has contaminated our theological task, yesterday and today as well. At the present chapter of my life, I do theology eager to make mine the words of that stuttering father who told Jesus: “I do believe; help me overcome my unbelief!” (Mk 9.24).

Secondly, I do theology covering my face and with trembling knees, inspired by the experience of Moses: “At this Moses hid his face, because he was afraid to look at God” (Ex 3.6). I have found out that it is good, and necessary, to do that. Not only because I cannot hide anything anyway, but also because I see God nearer through my covered eyes. Surprised, I realize that reverence does not produce distance; instead, it produces closeness. And closeness is something my soul is hungrily looking for. Closeness is the nest where the alphabet of love is recited again and again. To recite this alphabet is theology’s supreme privilege and most difficult challenge. We know all too good how difficult it is for us to pronounce those simple words: “Lord, my God, I love you”.

Thirdly, I would like to be recognized as someone of my generation. Someone of my people. Someone of my place. One that feels the beat of the heart, that knows the rhythm of the dance, who whistles the music of my people. Someone who knows where their shoes hurt. Someone who has an address and identity. I don't believe in a theological language of “Esperanto”. I believe that in Jesus Christ God spoke, and still speaks, the language of incarnation.

In this attempt to find forms and language to fulfill my calling, I have come back to Bible. Again and again. And this has been very good. It has been a captivating, passionate experience. I
hope that by doing so I am not abandoning the skillfulness of good biblical interpretation, and that I'm still respecting the frontiers of what could be called a sound theology. But I am trying very hard to listen to God again. Listen to his word anew. To be a pale remembrance of David, of whom God said that he had been "a man after my own heart" (Acts 13.22). I am even trying not to take myself too serious and laugh at the mirror of my theological second-hand alphabet.

As I open my Bible, therefore, I have been faced by some fantastic characters. People that never stop talking to me without overtalking. Today I share with you some of the things that I have been hearing from one of these characters. Someone who has challenged me a lot for quite some time, especially as I deal with availability and simplicity. Would you sit down with me and allow both of us to be ministered by her? She would tell us about the nature and the process of doing theology. About this hermeneutic of life that can't get rid off God. About this indispensable invasion of God in our life which will determine our steps forever... although not always in the direction we would choose.

I am talking about Mary, this theologian who, as a woman, opens her womb to God. Her womb, the deepest place where life is born! A woman who struggles intensively in her search to understand her son and not to experience her faith as despair. A woman who cries in rebellious confusion, but still goes to the foot of her son's cross. A woman who does theology as life goes on. A woman who can't help thinking her faith based on her vocation, and whose vocation determines her theology. A woman whose options in life form the best chapter of a vital theology.

Mary, the woman theologian, sees her life from the perspective of God's history with His people. That's why she sings, and that's why she dances. And this is the subject of her beautiful Magnificat (Lk 2.46-56).

Let's then go back to what happened to Mary. Let's hear what she says, try to understand the frame in which her life happens. This we'll do by simply returning to the Bible passages that speak of this woman called Mary.

### A LISTENING EXERCISE

**And so it all began...**

In the sixth month, God sent the angel Gabriel to Nazareth, a town in Galilee, to a virgin pledged to be married to a man named Joseph, a descendant of David. The virgin’s name was Mary. The angel went to her and said, “Greetings, you who are highly favored! The Lord is with you”.

Mary was greatly troubled at his words and wondered what kind of greeting this might be. But the angel said to her, “Do not be afraid, Mary, you have found favor with God. You will be with child and give birth to a son, and you are to give him the name Jesus. He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High. The Lord God will give him the throne of his father David, and he will reign over the house of Jacob forever; his kingdom will never end.”

