

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

"Go and Do Likewise" (Luke 10: 37; RSV)

Chapter 1: Prayer

*"Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God"
(Luke 6:12; NJB)*

LISTEN and REFLECT

Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke (6: 12-19)

Now it happened in those days that he went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'apostles': Simon whom he called Peter, and his brother Andrew; James, John, Philip, Bartholomew, Matthew, Thomas, James son of Alphaeus, Simon called the Zealot, Judas son of James, and Judas Iscariot who became a traitor.

He then came down with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples, with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judaea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all.

In most religions mountains are the places where heaven and earth meet, and where people meet God. They are especially places where the divine is present and shows itself (theophany). Mountaintops, so often hidden in the clouds, are places of mystery.

Mountains have a special place in the life of Jesus. He often goes up a mountain to pray to his Father (*Matthew 14, Luke 6 and 9*). For Matthew especially, the ministry of Jesus is framed by two events involving mountains. At the beginning of his public life, Satan offers Jesus power over the whole world (*Matthew 4*). At the end of it Jesus confers on his disciples the powers which he has received from his Father, in *Matthew 28*: *"Meanwhile the eleven disciples set out to Galilee, the mountain where Jesus had arranged to meet them. When they saw him they fell down before him, though some had hesitated. Jesus came up and spoke to them. He said 'All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, make disciples of all nations; baptise them in the name of the Father and of the son and of the holy spirit, and teach them to observe all the commandments I gave you. And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time.'"* Between these two events, he climbs a mountain in order to teach the crowd and his disciples (*Matthew 5*): *"Seeing the crowds, he went on to the mountain. And when he was seated his disciples came to him. Then he began to speak. This is what he taught them."*

It is on a mountain that the Transfiguration took place. *"Jesus took with him Peter and James and his brother John and led them up a high mountain by themselves. There in their presence he was transfigured."* (*Matthew 17*).

For Luke, "going up" to Jerusalem represents the triumphal way to the crucifixion - the climb to "the Mount of Olives". There he is hailed as a king, as he arrives mounted on a donkey, and the people spread their garments in his path (*Luke 19*). Soon afterwards, as if to demonstrate the inconstancy of the crowd, he climbs the Mount of Olives again, but this time to be crucified.

We in our turn are invited to go up to the mountain of the Lord. The mountaineer or mountain walker knows how hard the climb will be, but he is already focused on the summit. He knows that he must cut down the weight he carries as much as possible and that his rations must be light but high in energy. And he knows that he will need a guide he can trust.

It is the same when we start to pray. We know it will be difficult but contemplating the living God, however imperfectly, fills us with happiness. What can we leave behind, in order to lighten our load? Certainly not our fellow humans - that would not be Christian prayer. Each one of us must discover what weighs him down, what impedes his progress. The food for our journey is of course the communion bread of the Eucharist, but it is also the nourishment we obtain from communion with our fellows, because all prayer has a communal aspect. And ultimately our companion and guide is Christ himself. *"And look, I am with you always; yes, to the end of time."* (Matthew 28: 20).

SEE

'After 36 years in the priesthood it is becoming clearer and clearer to me why so many couples are morally and physically sick — why so many do not achieve the harmony unity and happiness which they hoped for — why Christians are so deeply divided, both in theory and in practice. It is because people do not understand how important prayer is. When individuals or societies do not tie themselves to God through prayer, they are at the mercy of the forces of discord. Lack of time or inspiration, the demands of work or of the apostolate are all put forward as excuses. What nonsense! What would you think of a mother who says she has no time to eat because her two children are sick and she is overwhelmed by household chores...?

Is praying any less important than eating? In other words, by not praying we risk serious damage to our moral and spiritual health. On the other hand the person who prays finds mental equilibrium, happiness and the power of love. I am in no doubt that prayer is just as vital for you the laity as for us priests. I am not talking about quick spoken morning or night prayers, but about what is known as meditation — the lifting up of the mind and heart to God.

I know so many Christians, members of the Équipes Notre Dame, who every day, in spite of the heavy demands of work family and the apostolate, devote a quarter of an hour, half an hour or even more to prayer. I can tell you that these people experience a daily renewal in their whole Christian life — in their moral and physical well-being, their married life and in all their various activities. And to my great delight I know that through this daily exercise some of them attain that continuous prayer which St Paul, echoing Jesus, recommends: *"pray constantly; and for all things give thanks; this is the will of God for you in Christ Jesus."* (1 Thessalonians 5, 17-18)

You should find an additional incentive to pray in thought of all those couples throughout the world who are unhappy, sick at heart or depressed, lacking the graces with which you, as members of the Équipes Notre Dame, are so richly endowed. You can help some of them directly, but so many others — so very many — can only be reached by your prayers. You may protest that it is for Carmelites and Trappist monks to pray. True, but for a start there are not very many of them, and in the realm of prayer, as in the apostolate, it is primarily for like to help like.

I cannot believe that a couple who do not feel a responsibility to their fellows have a very deep Christian faith — if they do not feel the need to pray for couples who are unaware of God's plan for love and marriage nor consider that there are couples somewhere in the world whose spiritual well-being has been given into their charge.

We often talk about "grown-up Christians". Grown-up Christians and grown-up couples are those who willingly feel and know that they are responsible for their fellows. They are those who have realised that they have a vacation to pray for others, and accept it willingly in the same way as they do the duties of their apostolate.

In these times of marital and family breakdown, when so many married people, whether consciously or not, mock God's plan for marriage, it is important that Christian couples should come together, united before God. Knowing that individually they are powerless to achieve the renewal of marriage on a global

scale, they must adopt a life of prayer and intercession, asking God to do what they cannot do without his help.

If the Équipes Notre Dame, spread over some 35 different countries, do not constitute such a power of intercession, they play false to one of the primary reasons for their existence. They would become nothing more than groups of privileged people. And history teaches us that one day a tide will come and sweep away those who unite to defend and foster a privileged position.

Some of you are so well aware of all this that you have been asking for contemplative prayer to be made obligatory for all couples in the Movement, not just those in positions of responsibility. I do not think it is necessary to impose additional obligations. But what I do know is that if after two or three years in a team the couples of the Équipes Notre Dame do not make a place for prayer and their lives of their own accord, then they have not understood much about Christian life or their spiritual responsibilities.

Perhaps you will protest that it is not easy to pray. Prayer is both a science and an art. Someone who wants to learn to touch type will spend weeks practising. Someone who can play Beethoven sonatas will have tortured his next-door neighbours for years. You have to learn to pray — and you never finish learning.

I hope that in the coming year, helped by your teams, each one of you will learn to pray better — in other words, to love God better.' (H. CAFFAREL, "Veillez et Priez", *Lettre mensuelle END* 1/1966.)

EVALUATE

' My secret is exceedingly simple. I pray. Through prayer I become united in love with Christ. I know that to pray to him is to love him. In reality there is only one true prayer, one meaningful prayer: Christ himself. Only one voice goes up from the surface of the Earth: the voice of Christ. Perfect prayer is not composed of a multitude of words, but of a fervent longing which lifts the heart to Jesus.

Enjoy praying. Cultivate a need to pray all day long. Prayer enlarges the heart until it is big enough to receive God's gift, which is himself. Ask, seek, and your heart will grow until it can welcome him and keep him as your own.

God speaks in the silence of the heart. If you come before God in silence and in prayer, he will speak to you. Then you will understand how insignificant you are. It is only when you come to understand your own nothingness, your emptiness, that God can fill you with himself. The souls of those who excel in prayer are very silent places.

Silence shows us a different aspect of things. The soul can only be reached through silence. It is not what we say but what God says that is important — what he says to us and what he says through us. In this kind of silence he will listen to us. In this kind of silence he will speak to our souls, and we will hear his voice.

Before you speak, remember that you must listen and that it is only then, from the very bottom of a receptive heart, that you can speak and God can hear you.

To be alone with him, not in our books our thoughts or our memories, but in perfect abnegation; to stand in his presence in silence, empty, still, waiting.

True prayer is union with God, a union as life-giving as that of the grapes and the grapevine in the image which Jesus uses in St John's Gospel. We need prayer. We need this union to bear fruit. That fruit is the work of our hands.

To be fruitful prayer must come from our hearts and must be able to touch the heart of God.' (*Mother Teresa. "There is no greater love". Lattes 1997.*)

ACT

'I know from experience that if I do not begin my day by reading a passage of the Gospel, I am lost. I read the passage and I start with a simple prayer and a reflection on what I have read. I study the text and I take hold of one little phrase. It may be something as simple as "hope succeeds". I write it in red ink in my notebook. As a result I keep coming across it all through the day.

Prayer is the centre, the heart and the strength of our faith. For us Christians, prayer is far more than the repetition of a set of words. Prayer is what we do on waking in the morning — on rising from our beds.

Some of my acquaintances get up an hour earlier in order to pray or to go to church. I admire them. Making an effort to meet Christ every morning is a wonderful thing to do. St Vincent De Paul once said "give me a man of prayer — he will be a superb man of action."

Without prayer we merely exist. When people ask me how I survive, with such a difficult job as the support of my young people, I reply that I enjoy 60 days of silence every year, including a five-day retreat in Algeria. It is from this that I draw my strength. It is the heart and centre of my life.