“How will this be,” Mary asked the angel, “since I am a virgin?” The angel answered, “The Holy Spirit will come upon you, and the power of the Most High will overshadow you. So the holy one to be born will be called the Son of God. Even Elizabeth, your relative is going to have a child in her old age, and she who was said to be barren is in her sixth month. For nothing is impossible
with God! “I am the Lord’s servant,” Mary answered. “May it be to me as you have said”. Then the angel left her. (Lk 1.26-38)

**Elizabeth became a pregnancy partner**
At that time Mary got ready and hurried to a town in the hill country of Judea, where she entered Zechariah's home and greeted Elizabeth. When Elizabeth heard Mary's greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit. In a loud voice she exclaimed: “Blessed are you among women, and blessed is the child you will bear! But why am I so favored, that the mother of my Lord should come to me? As soon as the sound of your greeting reached my ears, the baby in my womb leaped for joy. Blessed is she who has believed that what the Lord has said to her will be accomplished. (Lk 1.39-45)

**And Mary did theology**
And Mary said:
“My soul glorifies the Lord and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior, for he has been mindful of his servant. From now on all generations will call me blessed, for the Mighty One has done great things for me - holy is his name. His mercy extends to those who fear him, from generation to generation. He has performed mighty deeds with his arm; he has scattered those who are proud in their inmost thoughts. He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away empty. He has helped his servant Israel, remembering to be merciful to Abraham and his descendants forever, even as he said to our fathers.” Mary stayed with Elizabeth for about three months and then returned home. (Lk 1.46-56)

**But then she got confused**
Every year his parents went to Jerusalem for the Feast of the Passover. When he was twelve years old, they went up to the Feast, according to the custom. After the Feast was over, while his parents were returning home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem, but they were unaware of it. Thinking he was in their company, they traveled on for a day. Then they began looking for him among their relatives and friends. When they did not find him, they went back to Jerusalem to look for him. After three days they found him in the temple courts, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. Everyone who heard him was amazed at his understanding and his answers. When his parents saw him, they were astonished. His mother said to him, “Son, why have you treated us like this? Your father and I have been anxiously searching for you.” “Why were you searching for me?”, he asked. “Didn’t you know I had to be in my Father’s house?” But they did not understand what he was saying to them. But his mother treasured all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom an nature, and in favor with God and men. (Lk 2.41-52)

**It wasn’t always easy**
On the third day a wedding took place at Cana in Galilee. Jesus’ mother was there, and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding. When the wine was gone, Jesus’ mother said to him, “They have no more wine.” “Dear woman, why do you involve me?” Jesus replied. “My time has not yet come.” His mother said to the servants, “Do whatever he tells you.” Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from seventy-five to one hundred and fifteen liters. Jesus said to the servants, “Fill the jars with water”; so they filled them to the brim. Then he told them, “Now draw some out and take it to the master of the banquet.” They did so. (Jn 2.1-8)
Things got worse
Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived. Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him. A crowd was sitting around him, and they told him, “Your mother and brothers are outside looking for you.” “Who are my mother and my brothers?” he asked. Then he looked at those seated in a circle around him and said, “Here are my mother and my brothers! Whoever does God’s will is my brother and sister and mother.” (Mk 3.31-35)

At the cross Mary felt embraced
Near the cross of Jesus stood his mother, his mother’s sister, Mary the wife of Clopas, and Mary Magdalene. When Jesus saw his mother there, and the disciple whom he loved standing nearby, he said to his mother, “Dear woman, here is your son.” And to the disciple, “Here is your mother.” From that time on, this disciple took her into his home. (Jn 19. 25-27)

Life goes on, and discipleship begins
They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers. (Acts 1.14)

THEOLOGY COMES AT THE SECOND HOUR
To do theology is our business. It's something we do. It reflects our effort in knowing God. Our eagerness in talking about God. Theology systematizes our knowledge about God: His person in the Trinity, His creating and redeeming action, His immeasurable love, and His insistence in being present and communicating with us through His Word. Theology tries to grasp God's action in history - past, present and future - and points out the way this very story goes on towards God’s “eschaton”, the end of all things.

Theology is a church thing. To do it is a prerogative of God's people. In spite of all mess and confusion we as church have made, God continues to entrust us with this task. We, as the church, continue to experience the love and the call of God in our life, throughout history. We, as the church, continue to be conscious of being a privileged channel of experimentation and announcement of God's grace through Jesus Christ.

The Magnificat shows us what theology is all about, through its contents and the way it is articulated, through its understanding of history and its messianic dimension. Nevertheless, it is still a second-hour matter. For what comes at the first hour is God's revelation. God's irruption. God's visit. God's incarnation in Jesus Christ.

Theology comes at the second hour so that we don't start thinking we are too smart. For us not to foolish ourselves by thinking we can discover something new about God's nature. In order for us not to deceive ourselves by getting wrapped in science's clothes, thinking that God is an object of our knowledge.

For theology to have the taste of God's things, and the smell of transcendency, it has to be born in the unexpected encounter that happens in the messy kitchen. Wasn't that so with Mary?

It was there, in her smoky kitchen, wearing a worn-out apron and holding a damaged-handle pan, that she was visited by God. It was in the kitchen that the angel greeted her in a never-to-forget fashion: ‘Greetings, you who are highly favoured! The Lord is with you.’ (Lk 1.28)
Theology's seed is God's revelation. To us, however, theology is born in the guts twisted by the shock of God's visit. The cradle of theology is stupefaction, when we find ourselves absolutely lost and completely thankful for God's visit.

‘And don't start telling me stories about a theology objectively impartial’, I can see Mary complaining, as she gets rid off her old apron and washes her face, in an attempt to get over this angelical shock. ‘That's the kind of thing said by people who have never seen Gabriel, people who want to keep their wombs for their own things', she still mumbles before tossing some cold water on her face.

DO YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND THEOLOGY?
OFFER YOUR WOMB!

Asking for someone's womb is asking a lot. Offering your womb is a great thing indeed. As this humble apron-woman Mary says: 'I am the Lord's servant. May it be to me as you have said' (Lk 1.38). And so the woman Mary gives out the most precious thing in her: her virgin womb. I can only gasp the meaning of such offer! And this is what young Mary does: she can only express in long, deep sighs the craziness of her own gesture, the cost of this to her image, sighing once more as she considers confused Joseph. But she doesn't give up her surrender, and soon the results of this start to gradually appear in form of a pregnancy. Vocation always manifests itself in the growing pregnancy of obedience.

Theology is done in a disposition condition. The answer to God's revelation is a life surrender. A womb surrender. A virginity surrender. The theological word about God's nature, action and vocation is born as pregnancy becomes evident. Discipleship pregnancy. Theology belongs to the disciple who lives in expectant obedience.

Theology cannot be impartial. The more life's options and ways are compromised with God, the more it is theology. Impartial theology is an arrogant contradiction of people who haven't come to awake yet, people who think they can understand God in a simply cognitive fashion. No Gabriel will obey a "god" of neutral theology; and no Mary will offer her womb to such a god. Such theology will only show a god with a little 'g'. A god of our vain philosophies, a god as big as our inflated egos.

The theologian Mary walks around showing off her pregnant womb to help us understand that theology becomes mature in the active expectancy of the fulfillment of God's actions. It's theology with a vocation gesture towards an obedient discipleship.

Recovered from the initial shock, Mary hides in her room. Throwing herself on her bed, she weeps and laughs at the same time. The laughter of choice mixed with the cry of despair. She cries in thankfulness and she nervously laughs, wondering what to do, not willing to do anything else than whispering again to the Lord: ‘May it be to me...’ (Lk 1.38).
‘Only those who have never seen Gabriel could talk about “mere knowledge”. People that seem not to have a womb. Those temple-people, who don’t even see Gabriel arrive’, Mary mumbles as she goes back to the kitchen. After all, there’s more to do there. ‘Where did I put my apron? Am I going crazy!’, she still says to herself.

DO YOU WANT TO UNDERSTAND THEOLOGY? 
LEARN TO PAY A VISIT!

It’s hard to understand why Mary went to visit Elizabeth. Was she trying to hide? Was she curious about old Elizabeth’s pregnancy? Maybe this odd story of two pregnant women was taking away her sleep? Did she go in order to freely dance at the sound of this fantastic melody of God's revelation? Or, was she looking for a private place to cry? Or, maybe for these reasons altogether, a little bit of each? What an intense and beautiful event was the encounter of these two women! It was divine. It was a ‘womb mover’, as the text states: ‘When Elizabeth heard Mary’s greeting, the baby leaped in her womb, and Elizabeth was filled with the Holy Spirit.’ (Lk 1.41)

Those of us who has been involved in a pregnancy experience know about the emotional force of a womb movement. I remember! My wife would suddenly hold my curious hand over her swollen womb so that I could feel the baby kicking! But here, in Elizabeth’s womb, the “kick” is stronger: it’s a kick of divine emotion, it’s a miraculous leap: it’s the kick of incarnation.