When I was at the seminary our masters used to say to us young colts (for such we were): "If you are not first and foremost men of prayer, you will be mere men of action". They were trying to tell us that if our actions, our deliberations and even the help we gave one another were not grounded in prayer, then we were not putting our hearts into it. By contrast the man of prayer is given strength by the time devoted to praying.

Without prayer we merely exist. Prayer is at the heart of every apostolate. It is a special moment which you will only experience if it has become as necessary to you as your morning cup of coffee. This coffee will keep you awake throughout the day and will give you a strength beyond your dreams.

An impulse of the heart. About half an hour is just right. After that I am set up for the day. All I do is say to the Lord "Now, take possession of me".

Hang on to your daily prayer. Let it come naturally. Shadows are seductive and draw us in. It takes willpower to put them aside and to pray one's rosary.

For myself, I like to pray while driving. (There's nothing against it in the Highway Code.) I turn off the music or the radio (not an easy thing to do as there is so much of interest to listen to). Then I say the rosary and I tune in to a new savour, a very high frequency transmission and I am inspired....

Mind you, I'm not saying that I experience great revelations every time I pray. Prayer rarely brings illumination. No, I just hang in there, and then I am suffused with a great happiness.

It is my date with God. I cannot do without it.

You will find strength and a secret joy through your morning prayer. Maybe you will keep it up for a few days and then abandon it, but I think that you will very soon feel the lack of it. It is a grace which is difficult to attain. Ask God for the grace of prayer, and once you have it, never let it go!' (Père G. GILBERT, *Rallumez le feu.*). Fr Guy Gilbert devoted his life to the rehabilitation of young offenders.

SHARE:

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

Questions for discussion by couples

1. We suggest you discuss between yourselves the current state of your relationship with the Lord – what stage are we at individually? How can we help each other to move forward in this relationship?
2. Talk to each other about how you pray – when, where and for how long? What aids do you use? How do you deal with distractions?

Questions for the team meeting

3. What thoughts did we have on reading this chapter, and what memories did it evoke? What have we gained from it?
4. What new horizons has it opened up for us? What still remains to be done?

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

"Go and Do Likewise" (Luke 10: 37; RSV)

Chapter 2: Marriage, the work of God.

*"The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him."
(Luke 10:1; NJB)*

LISTEN and REFLECT

The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke (Luke 10: 1-6)

After this the Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself would be visiting. And he said to them, 'The harvest is rich but the labourers are few, so ask the Lord of the harvest to send labourers to do his harvesting. Start off now, but look, I am sending you out like lambs among wolves. Take no purse with you, no haversack, no sandals. Salute no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, let your first words be, "Peace to this house!" And if a man of peace lives there, your peace will go and rest on him; if not, it will come back to you.'

To understand the dynamic of conjugal love, we need to plunge into this marvellous school which is love and be attentive to our feelings. As a couple, we receive a new life and we are called continually to grow in this life. It is through conjugal spirituality that we develop the life that God has granted to us in order to construct this masterpiece. The wisdom of God, the gift that each one of us has within ourselves, affects the life of every couple!

A challenge is therefore given to the couples of the Teams: how to understand, and interpret the signs of the times, so complex are the human situations of couples, which will always bear the signs of grace! Conjugal love, far from being in competition with the love of God, can bring this divine love to completion, enriched and fortified by human love.

SEE

In adhering freely to this proposition which comes from God, we become men and women of salvation and happiness for others. We are this sign of an incarnate love. However, there are no models of marriage: the model is created in the gratuitousness of relations. We are man and woman in everything and for everything. It is as such that we have our place in the world.

God created the human being, man and woman complementary, and this complementarity must be continually renewed, in the respect for and the desire of a deep acquaintance, which leads us to the practice of a more enlightened sexuality. It is necessary therefore to understand the language of the body, the senses, the language which leads us to the rituals of love, without prejudice to age and all its limitations. Man is made for woman and woman is made for man, in such a way that both can constitute a unity and live their communion in Christ while at the same time being a reflection of the Love of God.

When one discovers that the great way to love is by self-sacrifice, the way is to love, to love to the end, in order to destroy egoism and achieve the fullness of love. The life of the couple implies a stable path, continuous, in the pursuit of holiness, both of them developing the gifts that God has given to each one.

Again at Chantilly, Father Caffarel said: *"Christ gives two ways to those who wish to aim at perfection: love and self-sacrifice."*

Love = The gift of self. Self-sacrifice = Forgetting oneself. Charity includes and contains all the reality of the love between a man and a woman. Charity is the axis around which turn all the efforts of the couple to

lead their conjugal life to the full, and, finally, to be able to contribute to the construction of the masterpiece of God.

We, as couples in Teams, understand perfectly what Pope Benedict XVI says in his Encyclical '*Deus Caritas Est*', when he speaks of this reality which is at the same time human and divine that is conjugal love: "*In reality, Eros and Agape – love ascending and love descending never allow a complete separation of one from the other.*"

The sexual union carries within itself the sign of the great mystery of creation and of redemption. While creating a place of meeting, of enrichment, of sharing, of commitment and of fidelity, man and woman bind themselves together in a perfect union which refers us back to the Eucharist.

"With the Equipes Notre-Dame, one asserts in the Church that sexuality is a factor of sanctification on condition that it is accepted responsibly and evangelised, the pleasure is a holy reality, in the plan of God." (Notes of Father Caffarel)

EVALUATE

The path in the life of the couple is not a level path. There are many who sit at the edge of the path and others turn round and go back. When the path is long, one fixes some "goals" which can help to determine the pace, to foresee obstacles and to fix the time for rest. To rush through these stages without knowing clearly the goal towards which one journeys, is travelling for the sake of travelling. Seneque said: "*There is no favourable wind for one who does not know where he is going.*"

Jesus took the irrevocable decision to go to Jerusalem. And he went there....The disciples followed him and felt the need for conversion. When one lives the Gospel, one accepts being sent to announce it.

Let us begin by considering what is important in life, because it is marked out for us by our decisions. Life is the result of the decisions we take along the way. St. Augustine said: "*Today in my life what vibrates, and what makes me who I am, it is my decisions.*" It is our decisions that make us who we are.

It is important to understand that we are called, not only by the Movement but also by the Church, to become witnesses and disciples of the sacrament of Marriage in the world. "*The Lord appointed seventy-two others and sent them out ahead of him in pairs, to all the towns and places he himself would be visiting.*" (Luke 10:1) The group is large, it is not only the twelve apostles. How will Jesus be able to help so many? No one can be excluded! God loves everyone.

The questions that were raised then have to be repeated today. What is salvation and for whom is it intended? Salvation is to remain in life, salvation is for everyone. "*Remain in me, as I in you.*" (John 15:4) From the beginning of his ministry, Jesus set in train the accomplishment of the plan of salvation that the Father had given him as his mission. The path is long and gradual, but every stage brings opportunities and commitments which necessitate a conversion. The signs of God's project are to be found in easy situations but also in obstacles.

Father Caffarel wrote in his book (*Aux Carrefours de l'Amour*): "*It is not to an easy going life that I invite you. Simply I hope that you will not keep your bow stretched from morning to night, that you will not be continually occupied doing, and doing more, and doing better. It is necessary that the in spiritual life of the Christian, particularly at the time of prayer, there is an equilibrium between doing and letting God act, loving and letting oneself be loved, doing and being, being and offering, to be surrendered to God's action.*"

ACT

"Make God known, proclaim his Love, this is the first aspect of the apostolic mission of the couple." (H. Caffarel, L'Anneau d'Or: "Proclamer l'Amour Divin")

To be a disciple of Jesus Christ demands a clear and definite option. We are called by Love and attracted by Love – called to holiness. Our vocation in the world today is to help other couples, to do everything to reduce suffering, to prevent in as far as it is possible, the suffering of innocents, to soften the pain, to help overcome psychic suffering. The fact that we are announcing our faith will not be able to diminish the deep respect that we must have for others and their choices.

The response to the meaning of life and death, to the mystery of suffering, to insuperable loneliness, to the desire for happiness, always sought and never attained, to the disillusion of love, to the difficulty in understanding the dimension of eternity and of fidelity, only the Gospel can give it as a proposition of life. Only a God who personally enters into history, by becoming man and taking upon himself the aim of his mission, accepting the suffering, can heal the world. Jesus saved the world as a “Lamb” and not as a wolf. Gentleness and love are agents of transformation. The choices of the methods to accomplish the mission conformed to the image of the Lamb. Equip ourselves lightly: “*no money, no bag, no sandals.*” Let us set out, stimulated simply by the strength of Joy, fortified by Confidence and driven by the Hope which comes to us from the Holy Spirit.

Change ourselves in order to change

The response is demanding.

If we are authentic, we are drawn towards the centre of the scene and become leaders on the journey. The faith announced is an experience of life, since the Christ whom we announce is He whom we love and seek. It is urgent to initiate the mission that we have received...To set out, to set out and renounce all security.

Humbly let us entrust ourselves to the protection of the Shepherd, and then to set out will seem to us to be the response to this mission, because we know that God is able to act through our poverty and our work will be the work of the Holy Spirit. It is important to show today that the historic Jesus had in himself the capacity to give meaning to the life of man and the life of the couple of the 21st century, where God reveals himself in concrete life, in history, in the person of Jesus who lives and is incarnated in every person.

Father Caffarel said in Brazil, in 1972: “*The Church, our great, our dear Catholic Church, will not only be saved to the extent that the shapeless mass of Christians become coherent teams around Christ and animated by his Spirit.*”

Constanza and Alberto Alvarado, on the occasion of the International Gathering of Couples with Responsibility in Rome, in 2009, in calling to service the couples in Equipes Notre-Dame, said: “*The institutions are made in order to support, defend and make effective their position at the heart of society, and in this case the Church. It is for them to defend their ideas, and lead the changes required, so that their ideas may triumph and be lasting.*”

To us, the Teams of Our Lady – the new family of disciples – we are asked to change the course of the world. That is the mission of Equipes Notre-Dame today. Let us profit from the manifestation of the glory of God and of his love, in the vocation of human love, in order to understand that, in the signs of the times, there is always the sign of the grace of his love. The Lord wishes to be our companion on the journey, because it is He who sends us. Let us go out animated by the Spirit and take Our Lady with us. She will repeat to you without ceasing. “*Do whatever He tells you.*” (John 2:5)

SHARE:

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

Questions for discussion by couples

We pray, above all, together, to create an ambiance of welcome and openness. After a little time in silence, we should exchange our ideas on the following questions:

1. In what situations do we feel that we are taking "*decisions*" which will enable us to do "*important things*" and to live our vocation of Christian couples?
2. Can we affirm that our project of marriage is really that of both spouses and not of only one? How have we developed in this aspect of our "*life of mission*"
3. St. Paul said: "*Change yourselves by renewing your spirit.*" What endeavour, however small, are we going to try to renew this month, in order to demonstrate better our love to our spouse and to others?

Questions for the Team Meeting

"Conjugal love, far from competing with love of God, is a path to Him."

4. Are we persuaded of this? What are the particularities of this path, and more especially of our own path?
5. Let us ask ourselves about the function of love in our couple.
6. Let us reflect on the vocation of human love in the plan of God.
7. Let us reflect on the "*sacred value*" of our physical union. What dominates? Sensuality? Or the gift of self?
8. "*Do not let yourselves be confused by temptations, difficulties, or challenges which come in your way, because with the strength of Christ, you can, and therefore you must achieve great things.*" What temptations, what difficulties do you meet? How do the sacrament of marriage and the teaching of the Church help us to overcome these?
9. Is our marriage a "*masterpiece*" for us? What are its effects on us, on those around us? What link are we making with Christ, with the sacrament?

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

"Go and Do Likewise" (Luke 10: 37; RSV)

Chapter 3: Daily Spirituality.

*"Great crowds accompanied him on his way and he turned and spoke to them.
'Anyone who comes to me.....'" (Luke 14:25-26a; NJB)*

LISTEN and REFLECT

The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke (Luke 14: 25-33)

Great crowds accompanied him on his way and he turned and spoke to them. "Anyone who comes to me without hating father, mother, wife, children, brothers, sisters, yes and his own life too, cannot be my disciple. No one who does not carry his cross and come after me can be my disciple.

And indeed, which of you here, intending to build a tower, would not first sit down and work out the cost to see if he had enough to complete it ? Otherwise, if he laid the foundation and then found himself unable to finish the work, anyone who saw it would start making fun of him and saying, 'Here is someone who started to build and was unable to finish.'

Or again, what king marching to war against another king would not first sit down and consider whether with ten thousand men he could stand up to the other advancing against him with twenty thousand ? If not, then while the other king was a long way off, he would send envoys to sue for peace. So in the same way, none of you can be my disciple without giving up all he owns."

Some commentators believe that in the language of the Old Testament, the comparison is not usual. Jesus speaks to a people accustomed to the language of his time. The point is not to compare the love of God to the love of men, but to warn that loving our lives does not take precedent over loving God. To God we cannot offer too much love.

These large crowds are formed by all those who have been called in the past, by us today when we hear the call of Jesus and also by all those who will come after us to follow Him. Jesus speaks here surely, and in a special way to those of us, who at first excited by the call, have abandoned their plans and committed to the Gospel, then backtracked and resumed a safe life, in accordance with the prevailing mentality in the world. Hearing these words of Jesus, we can guess at his desire to rely on disciples who engage with him wholeheartedly, taking it upon themselves to be his disciples in all circumstances, letting love take priority over any possessions, people willing to become builders of a new civilization of love. In short, this is to practice something we have in ourselves but that we often overlook: the ability to renounce, to say no to anything that prevents us from following Jesus and to fulfil the work he expects of us.

In one of the most famous editorials, published in 1945, our founder wrote: *"God is the first loved, the first served."* This editorial guidance strongly permeates the orientation of the Movement given to us all, members of the teams, and we are quote this excerpt: *"May God be for you the first sought, the first loved, the first served. Love each other: when love grows in your home, it grows in the Church of which it is the living cell. Love each other: 'Ubi caritas et amor, Deus ibi est'. Be happy: the Lord expects this praise from you and the testimony of the people around you."*

The charism of the Movement contains the "being" and "doing" or, if you prefer, the vocation and mission. Formed by couples who have received the grace of God's love in the day to day reality of life, the Lord invites us to discover the mysteries of married love. Made strong by community life as a group – that allows us to host and to experience Love, we are sent to raise the role of disciples in the Church and the world.

SEE

The word spirituality has different meanings. We can, firstly, associate it with the study of the science of faith and of divine things. But we often hear that someone has a great spirituality when we admire his wisdom when speaking on a religious subject. It is also said that spirituality is related to practical acts of piety, to obedience to religious precepts. All these aspects of the concept of spirituality can have their value. None of these things, however, define spirituality but the meaning is to be found in the actions, methods or ways, criteria or pedagogies that are influenced by the Holy Spirit.

This means that all of a Christian's actions and relationships must be infused with the breath of the Spirit of God, with all the vigour the soul and spirit is capable of, transforming routine activities into offerings of praise to our Creator. It is not for nothing that in the teachings of the Apostle Paul we hear in various epistles the insistence that we become spiritual people, so that we turn the common things of our day to day life into pleasing vessels to the Lord.

"Whether you eat or drink, do all for the glory of God."

Again at Chantilly, Father Caffarel said: *"Christ gives two ways to those who wish to aim at perfection: love and self-sacrifice."*

Being a Christian does not mean living in the stratosphere. It is precisely the realities essential to human life that must be indwelt with the presence of the Spirit. And it all begins within ourselves: to make our marriage, parenthood and sexuality Christian; to adopt a sober lifestyle, without the excesses of the habits of consumerism and a disposable culture; to commit to solidarity and to sharing with our neighbour; to reject conformity and to engage in the transformation of values in building the society in which we belong.

EVALUATE

His Holiness Pope Benedict XVI sees relativism as the greatest evil of our time, because in this way of thinking and acting, anything goes; it despises the ethical principles and evangelical values which can guide human behaviour. The truth doesn't matter much, what is important is to achieve personal goals.

This relativism constantly hits the door of the families of team members in the form of many diverse trends of thought and action. It creeps in insidiously even in Christian circles, in the Church, groups and families. Added to this is the evil of the modern remnant of the centuries old Manichean philosophy, which seeks to separate the material and spiritual, body and soul, thus causing a real discrepancy between faith and life, the inconsistency between the values we profess and how we act.

We end up being satisfied with the obedience to the norms and the rules. "I am a good Christian, I do not miss the Sunday mass, I pay my tithe, I send the children to catechism. I feel good in the team, because I practice the endeavours, I never miss the meetings, I study my monthly theme, etc.

But outside of this environment, how do I act? In the world of work, what is my level of solidarity with my colleagues? In my business, my industry, is my profit the fruit of my greed for gain, my individualism? What is my interest in building a just and fraternal society? Am I indifferent to poverty? How many times have I come to the defence of a victim of injustice? When was the last time I spoke on behalf of those who have no voice?

In my social circles, at parties, in meetings with friends, have I been ashamed to defend the truth, afraid to proclaim the Gospel values, to confess my faith and my commitment to Jesus?

Father Caffarel said that the world needs saints, *"men and women all dedicated to Christ, inhabited by his love, driven by his Spirit. Workers, farmers, business leaders who are saints; artists and scientists who are saints, politicians that are saints."* This will be the experience of spirituality embodied in the concrete

realities of human existence, that will enable men and women to spot the signs of the times, seeing the world not with physical eyes, but with the eyes of the heart.

We must bring people closer to themselves, in the integration of body + soul + spirit, marvelling at God's plan for humanity and seeing the signs he sends. So it becomes possible to find the path to happiness and to call everyone to become builders of the civilization of love.

ACT

We are citizens of the world and of the Church. Teams have never thought to put their homes under a glass cover to prevent them from being contaminated by a society that has become pagan. To the contrary, we are planted, like yeast, which carries within it a gradual transformative power.