And so Mary and Elizabeth spent three months together, growing strong in each other’s understanding of this strange way in which God writes His story. And speechless Zechariah was a testimony to these two women who couldn’t stop talking and telling their stories, raising enigmatic questions. The whole situation made them laugh and made them cry, made them dance and made them wonder in awe. Are we willing to be part of this picture?

That’s how theology is done: in the communion of the chosen ones living out the agony of the vocation experience. Theology is done in community, and experienced in community as well. In the sharing of stories and in the anguish of trying to understand and discern everything well.

It’s a shame that we have reduced theology to an individualistic speech, expressed in words accumulated in books and dissertations. Theology must rescue its place in the gathering of the called ones. Theology needs existential space. Space to breath. Space to struggle. Space to be puzzled. Theology hates feeling suffocated by words and obsessive discourses. It “kicks about” in protest against each attempt to make it fit into any of those library multi-volumes. It’s not that books and libraries are a problem to theology; theology, however, shouldn’t be trapped in a library, to start and to finish in there.

When the last night comes, Mary packs up her bags, while Elizabeth watches in silence. A tear here, another there, serve as witnesses to how they miss each other already. The burden of a vocation is too heavy to carry alone. But the memories of the time together
will help these two women carry on; and they know new road companions will come as they go on fulfilling their calling. Let’s only mention Zechariah, who will soon start talking and singing again; and Joseph, who will return to Mary, offering her a long embrace of acceptance and a life of fellowship.

While trying to fall asleep that night, Mary recollects the whole story again. Her eyes are wide-opened as she talks to herself, realizing how tough this time would have been without this heart-and-womb communion with Elizabeth. ‘And there’s still people who think we can understand God’s matters alone!’, Mary reflects, half asleep. ‘As if theology were an office occupation! Theology is done with wombs in communion,’ she still mumbles before falling asleep. The troubled sleep of good-bye.

SURROUNDING GOD’S ACTION WITH POETRY

Mary’s song - the so-called Magnificat - has fascinated many people throughout history. How much of this song was Mary’s creation and how much of it was a part of the oral tradition of the family of faith, it doesn't really matter. What matters is the way the Magnificat puts past, present and future together. How this song speaks of God’s memory that becomes reality throughout history, how it describes the geography of God’s action, and how Mary feels herself included in this story. And so she sees herself highly blessed. Notice the smile in her face as she sings in a loud voice:

My soul glorifies the Lord
and my spirit rejoices in God my Savior,
for He has been mindful of the humble state of his servant.
From now on all generations will call me blessed (Lk 1.46-48.)

Theology is done by people that feel and know that they are pulled into God's history. True theology is born with commitment. With the disposition of laying oneself in the altar of God's action.

That is how Mary does theology. With a historical sense. With the perception of God’s fidelity. Laying all her life in this project of God, and discerning the saving construction of his plan. And Mary does theology with gratitude and in the rhythm of dance. Inviting us to join her with grace and rhythm. With a desire of riming.

What a pity that poetry has been removed from theology! It's a pity we have turned theology so much into an object of our discourse – a cerebral verb of the white male. And so it ended up being heavy and tiresome, expressed in long sentences and articulated in a lofty philosophical language. Let's confess: we have imprisoned theology within academy and the library. Even Mary was left out, since she was not able to pronounce those classical key German words such as Heilsgeschichte... She lacked that intellectual look. She did not even wear one of those round eyeglasses. She did not fit the pattern.

In fact I am not talking about intellectual capabilities. And far from me any attempt to formulate an argument in favor of intellectual laziness. Here we are dealing with
something different. We are faced with an invitation to throw ourselves into God's hands. To read the story of our lives from the perspective of God's vocational visit. To notice God's fidelity throughout history, and to sing it in verses and prose.