We live in a world of solitude. Despite advances in communication technology over the Internet, the loneliness of men and women is surprising. We want to draw attention to the solitude of one who wants to be listened to, not in superficial conversations that do not penetrate. We talk about the loneliness of the man who wants to listen to the soul, the deeper anxieties, the desires of transcendent journey, which remain hidden from the person himself. There is the loneliness of many married couples who share the same roof, the same bed, unable to share their own life. This is the cause of frustrations... There is the loneliness of parents and children who do not speak to each other and who cannot even understand each other, because they do not spend time together. There is loneliness before the transcendent, because we only seek today the goods that money can offer. There is too much to do, too many worries, too many goods to accumulate. The man knows, deep within himself, that God is the one missing - this is the solitude of one who lacks true meaning to his life. Many acquisitions are made, enormous effort expended, nights spent sleeping badly, but nothing fills the void of human existence. Even when we think we have arrived the search continues. There is the loneliness of those who unintentionally do not have opportunity to fulfil their potential, who are relegated to the margins by social injustice.

Faced with this swirl of human loneliness, the Christian couple, seeker of God, apprentice of love and holiness, is called to plant seeds of hope. *"When the human heart is recklessly open to the love of Christ, it irresistibly expands the dimensions of the Church and the world,"* said Father Caffarel, in his speech on May 4, 1959, at the International Gathering of Rome. The ideal of conjugal spirituality that he and our pioneer couples had dreamed of, has a missionary dimension facing towards the shortcomings of couples, families, citizens of the world.

Enlightened by love - charity, a couple should be a sign, a witness and a builder. A sign that God has not forgotten man. A witness to the happiness gained through faithfulness to your spouse, to the sacrament of marriage and to God's design for us. A builder of hope, that it is possible to find meaning in life, that the love of God can be known and taught in the most basic activities of man. It is time to wake up to the commitment and responsibility to transform the realities that shout in our ears. It is not reasonable to remain untouched. We cannot isolate ourselves in the comfort of our meetings in our protective and protected homes. There are crowds waiting for us who crave our love who need our charity.

We conclude with Father Caffarel's vision: *"What tomorrows couldn't we hope for the Church if the luminous message of Christ on marriage reached to the four corners of the earth, converting many young couples, bringing many families to life in ever growing numbers, where God is loved by all and above everything".*

SHARE:

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

Questions for discussion by couples

1. Where in my life is there a division between my actions and my faith?
2. Is the call to sainthood or holiness attractive, or Boring?

Questions for the Team Meeting

1. In analyzing with "the eyes of my heart" what is happening around me, at school, at work, at leisure time, in political and social life, what does it make me aware of ?
2. Is my behaviour the same in an ecclesiastical atmosphere (church for example) as well as in my daily realities? Why ?
3. What is your concrete plan of action in response to this discussion ?

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

"Go and Do Likewise" (Luke 10: 37; RSV)

Chapter 4: Active People in History

"You are the salt for the earth... You are Light for the world..." (Matthew 5:13-14; NJB)

LISTEN and REFLECT

The Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Matthew (5: 13-16)

"You are the salt for the earth. But if the salt loses its taste, what can make it salty again? [...] You are the light for the world. A city built on a hilltop cannot be hidden. No one lights a lamp to put it under a tub; they put it on the lamp-stand where it shines for everyone in the house. In the same way your light must shine in people's sight, so that, seeing your good works, they may give praise to your Father in Heaven" (NJB).

In the Gospel of Matthew these verses immediately follow the Beatitudes which are considered as the first teaching that Jesus addresses to his disciples. Gabriel Ringlet suggests that we could consider the following as a ninth Beatitude *"Blessed are those who give flavour to men's existence, who fertilise the fields of humanity. Blessed are those who carry a lamp in the depth of the night and protect their little light from the wind"* (Gabriel Ringlet; *Eloge de la fragilité: L'actualité à fleur d'Évangile*; 2004. ISBN: 978-2226154408.)

Christ addresses himself to the disciples, to us, to his Church. But it must be made clear: some salt is invisible: it mixes, it preserves, it dissolves, it gives taste, it makes one thirsty. But it doesn't show. And the Church will be like salt to the world. Light, itself, has a brilliant action but it comes to us from Christ. *"God is light, and there is no darkness in him at all. But if we live in the light, as he is in the light, we have a share in one another's life, and the blood of Jesus, his son, cleanses us from all sin"* (1 John 1: 5-7). We can shine for each other only if we are bound to Christ.

But when we hear it said that we are the salt for the earth and the light for the world, do we not run the risk of believing that we are the only ones capable of seeing clearly? Then we must remember the prophet Isaiah, *"If you do away with the yoke, the clenched fist and malicious words, if you deprive yourself for the hungry and satisfy the needs of the afflicted, your light will rise in the darkness, and your darkest hour will be like noon."* (Isaiah 58, 9b-10).

Through these acts of love, we are with millions of human beings participating in the mystery of human existence. Surely the words of Jesus are an urgent call to plunge us into the humus of our humanity and to share with everyone, whoever they are, the questions of justice, of solidarity, of peace? The Church is called to be a sign of the fraternity which humanity dreams of, leading towards a world transformed in a community of love.

SEE

The Church responds to the challenge of being the *"salt for the earth"* in our modern world, coming from its natural ground (theology, Scripture and dogma) to enter into that of society (politics, economics, living together) through its social teaching. This dialogue with the world always takes its source from the Gospel but it must pass on its message making use of the language of the times and in a context which is always new.

Modern man is confronted in his collective and personal way always with more numerous and precise questions. The changes in process in our societies encourage the Church to *"have a word"*, which is what has been done through Church pronouncements. It is interesting to look at the different documents which make up the social teaching of the Church during the last century. These are gathered together in the

Compendium of Social Doctrine edited in 2004 by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace. The *Compendium* includes social teaching about the family. (P. De Charentenay; *Vers la justice de l'Évangile, Introduction à la pensée sociale de l'Église*, DDB, 2008. ISBN : 978-2220059143) The last encyclical –*Caritas in veritate*, “Love in truth” from Pope Benedict XV carries on this tradition of social encyclicals begun by *Rerum Novarum* in 1891. (see *Reliability – Guide to the reading and history of social thinking of the Church*, (Centre Avec); Brussels 2009)

What do these encyclicals contain?

“The Church gladly reaches a decision in questions of choice between encouraging the growth of societies of development, of dynamism and of sharing, or on the contrary of directing it towards societies exclusive to themselves without concern for the people who set them up.(...) On the political plane the Church is more discreet (...) On the other hand, the Church is preoccupied with the social field(..). very many fundamental subjects are widely discussed from work to housing, to strikes, to syndicates, etc (...)In the domain of morality, the social teaching of the Church is an abundant source of reflection, from the debates on the human person and its dignity, on the rights of man and the common good. Far from the techniques of human science, the Church speaks more easily of the foundations that it is important to respect. Her defence of the human being, central to all her discourses, allows it to develop a unity of reflection more than convincing.” (P. De Charentenay; *Vers la justice de l'Évangile, Introduction à la pensée sociale de l'Église*, DDB, 2008. ISBN : 978-2220059143).

The Church invites us then to go into action *“because changes are possible, if the participants wish to commit themselves”* (P. De Charentenay; *Vers la justice de l'Évangile, Introduction à la pensée sociale de l'Église*, DDB, 2008. ISBN : 978-2220059143). The social teaching of the Church has no other end but to aim for life in society being regularised according to the criteria of justice and of peace.

EVALUATE

Throughout the centuries, Christians, priests and lay people, men and women have been *“salt for the earth”*, sometimes giving their lives for their brothers. The Church has acknowledged them; in 2001, Pope John Paul II said to young people: *“You are the salt of the earth and the light of the world”*, explaining that *the Saints are the reflection of the glory of God, presented by the Church with a view to their imitation by us all.* (Pope John Paul II; *Message to the young people of the world – 17th World Youth Day*; 2002)

Many others have worked in the shadows or in secret to be the leaven in the dough. We think of the founders of religious orders in the service of mankind, in hospitals, schools... and of Catholic Action spread throughout the whole world over the centuries; and the example of perilous commitments like those of the worker-priests in France, or priests promoting liberation theology in Latin America. All these commitments have been the signs of hope for a better world where each individual will be recognised as a person with all his dignity. Every commitment asks for discernment. First and foremost what are the references and values on which we rely to discern the appropriateness of such a commitment ?

Maurice Zundel asks the question: *“What is the right commitment then ? It is the power to be human, it is the vocation and capacity to be human, or, if you wish, it is the capacity and the vocation to love.”* That implies also that each person has *“a space of security which ensures a space for generosity.”* (Marc Donzé, *Prier 15 Jours Avec Maurice Zundel*, Edition Nouvelle Cité, Montrouge, 1997)

Mgr. Aloys Jousten, Bishop of Liege (Belgium) makes quite clear what the question is ultimately: *“what does God wait for from us here and now? And the following question arises from that: what have we done for the poor? If the poor person is our criterion, if the poor person is our starting point, all the others will follow.”* (A. Jousten, *Talk at ADIC*, Brussels, 12th March 2009.)

ACT

By our witness.

At an individual level, the word of Jesus if it is spoken in the spirit of the Beatitudes, invites us to shine, to become men and women who will carry with them the salt of peace, of justice, of gentleness, of poverty.