Many years have gone by. Miles and miles away, Mary decides to do some research about herself. She gets a friend's computer and, confused, surfs through internet. Trying to work with this strange "mouse" thing, she is astonished by the so many “Mary” entries found here! Endless information about this Mary, that Mary, so many guesses and interpretations about her! She never thought of saying all of that! Actually, she didn't like what people have done to her. Unable to move, she finds herself raised in a pedestal. Analyzed by academicians, with their arrogant scalpels in hand, she feels like a corpse in advanced dissection! Interpreted by church bureaucrats, it feels like she's being forced into a box.

She could no longer stand it! So, stomping her foot, she left in protest. And there flew the apron, once again thrown to the corner: 'Don't these people understand anything?!', she rages. 'Mary is just a woman, a woman wearing an apron. She's a woman who enjoys living life as simple as possible. Besides, these people must understand that theology is done with simplicity. It's life seasoned with poetry. It has to be something born from a heart that beats crazily, and from the womb, pregnant of God's things. Theology is a soul issue. It has the smell of commitment and the taste of obedience.' And Mary knew what she was talking about.

DOING THEOLOGY IN A STATE OF EMBARRASSMENT

Mary had already learned some lessons. One of them was never to shut doors too early. Not to give up too easily. To prepare space for possibility. And this is what she does once more, once she sees herself involved in this lack-of-wine story in that Cana, Galilee marriage. The details of this marriage are unknown. But the feast must have lasted several days, as was the tradition at the time. It must have been some party. Not only Mary was there, but also Jesus, and his whole group of disciples (Jn 2.1-12).

We do not know if it was some relative's marriage, or a daughter of one of Mary's friends, but the fact is that she was close to what was going on. Near the kitchen and near the hosts' hearts. So, when she saw they were running out of wine, she quickly went for Jesus, to try to find a way out. You know, she had lived enough with him to know that there would be something he could do about the situation, and that something new could happen. Living with Jesus, she had learned to leave the doors of possibilities open. She knew there could be wine on the table again.

That is how theology is done. In living close to Jesus and keeping the doors open. Theology is done by following Jesus; by knowing him and learning with him. Listening to what he has to say, trying to understand his parables, trying to understand his geographic, social and cultural misplacements, and watching how he reacts when faced with different situations in life, be it the controverted pharisees, the lonesome Zacchaeus, or the astonished Jairus. Observation here and tension there. Offering consolation at one hour and arguing at another. Always establishing priorities and
building relationships. Relationships that need to be dealt with and included in the theological process. And that's not an easy thing to do. It is indeed a life-long agenda.

We must recognize: that we are the children of a tradition that gave priority to the 'academic knowledge', and did not develop the gift of togetherness. We searched for content, and didn't prioritize emotion. We thought theology was a mind issue, giving no importance to the feet, with their ways and options in life. The heart, with its thousand and one feelings, and the relationships, with their thousand and two bifurcations, were not only overlooked, but solemnly put aside as well.

It is much easier to transform theology into a brain issue. For, when we do that, the library and the computer will be enough. But this 'ivory tower' theology does not understand nor does it reflect what is in God's heart, and it is unable to get near to the questions, problems and agonies of people yesterday and today. Theology needs to know, and theology must want to see the empty jars, and take them to Jesus' heart, alongside with all that that means, in terms of embarrassment, partying, and the building of solid human relationships. Here also Mary teaches us the way. She saw the situation and came to Jesus: 'They have no more wine' (Jn 2.3). Theology does not just give answers. It also asks questions. It brings life's needs close to God's heart.

Being aware of the situation, however, does not mean controlling it. Did Mary possibly intend to do that? Would she be one of those bossy people who want to control everyone and everything? Was she a 'definitive woman' trying to take charge of everything around her?

It's not difficult to imagine Mary as a strong woman. But Jesus also knows who he is and what he wants. He doesn't go for the 'bossy' game; and his answer to her leaves us quite embarrassed: 'Dear woman, why do you involve me?' Interestingly, why does he call her "woman", and not "mother"? So, you'd better not be around when this conversation happens! It could have been a quick whispering between Mary and Jesus. Maybe the tone he uses and the way he looks into her eyes kept her from blushing and feeling embarrassed. The fact is that Mary has to learn she can't control Jesus. In the same way, theology can't control God. Have we not tried to do precisely this so many times throughout history? Theology needs to learn how to say that the wine is over and be silent afterwards. Theology must learn how to say 'I don't know'. It must learn how to wait and to be prepared for God's time to come.