"Blessed are you if you are capable of burying yourself in the world of men and enlightening it without upsetting them, if from day to day and from window to window you light this little candle of hope which has already melted down so many barbed wire fences." " (Gabriel Ringlet; Eloge de la fragilité: L' actualité à fleur d'Evangile; 2004. ISBN: 978-2226154408.)

To be present, to be compassionate, to be with someone, and have real heart-felt concern for them. Let us be more alive to the way of evangelisation!

By our commitment.

To be the salt for the earth, light for the world, can be lived out daily through a discreet witness but it can also move conscientious people to take decisions which will mark a turning point in their lives. This call can arise in different moments of their lives.

Let us listen to Father Caffarel: *"The call from God can make itself heard more than once in the lifetime of a man.(...) Since I have been a priest, how many times have I known of those colleagues or lay people who one day heard a new calling! I only mention here the single households. I am thinking of those whom I have seen leave a situation of quiet contentment to put themselves at the service of the disinherited, of the poor in material goods, in culture or in hope.(...) The joy of all these people at the time of their departure has always struck me : it is a momentum, a leap of the spirit, a liberation."* (H. Caffarel, At the Crossroads of Love)

In the current world situation, Christians can be the *"salt for the earth"* and *"light for the world"* through commitments which affect social, perhaps political systems. Let us not be afraid. Let us put our heads above the parapet ! If we wish to build a civilisation of love, it is necessary to put ourselves at the service of a new humanity in a world where respect for the dignity of all, in its diversity, will reign. (B.Sorge; Called to build the civility of Love, International Gathering of Regional Couples, END, Rome 2009)

By our commitment in the Church

A specific mission of the members of Equipes Notre-Dame, a movement whose central tenet is the spirituality of the couple, is to be with couples, all Christian couples, in the different stages of their lives as a couple.

The talk from Constanza and Alberto Alvarado at the International Meeting of the Regional Responsible couples in Rome in 2009 throws light on the commitment of many team members, but also on the commitment taken by the Movement. We present some extracts to you: (C&A Alvarado; History and Orientation of the Movement during these last years, International Gathering of Regional Couples, END, Rome 2009)

Jean and Annick Allemand quote Father Caffarel in 1970 concerning institutions whose *"vocation ought not to be defined only according to the needs of the couples, but also according to the great shortcomings of our contemporary world"* (J&A Allemand; Henry Caffarel: Facing Atheism).

In 1976, Father Tandonnet, in the name of the International Leading Team defined the *mission* of the Movement as: *Evangelisation is not reduced to a single example. You belong to a Movement which has taken the concern for evangelisation seriously.* Joining END you have not only yielded to the desire to perfect your personal conjugal life: you know that you have quickly noticed that the Teams wish to be open to the world and to others.

The Second Wind (1988) explicitly says it again: *"The Teams have a specific objective: to help couples to live out fully their Christian marriage. They also have a missionary objective: to announce to the world the value of Christian marriage by word and the witness of their lives."* It is in this way that we are called upon to work in the sphere of activity such as: being with teams of young people, preparation for marriage, journeying with young couples, helping couples in difficulty, such as divorced remarried people.

Father Caffarel's talk at Chantilly in 1983 was prophetic in this regard and points to the current momentum. He expressed two regrets, this being one of them: *"I regret that END has not followed up the centres for marriage preparation. They were born out of END, but very often they have become very less Christian. I do not think that END ought to direct the preparation for marriage, but I think that END ought to have centres for the preparation for marriage which would be points of reference for the other centres, coming from precisely the spirituality that they had discovered."*

To end, let us take up again some important phrases in the conclusion of Constanza and Alberto Alvarado's talk in Rome: *"Are we today facing the beginning of a third period where the Movement 'reflected on its vocation' in order to discern what is necessary to correct or renew it... ? In the new document of the Satellite Team for the formation of the END, it is asserted that Teams couples should be prepared to participate in the external apostolic activities of the Movement. We must ask ourselves the question: In what way will the Movement support this development and how do we see the future development of this aspect of Formation ?(...) But there is more: if the Church, as an institution, not only sends out its members to witness by example, word and action, but also to support their subsequent formation, organisation and continued institutional support, are the Teams of Our Lady not obliged to do as much for their own members ?*

SHARE

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

In the light of the words of Jesus, *"You are the salt for the earth, you are light for the world"*, let us consider the following questions.

Questions for discussion by couples

1. Have we recognised at some moment in our lives a particular calling towards others ?
2. What are our current commitments? Do we see them as part of Gods' plan ?

Questions for Team meetings

1. How do we react to the words of Constanza and Alberto Alvarado: *"But there is more: If the Church as an institution, not only sends out its members to 'witness' by example, word and action, but also to support their subsequent formation, organisation and continued institutional support, are the Teams of Our Lady not obliged to do as much for their own members ?"*
2. Do you think that our Movement faces up to the beginning of a "third period" as Constanza and Alberto Avarando advocate?

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

"Go and Do Likewise" (Luke 10: 37; RSV)

Chapter 5: to be close to humanity and increase love

"Jesus then came down from the mountain with them (the Twelve Apostles) and stopped at a piece of level ground..." (Luke 6:17; NJB)

LISTEN and REFLECT

Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke (6: 17-19)

Jesus then came down from the mountain with them and stopped at a piece of level ground where there was a large gathering of his disciples, with a great crowd of people from all parts of Judea and Jerusalem and the coastal region of Tyre and Sidon who had come to hear him and to be cured of their diseases. People tormented by unclean spirits were also cured, and everyone in the crowd was trying to touch him because power came out of him that cured them all. (NJB).

Jesus and his disciples came down and they stopped. These are 'action verbs'. A great crowd had come from afar and from all around to listen to him and to be cured by him.

Jesus Christ alone cures, cares for us and sends us out to care in his name. We are 'cured wounded'. *"Go and do the Same Yourself" (Luke 10: 37)*. The Samaritan, too, was coming down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and by chance he came upon a seriously injured man; came near him, and seeing him, and without the injured man asking anything of him, was moved with compassion, treated him and bound up his wounds. Then he put him on his own beast, brought him to the inn and took care of him. The next day, when the Samaritan had to go on his way, he gave two pieces of silver to the innkeeper and asked him to take care of the man, promising to pay him any extra expense, on his return.

'The world around us is also held back if your love cools. A world which is not far from despairing of love, of a certain quality of love and in danger of being swallowed up in materialism is entitled to your witness. It needs to see divine love radiating from human tenderness, to learn from you that Christ came to save love. Will you refuse this witness?'. (H. CAFFAREL, Textes choisis.)

SEE

The crisis of the couple is a worldwide phenomenon, characteristic of the second half of the 20th century and of the first years of the 21st century. Numerous couples find themselves affected by this crisis which leads them to separation or to divorce. Some have been divorced two or three times, or even more. In some countries more than half the couples separate or divorce in the first five years of marriage.

Irretrievable breakdowns occur in all classes of society and at all ages. This affects many couples, and has given rise to changes in legislation in the majority of countries which now allow divorce. At first, laws depicted divorce as a lesser evil, confirming the "death of the couple" and "betrayal of marriage vows". It provided an alternative avoiding the major drawbacks that result from impossible or very difficult married cohabitation. Nowadays, divorce is often considered as the individual right of all spouses to end their marriage, even where no serious justification exists.

Divorce does not help to solve couples' problems. Its causes are numerous : immaturity, weakness of character, illness, boredom, routine, infidelity, parallel lives, professional conflicts, domestic violence, absence of a project in common, economic problems, reciprocal misunderstandings, etc.

We all know many people who are separated or divorced; close to us or distant: family, friends, acquaintances in the neighbourhood, at work, in our parish, or even in couples within teams, sometimes even in our own team.

When a marriage breaks down it is a source of pain and suffering for the two spouses, or at least for one of them, and almost always for the children. Many people are wounded by the failure of the marriage. Some have suffered a lot and have tried to save their marriage but have been 'abandoned' by their spouse.

When divorce becomes commonplace, as happens in many countries, civil society suffers as a result. Although at first sight divorce may be a private matter that only concerns the couple and the children, when cases of divorce multiply, the problem spreads to society: single parent families (a man or woman living alone, with responsibility for children) cause new problems. In the end few people still find that it is a social good that marriages last and not break down. Nevertheless, social actions to prevent and fight against the causes that lead to divorce are still too few and hold no interest for the public.

EVALUATE

Positive elements of the current situation

Freedom. In the majority of countries men and women are free to marry, free to choose who to marry, or indeed whether to marry or not. In those countries which have legislated on divorce, married people who do not divorce, stay married because they want to and not because society or the law force them to. As a result, every day they in fact renew the promise they made the day they married.

Equality. between men and women, and between husband and wife. This is a victory for women, a fruit of their struggle and effort to participate in society on an equal footing with men and to enjoy the same rights as men. They are able to undertake the same studies, work and political rights as men, and so attain the same status as them. From this perspective, consent to marriage is freer and more thoughtful at the time of marrying and in the decision to stay married.

Responsible procreation and education for children. Where there are children, they may be a factor in deciding to not to divorce.

Many men and women are travelling more internationally through work, culture or tourism. This openness has enriched us all, and it facilitates marriages between men and women of different races, languages, cultures and religions.

The Catholic Church is more attentive to early and later preparation for marriage, to its celebration, to couples in crisis, to those who are separated, divorced-remarried, and to canonical procedures for nullifying marriages.

This concern can be found in numerous documents by pastors of the Church, and in the thinking of lay people, particularly of couples who belong to Church Movements for couples and families. However we should all pay more attention to the discernment that the married faithful are undertaking, concerning those who are separated and divorced.

Negative or inadequate aspects

Starting from a concept of 'weak men and women', freedom can be described as an absence of commitment by the couple, happiness as the absence of problems or difficulties, and love between a man and a woman becomes defined as a consumable good, to be 'used and thrown away'.

This concept of 'weak men and women' takes no account of personal strengths that are suited to confronting crises within the couple. Sadly such crises sometimes produce violent episodes, but these can be overcome.

The majority of countries pay little attention and devote few resources to the effective promotion of the stability of couples and families, or to helping achieve a balance between spouses' work and their 'role' as couple and parents. The concept of divorce as an individual right, develops, not as a lesser evil, but as the

last recourse to avoid worse. We frequently forget that it is children who are the first victims in case of separation or of divorce.

The Church's pastors do not pay enough attention to conjugal spirituality and to pastoral care for the couple after the marriage ceremony. There is a great emphasis on pastoral care for the family, yet couples are starting their life as a couple and have yet to create their identity as a couple. Without a couple there can be no family. Maternity-paternity is an important dimension of the couple, but is not its totality.

Although numbers 83 and 84 of apostolic exhortation *Familiaris consortio* (22 November 1981), and many of the Pope's other, later documents, speeches and homilies and Episcopal conferences emphasise the fact that the Church must help separated people and those who are divorced-remarried, most parish communities, couples and families do not give them the support they need. Many of them are wounded by the failure of their marriage, and do not understand why the Church offers them recognition, understanding, solidarity and concrete support, but does not allow them to receive communion if they are united in civil marriage to another person.

ACT

The Second Wind, (1988) affirms that teams as such 'do not undertake any predetermined group action, as each couple must discover the call to which the Lord wants them to respond.[...] but the Movement has a charism that is proper to it, that it cannot 'deny its peers' and specific calls by the Bishops in the domain of pastoral care for families It is important for Teams to be open to other social milieu and to be concerned for the needs of their country preferably those that are identified by their local Churches'. And amongst the fields of action of the current needs of pastoral care for families, it referred to: 'providing support to couples that are having difficulties and to those who are divorced-remarried'.

In his 20 January 2003 speech to Regional and Super-regional Responsible Couples, and to the ERI, Pope John Paul II, reminded married couples, of their spiritual closeness 'to separated, divorced and divorced and remarried people'.

Following the *Second Wind* many couples and teams' spiritual counsellors asked that the ERI promote concrete pastoral care activities by the Equipes Notre-Dame for separated and divorced people. The ERI cannot commit itself, because it is up to each couple to decide what it is inclined to do and for the responsible couples in Sectors, Regions and Super Regions, in accordance with any directives from local Bishops, to invite couples and Teams to freely take on these engagements in different areas of pastoral care for couples and families, including those that are separated and divorced-remarried.

Each couple and each spiritual counsellor is personally called to be Samaritan, in order to help couples around us that are wounded and in crisis, those that are separated and divorced, and divorced-remarried. We have neither remedies nor magic formulae that will solve their problems, but we can listen to them without judging, understand them with empathy and be available to walk with them.

As active members of our parish communities, we should promote and support the actions of our local Church, and those proposed by our local Sector or our Region. This is the evangelical discernment proper to lay people that the Church needs.

As citizens, we exhort team members to participate in opinion forums and in public debates that address: the causes of crises experienced by couples, of separations and of divorces; the personal, familial and social consequences of these crises; and the measures that the State should take to address these causes and to limit their effects. Our political vote should support electoral programs that take count of these measures.

We should never forget that Teams couples are men and women like the rest of the world. Marriage is threatened by egoism, the pursuit of material goods and excessive consumption, the temptation of infidelity, the weight of routine, the weakness that comes with aging, the passions, conflicts, the frustration

of not getting what we want, fear and pain associated with illness, refusal to make sacrifices for the other party, and the temptation of becoming discouraged.

All these conflicts underline the profound contradiction we live in: we are created to love but we are incapable of living total love. Even so, seeing our weaknesses does not discourage us; we have the hope that the last word in our relationship as a married couple will not be its breakdown, because God continues to be faithful, and he does not desist nor turn back despite our weaknesses and our sins. If both spouses ask for God's mercy, he will 'bind up their wounds', and he will increase in them their capacity to love and start again! God will be present in the couple that loves and pardons, in the moments of joy and in the moments of difficulty, in health and in sickness, all the days of our life and until death!

SHARE

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

Questions for discussion by couples

1. Have there been couples in crisis who called on us for help? How did we respond?
2. What is our attitude towards the separated or divorced or divorced-remarried couples around us? Have they sometimes called on us for help?
3. What are we prepared to do to help couples in crisis?

Questions for Team meetings

1. Are we capable of detecting crises and suffering in the other couples of our own Team?
2. Do we try to be close to, to listen to and to help couples that are in crisis, separated, divorced et divorced-remarried? Or do we 'look the other way' and 'pass by on the other side'?
3. Do we participate in activities of the local Church in order to hear, to welcome and to walk with couples in crisis?
4. Do we promote or participate in opinion forums or public debates on the causes of crises affecting couples, bringing about separations and divorces, with the personal, familial and social consequences they entail, as well as those concerning measures that the State should take to prevent its causes and alleviate its impacts?
5. Do we ask our political representatives to include in their electoral programs measures to prevent the causes of crises in couples, of separation and divorce, and to alleviate their impacts? Does our political vote support electoral programs that contain these measures?

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

"Go and Do Likewise" (Luke 10: 37; RSV)

Chapter 6: Life as a vocation

*"When day came, he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them"
(Luke 6: 13; NJB)*

LISTEN and REFLECT

Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke (6: 12-13)

Now it happened in those days that Jesus went onto the mountain to pray; and he spent the whole night in prayer to God. When day came, he summoned his disciples and picked out twelve of them; he called them 'Apostles'.

Just as Jesus prayed before acting, we as a couple are called upon to do the will of God throughout our lives, but in order to achieve this it is essential to seek, in the first place, what is the will of God.

It is essential to really know ourselves, if we are to grow spiritually. We all know our fundamental faults only too well - our inner and outer weaknesses (and we hope others do not know them!). However, we often tend to underestimate our strengths and talents. Through personal prayer we must try to know truly who we are and make the exterior picture match the inner reality.

To pray as a couple is to invite Jesus into our marriage. Having established the truth about ourselves as individuals it is then possible to explore honestly and frankly, who we are as a couple and what our vocation as team members is.

Only then can we take action in the knowledge that we are doing the will of God.

As Father Henri Caffarel said, *"So Teams have a vocation, to help couples to become holy. Teams have a mission in the Church, we must continually bear in mind these two aspects, vocation and mission."* (Conference of European Responsible Couples, Chantilly, 1987)

By our Baptism we are called to be missionaries - By our marriage we are called to be a missionary couple.

In this way marriage has a decisive influence on how we live our spiritual life. Marriage should also influence our mission, not only in a couples movement like ours, but also the mission of the couples themselves.

Marriage is, therefore, a determining influence on the way we live the spiritual life. Marriage must also influence the mission, not only of a movement for couples like ours, but also the mission of the couples themselves.

"This passion (to proclaim Christ and the Kingdom of God) will not fail to stir a new missionary spirit in the Church, which cannot be left to a group of "specialists" but must be the responsibility of all the members of the People of God. Those who have come into genuine contact with Christ cannot keep him for themselves, they must proclaim him. A new apostolic enthusiasm is needed, which will be lived as the everyday commitment of Christian communities and groups". (John-Paul II, Apostolic Letter, *Novo Millennio Ineunte*, 6 Jan 2001)

SEE

The Teams movement has a direct and specific mission: to help couples to fully live their sacrament of marriage. In addition it has a missionary objective: to proclaim the value of Christian marriage to the world in words and in the witness of their life. In addition, to accomplish this mission, we must understand, live and spread married spirituality.

Some couples may be called to be missionaries in foreign countries, but most couples and individuals fulfil their mission within their family, at work, in their communities and wherever they go to relax. Each time that we follow and put into practice Jesus' principles, teaching and values in the way that we live and love as a couple, we contribute to the quality of life and happiness of members of our community. We are called to follow Christ every day, Christ who proclaimed justice, love, peace, forgiveness and freedom for all and particularly for those who are denied dignity, respect, meaning and hope in their lives.

But let us not forget that all this, the spiritual life and its dissemination, the methods the movement uses and its organization and all the help we can bring our brothers and sisters – have only one end in sight: to live the new commandment of love as Jesus loved us, to attach ourselves to his person and proclaim him.

EVALUATE

To Judge (or Consider):

Through Christian marriage, the life of couples is distinguished by a sacrament thanks to their deep commitment one to the other and is also a sign of God's grace. Married love finds its source in the love of God. Married spirituality is born at the heart of this relationship.