Mary's slight smile is clear. By the way, her path is intriguing as well. Embarrassed and reduced, she could hide in some dark corner. Head up, however, she walks back into the house where wine is missing. She will prepare everything. As if the party was hers, she talks to the servants: 'Do whatever he tells you' (Jn 2.5).

What an impossible woman this Mary is! She surprises us by not giving up. The issue is, she knows Jesus. Deep in her heart, she knows he too will go that same way. He will go and talk to the servants. But she also knows that his word will be quite different than hers. While her word has only prepared the way, his will be a new word. A creative word. A miraculous word. Her word can no more than organize the jars and make the servants expectant, ready to serve. But it is Jesus' words that will fill the jars, will get the servants
busy and the maitre astonishing as that precious wine slides down his throat. As to the hosts, what could we say? Their faces too changed from water to wine! I can only imagine the bride running up to Jesus and kissing him out of emotion and gratitude!

Theology serves. It prepares. Only that, and all of that. Every time theology intends to do more than that, it confuses the alphabet of priorities and discipleship. Every time theology tries to “frame” God, it becomes poorer. Every time theology tries to be final, it leaves the party without wine. Theology needs to learn how to prepare the jars and then leave it to God.

It is important to state, furthermore, what theology cannot do. It cannot try to get rid off the jars just because it does not know what to do with them. It cannot look for any cheap explanation for the wine-full jars, in a definitive demonstration that theology is the child of an Enlightenment party. Neither can theology try to schedule the time for the jars, transforming their being filled into a public event, in order to awaken to faith, or to win followers. What it can do is to prepare Jesus’s coming. What it can do is to testify, stupefied, the jars being filled with water that becomes wine. What it can do is to open wide eyes as did the maitre, who had never drunken such an excellent wine. What it can do is to line-up after the bride and groom and kiss Jesus. What it can do is, timidly, smile with Mary and bring the wine-full jars to its heart.

And here comes Mary with her enigmatic smile once again. ‘I knew it, but I didn’t know it’, she says in surprise. ‘The more I spend time with him and learn to wait for the unexpected, the more he surprises me once more. But, there was no need talking to me the way he did... Are those manners? But this wine is good!’ That is how theology is done, on the way from the empty jars to the full ones. In a state of embarrassed expectancy.

THE UPSIDE-DOWN KINGDOM

It’s time to go back a bit, and concede that things were never easy for Mary. One doesn’t even need to enumerate the challenges and recall the difficulties to reach this conclusion. The boy was born and grew up. The problems of the first years were gone, and Mary was glad that normal Nazareth routine was back. She enjoyed the quietness and even got herself some new aprons… Then came that temple experience, where the boy said things that were hard to understand. However, after returning to Nazareth, family routine was back to normal. I mean, if one can ever talk about routine when it comes to this boy!

Years later, he left home and hit the road. Sometimes it seemed as if he wanted to conquer the world! He became a preacher, a miracle man, and a healer. There was that experience in Cana, in Galilee that was a mixture of embarrassment and joy. But there were times and moments when things got a bit more confused. The Gospels register some of these stories, and their places.

Then Jesus’ mother and brothers arrived.
Standing outside, they sent someone in to call him (…) ‘Who are my mother and my brothers?’ he asked. (Mk 3.31,33)
In fact, Mary lived in a confusion of feelings, perceptions, and opinions. She never forgot how it all began. Still, understanding Jesus’ steps seemed just too much for her. Even tougher than accepting the angel’s visit. After all, she knew who Jesus was, but she didn’t always understand the things he said or did. She had a tough time understanding and accepting his way of fulfilling his divine vocation. The things he said, the people he lived with, and the actions he allowed himself, where hard to accept. And so she lived out her vocation in ambiguity. But she never stopped following her son’s steps. More than that, she was always treasuring all things in her heart.