Couples develop their married spirituality through seeking the presence of God and their desire to know and carry out His will in all the ordinary circumstances of life. Divine love finds its expression in human love when the daily life of couples is filled with care and concern for each other, with support and absolute faithfulness, with understanding, and mutual respect, and with a harmony of heart and mind. When even the simplest tasks are done with love, then the Lord is present at the heart of the couple and their spirituality is a lived reality.

The married couple want to live this spirituality in the course of each day. Sometimes it is a struggle to relate lovingly to each other, mistakes are made and one is hurt but they constantly reach out to each other and it is in these moments that they encounter Christ.

"Although the Teams of Our Lady are not a movement of action, they want to be a movement of active people" (Cardinal Martini – Gathering of Italian Sector couples 1998)

Teams do not get involved, as teams, in particular joint activities. It is for each couple to discover the call to which the Lord wants it to respond. However this freedom of individual commitment must not let us forget that the purpose of the movement is to let couples see the possibilities of change and growth. We need to be aware of the 'signs of the times', to listen, to discern and to respond to the needs of others. Missionary couples present marriage as a living community of love, as a rich source and expression of our spirituality.

It is also important that couples should...

- *"... be open to new social groups and be concerned about the needs of their country, preferably those highlighted by local Churches."* (The Second Wind - 1988)
- respond to the call of the Church for a new evangelisation based on human love and family life. Today the Church has great need of a married laity, enriched by formation where faith

and life nourish each other. Christian couples also have a missionary duty to other couples and a duty to help them. They legitimately desire to pass on to them their experience and show them that Christ is the source of all married life.

"Innumerable couples will be grateful to you for the help that you bring to them; in fact, most couples today are in need of help" (Pope Paul VI to the Teams of Our Lady – 1976)

To fulfil our mission, Teams of Our Lady must always support their action with prayer:

"Isn't prayer the force that takes us out of ourselves and propels us to the service of others? It is through prayer that human means acquire their full efficacy, and it is prayer that continues to achieve when these means no longer can." (Fr. Henri Caffarel (Second Wind))

The call to mission can be frightening. We may refuse to accept specific tasks because of feelings of inadequacy or because of busy lives rather than seeing them as an invitation from God to use our talents and time. We may fail to trust that God will provide all that is needed to do the work He asks of us. Before we can share our love we need to know that we are loveable. We will have difficulty understanding and being committed to our role as a missionary couple until we have developed a true spiritual relationship with God.

The joy of giving by sharing our love is self-perpetuating. Just as from a single candle a multitude can be lit, spreading light far and wide, without ever diminishing the brightness of the first candle, so a couple by a single act of love can proclaim the glory of God.

ACT

While each person is entrusted with an individual mission, as couples, through the sacrament of marriage, we are given a joint mission realising our vocation in life.

Therefore we are called to live the Gospel each day by:

- Being open to the gift of faith and recognising this gift in ourselves and in others and expressing it in our daily lives
- Setting aside time to pray and reflect together to discern what the Holy Spirit is asking of us.
- Recognising and celebrating the gift of marriage in order to live out God's call.
- Being open to growth and change and discovering the potential within each person.
- Realising that overcoming adversity and disappointment can enable growth.

Human Love especially within marriage is the image of God's love and we can show it by:

- The way we witness firstly to our family and then to those with whom we come into contact
- Our hospitality to others
- Our spirit of generosity
- The way we serve, reconcile, support and reach out to everyone.

It is now up to each one of us to see where specifically we can apply these principles.

For example it could be:

- Forming teams of young married couples.
- Marriage preparation for young engaged couples,
- Involvement in communities of young couples,
- Ministering to remarried divorced people,
- Ministering to cohabiting young people.

We must ask ourselves: What is our vocation? To what activity do we feel called? What needs do we detect in our area?

SHARE:

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

Questions for discussion by couples

1. The sacrament of Marriage corresponds to a call, a vocation, a new spiritual union in Christ. How do we compare this dimension of our marriage to the likeness of the union of Christ and His Church?
2. Fr. Caffarel said *"I know some widows who have remarried and built excellent couples but I greatly admire those I know who are still living their one and unique love."* Have you seen or experienced this kind of love? How do you respond to this way of loving?

Questions for the team meeting

3. *"Preach often – sometimes use words."* (St Francis of Assisi) Have you had a personal experience where your actions or those of someone else have shown the love of others in circumstances where that action reflected the unconditional love of God? How can we strengthen our spirit of commitment and fidelity to the Gospel in order to radiate married spirituality?
4. It is important that human love should be at the service of everyone. "Love one another as I have loved you". How can we put this into practice for those around us? What contribution can married couples make to building a civilisation in which Love takes first place?
5. A recent survey revealed that over 70% of team members had been involved in actively supporting the Church. Have you found that team membership has broadened your understanding of the needs of the Church community?

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

"Go and Do Likewise" (Luke 10: 37; RSV)

Chapter 7: God's Love and Love of Neighbour

*"You must love the Lord your God, with all your heart,
.... And you must love your neighbour as yourself."
(Matthew 22: 37-40; NJB)*

LISTEN and REFLECT

Gospel of Jesus Christ according to Saint Luke (10: 25-28)

And now a lawyer stood up and, to test him, asked, "Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?" He said to him, "What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?" He replied, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself." Jesus said to him, "You have answered right, do this and life is yours."

Luke's Gospel confronts us with the old debate that has fascinated believers for all time: which one commandment comes before all others? Love of God or love of man? Jesus' answer is so clear and obvious that we wonder why we still debate on this theme. *"You must love the Lord your God, with all your heart, And you must love your neighbour as yourself."* These words which were already present in the law that God gave to the Jewish people (cf. Leviticus 19), are reaffirmed by Jesus to answer a scribe, an expert in the questions concerning law, who asks him which is the first and most important commandment.

There is no precedence for the one commandment of love, the love of God which passes and is identified with love for man. It is not possible to distinguish these two loves, as it is unthinkable to separate the tree of its foliage: the more we love God, the more our love for our brothers grows; the more one loves humanity represented by the brothers and sisters that we encounter every day in life, the more our love for God grows and deepens.

"The love of God is the first commandment, but the love of neighbour is first by its practical realization. He, who gives you the commandment of love in these two precepts, does not teach you to love man first and then God. However, since you are unable to see God yet, in loving others you will acquire the ability to see God; in loving one's neighbour you purify your eye to be able to see God. We have not been able to see the Lord yet but we always have the neighbour with us. Come help the neighbour with whom you walk, in order to reach the One with whom you want to stay." (Saint Augustine, Tractatus in Iohannem.)

"Come help the neighbour with whom you walk" is the invitation of St. Augustine, a man whose life was held in the tension and in the passion to combine faith and reason in the sole and constant search for truth. We must also emphasize that to love God in the Bible, is never regarded merely as pure feeling, or abstract reality, but rather it means listening to the Lord and guiding the direction of our lives towards Him, giving life to His speech, using all the instruments, even if they belong to the world, that are useful for the good of man.

"Love for God does not therefore lead man away from the world, does not isolate him in a personal devotion. Rather it is the constant source and the momentum that pushes him to love all men without exception. And it is the sole guarantor to create a society where man is truly respected. Indeed, God, Father of all men who are brothers, is the foundation for the equality between men and for everyone's dignity." (Chiara Lubich, Focolare).

SEE

"And men will contemplate the mountain peaks, the huge waves of the sea, the long streams of rivers, the vastness of the ocean, the movement of the stars" (Saint Augustine, Confessiones.) It is still St. Augustine, a passionate researcher of faith in the world, who helps our reflection: to love God means to recognize Him in the things of creation, among the beauties of our countryside, along roads strewn with the joys and pain of men, with their dreams and their failures. To see not only with the eyes, but also with our reason and with our heart, with our thinking and our feeling, because everything is an object of our love and everything can lead us to God who is the ultimate Truth. It is not by chance that Benedict XVI (April 18, 2007) reminds us that the purpose of man is to become like God and to reach the Truth that is Jesus Christ; the man received the two wings of faith and reason; Faith and reason, faith and science that work together to build the fullness of man.

Admittedly, a long conflict has fuelled the debate over the centuries between faith and science, a conflict that has no reason to be but exists because of the temptation that is always present in the human believer or in the atheist, to appropriate himself the truth, the ultimate truth that belongs only to the Lord. However, Augustine had already given his answer: it is not possible to separate or oppose these two dimensions, but instead, they should always go together. As has written the same St. Augustine after his conversion: *"faith and reason are the two forces that lead us to knowledge."* (Saint Augustine, Contra Academicos.)

In this regard, we have the two famous Augustinian formulas (Saint Augustine, Sermones.) that express a coherent synthesis between faith and reason: *"Crede ut Intelligas"*, that is to say 'believe to understand', so believe to open the road and go through the doors of truth, but also, and together, *"intellige ut credas"*, that is to say 'understand to believe', so look for the truth in order to find God and believe.

Contemporary theology expresses this idea by saying: *"If a reason too sure of itself, an ideological reason, becomes violent and totalitarian, a faith that leaves no room for doubt and a believer who does not want to be the poor who commits each day to start believing, he could make his faith a comfortable security."* (B. FORTE – G. GIORELLO, Dove fede e ragione si incontrano? ; Mondadori, Milano, 2001). See; look at reality, read history, with the attitude of faith and with the instruments of reason, culture and science, to manage, with a passion for searching, to open yourself to love.