Theology is lived in ambiguity. In fact, as always mentioned before, the theologian is the one who says ‘I do believe; help me to overcome my unbelief!’ (Mk 9.24). Theologians never understand everything, but are always willing to accept the essential. They live from the memory of their vocation, and run after the comprehension of God’s actions. Until, at the end of their journey, they find themselves beside Mary, at the feet of the cross.

Sometimes Mary would have some crises over her doubts. She would blame herself for not understanding some of Jesus’ steps. But there came a day when Jesus sat by his mother’s side, gave her a hug, thanked her for the way she had answered God, and told her he understood her troubles. Then he looked deep into her eyes and told her never to give up following him. That was essential. Fundamental. Because his search, he said, was not for the wrong certainties of the Pharisees. That was the certainty of rejection. What he wanted and expected was following; the consecration of the womb. And the Mary found peace.

THE PATH THAT LEADS TO THE FEET OF THE CROSS

And that is what Mary did. Challenging everyone and everything, even overcoming herself, she walked the path to the feet of the cross. Crying and stumbling, it was there that she found her true place. Tough place. Unacceptable and strange place. An absurd place of peace. There, at the feet of the cross she, unexpectedly, felt at home.

The cross is the place where all good theology begins and ends. That’s why all our theology has to be theologia crucis! Theology that can walk towards the feet of the cross and, confused, whisper the need of forgiveness, spell its inadequacy and celebrate the encounter with God’s grace.

The cross is the best place to be. It’s the most necessary place to be. It is, however, also the toughest place to be. It is so for theology as well. At the cross we come to realize how confused we are. How much unbelief we have accumulated. How difficult it is to follow Christ and how impossible it is to follow the steps of the Father. At the cross we conclude that our hands are empty, we have nothing to offer. Our jars are empty and God wants to visit us with His grace. At the cross we see that salvation comes through grace. Grace alone. And that’s all theology needs to know. And that’s all theology should,
in the first place, be busy with. To inflect the verb of grace is theology’s main occupation. To call for the possibility of announcing forgiveness is the job that gives theology meaning and dignity. To be a messenger of reconciliation in its deeply transcendent sense, and in the inclusively human dimension, is a beautiful task to be performed in a context of loss and loneliness. It’s a good thing to serve the good news. It is good to do theology.

The cross is, thus, a place of grace. A place to meet with God’s unconditional love. It is, in essence, a place of life. It is the place of death that creates life, in the greatest expression of God’s redeeming craziness.

Theology also needs to decide. Needs to make an option: either to follow Mary to the feet of the cross, or to follow the disciples who, at first, took the runaway road. Theology done in the runaway road is only whispers thrown to the wind. It’s a proposal in religious masturbation. It’s no good to make anyone pregnant of life’s meaning. It’s no good to give to anyone the perception of his/her historical call. It’s no good for nothing. The disciples knew that, that’s why they had to come back. That’s why they must go to the feet of the cross, where they met Mary. And this is why we too must meet them there.

Mary will be seen again in the community of the Risen One. There she is, as a disciple among those who are waiting for the Holy Spirit’s to come, as Jesus had ordered them to do. And so, she is among those who are waiting, and who are available to follow Jesus: ‘They all joined together constantly in prayer, along with the women and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brothers’ (Acts 1.14). So she teaches us, with her life, that doing theology happens in discipleship. In prayer and in communion. In the expectancy of God’s anointment and in the disposition to serve him.

LOOKING AT A LAST SCENE

There is a last scene I want to bring to our memory. Mary’s life was certainly surrounded by great certainties and great doubts. And so it is with us so often. And it is no different with our theology. There are scenes that Mary can not understand, but in her wisdom she respects them. There are moments when she doesn’t have words, but she always has a heart.

Jesus’ birth scene is marked with characters and words that Mary doesn’t know how to face or how to understand. But Mary treasured all these things in her hearth (Lk 2.19). The boy is still a boy but, in the temple he behaves as an adult; and the things he says aren’t easy to understand. However, she treasured all these things in her heart (Lk 2.51). And that is how a good theology is. It can say some things and manage a few words. But there will always be other things which theology doesn’t know or understand. Which is no problem after all, since theology’s heart ought to be much bigger than our mouth. For good theology is a theology that comes from the heart.