God himself has given man the "wings" of faith and reason, Benedict XVI reminds us again, to enable him not to yield to the law of the strongest, but to recognize the other as a brother who has the same human rights: it is the basis of dialogue, forgiveness and reconciliation.

The harmony between faith and reason means above all that God is not a distant God: He is not far from our reason and our life and He is close to every human being, close to our hearts and close to our reason if we are really walking with Him.

EVALUATE

When we speak of love of neighbour, one thinks immediately of charity acts that must be done for our neighbour: giving food, drink, visiting, thus helping neighbour. But if this is a consequence of love, this is not love yet. Before charity there is benevolence; before doing good, one must want good. This is the "discernment" that Christ asks, this is the "discernment" linked to the experience of love, understood as kindness towards another, as towards ourselves: the benevolence, the good will.

Sometimes, however, driven by the zeal of a faith that does not love in the first place, we are pushing away from us brothers who live in situations we do not consider acceptable, or who

make different choices than us. But what man in all of humanity is not acceptable to God? And what gesture is not welcomed by the mercy of God?

Today's world, with its loss of values, with the multiplicity of false and confused ideologies, and with the danger of drifting towards laws based on consumerism and individualism, could cause us to marginalize the other or to feel ourselves marginalized, to classify and confine people in categories (good and bad), raising barriers and walls based on hatred and love. But we are asked to have a deep caring attitude before any involvement in the "doing".

The wounds of the modern man, abandonments and betrayals in conjugal love, disordered rebellion or lack of ideal for many young people, offense to abandoned or raped children, the elderly forgotten ... all the wounds of love. That is why we must first "take care of love", spreading in the world new seeds of love, understanding, mercy, kindness.

ACT

There is no doubt that the imperative "*love your neighbour as thyself*", already present in the Old Testament, becomes even clearer in the words of Jesus: "*Love*" means "*act with love towards your neighbour*". It is therefore not only to be guided by a sense of compassionate love, but to involve our will and free choice in our actions of love.

"Loving God with all your heart and your neighbour as yourself" means then guiding all your being and all your doing towards God, in a burst of love: it should be more than enough! But the gospel adds, "*and with all your soul*", which means "*with all your life*", "*with all your spirit*", which contains the thought and intelligence, and finally "*all your strength*", which includes all the energies.

"With all your heart and with all your soul, all your mind, all your strength" ... may seem an exclusive love, but instead it is a love that has no borders. If you love God, you will also love your parents and children because it is He who asks this of you; if you love God, you will love friends and co-workers because they are the brothers that he has put on your side; if you love God, you will love your profession, your work, because it is the prepared way of his love for you; if you love God, you will love your studies because you want to prepare yourself for God's purpose on your life; if you love God, you will love sport or entertainment because you know that God wants you to take care of your health and well-being.

If you love God you will do everything for your brothers, you will commit to meet their needs, you will heal their wounds with love, and you will share their hopes and will fight for them and with them: it is God himself who requests this of you. The mission of the Church is to be globally oriented. We, the lay people, we have to testify to the effectiveness of the Gospel. : Family, marriage, work, politics, sport, are the fields of our actions to make our baptismal commitment concrete (C. Molari, *Credenti laicamente nel mondo*, Cittadella, 2° edition). "*On behalf of our faith, we have the right and duty to be passionate about the things of the earth.*" (P. Teilhard de Chardin, *The Divine Milieu*, English edition translated by Sion Cowell, Sussex Academic Press, 2004)

SHARE:

"I do not ask you to preach morality to those around you ... (they are so boring, those self-righteous people with their morality!). It's not by brandishing a morality that we convert the world, but by announcing the wonderful news of God's love for us. How? I am not going to answer you. True love of neighbour, just as patience and perseverance, is never short of invention." (H. CAFFAREL, "Des garderies de bons chrétiens", Lettre mensuelle END, octobre 1953.)

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

1. How can we respond to Father Caffarel who asks us to be imaginative in our love of neighbours ?
2. As couple who have received the gift of love, how do we show this love in our neighbourhood ? Do we expend "all our strength" in our love for other couples?
3. What loving actions towards others can we perform which would show the love of God for his people ?
4. Father Teilhard de Chardin points out that "*Each abstract knowledge is a faded being*" : is our faith alive and concrete or a faded gift?

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

"Go and Do Likewise" (Luke 10: 37; RSV)

Chapter 8: The Mission of Teams.

"But Peter said, 'I have neither silver or gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk !'" (Acts 3:6; NJB)

LISTEN and REFLECT

The Acts of the Apostles (Acts 3,4-8; 4,1-3a.5-10)

Peter, and John too, looked straight at him and said, 'Look at us.' He turned to them expectantly, hoping to get something from them, but Peter said, 'I have neither silver or gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, walk !' Then he took him by the right hand and helped him to stand up. Instantly his feet and ankles became firm, he jumped up, stood, and began to walk, and he went with them onto the Temple, walking and jumping and praising God.

While they were still talking to the people the priests came up to them, accompanied by the captain of the Temple and the Sadducees. They were extremely annoyed at their teaching the people the resurrection from the dead by proclaiming the resurrection of Jesus. They arrested them, and as it was already late, they kept them in prison till the next day.

It happened that the next day the rulers, elders and scribes held a meeting in Jerusalem with Annas the high priest, Caiaphas, Jonathan, Alexander, and all the members of the high-priestly families. They made the prisoners stand in the middle and began to interrogate them, 'By what power, and by whose name have you men done this ?' Then Peter, filled with the Holy Spirit, addressed them, 'Rules of the people, and elders ! If you are questioning us today about an act of kindness to a cripple and asking us how he was healed, you must know, all of you, that it is by the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene, whom you crucified, and God raised from the dead, by this name and by no other that this man stands before you cured.'

The miracle of Peter, even the word "Walk" that accompanies it, reminds one of the first miracles done by Jesus in Capernaum (Luke 5:17-26), the echo effect is intentional, to emphasize continuity between the work of Christ and the work of his apostles. "I have neither silver or gold", says Peter, referring to the instructions of Jesus (Luke 9:3 - "Take nothing for the journey, neither staff, nor haversack, nor bread, nor money "), the apostle acts only by the strength of the name of Jesus the Lord, present in person in the work of his disciples.

The power of the apostles has nothing to do with magic or with the material resources that our human intelligence can find, not even with a special power of suggestion. The involvement of religious leaders only highlights this reality: like Jesus, the apostles, disarmed, could withstand the arrest and interrogation, but the violence did not prevent them from announcing with honesty the compelling work of the Spirit sent by Christ to the early Church. It is not their human forces, which are weak and easily crushed that allow this, but it is the presence of God on their side that comforts them and makes them avail, without violence, the repression attempted against them.

"I have neither silver or gold, but I will give you what I have: in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene", the Christian couple can make the words of the apostle their own every day. With all the limitations and weaknesses of human frailty, Christian spouses do not cease for a moment to be a living and incarnate proclamation of the Father's mercy, of the redemption of Christ, of the strength of the Holy Spirit. They do not enjoy a privileged status over other human beings: their loyalty is tested daily, their path takes place among difficulties that are sometimes heavy, and the judgment of others on them is often sceptical or suspicious. But the apostle Paul would say that in that weakness, grace is revealed. The wounds of sin can

be healed by mercy; the salvation of Jesus gives hope and the will to resume the way; the power of the Spirit pushes us to witness to the faith with renewed strength. In the painful situations of suffering and misunderstanding the love of the Lord who heals can always be revealed, and by this experience the couple understands that he can become a living testimony.

SEE

"*Look at us*" is Peter's invitation to the cripple. A look during which two poverties meet, the one of the beggar pitied by many but liked by no one, and that of the apostle who, forgiven by Christ after the betrayal, welcomed in himself the fullness of the Spirit of Lord. The look between the two is the beginning of a sharing that produces salvation, a "*miracle of the empty hands*" in the words of Georges Bernanos.

Father Caffarel wrote (H. CAFFAREL, *Aux carrefours de l'amour*, Parole et Silence, Paris, 2001 pages 86-88) : *But it can happen to us on our way to meet a being in the eye of whom we read such a love that we dare ask him to go down into our interior abysses, those of our miseries, those of our sins. Precious encounter. Rare encounter. And then what the speaker said holds true: we come back from such an expedition with a sense of deliverance. The discovered evil, it is true, cannot but arouse shame, a shame that would create anxiety and despair if at the same time, in the eyes of one who loves us, we didn't discover that there is within us, deeper than this evil, a beauty that can generate respect and love.*

Would so many criminals who surrender to the vertigo of evil have become so if a loving gaze had landed on them? The frightful Medea of Anouilh who is about to destroy herself after killing her children told the one who failed to love her: "When you suffer a while ago, think there was a little girl Medea in the past, who was demanding and pure, who was small, tender and silenced in the abyss of another. Keep in mind that she has fought alone, unknown, without a helping hand and that this was your real woman !"

As real as it is, this deliverance only lasts but a moment. Self-contempt, temporarily exorcised, comes back slyly: after all, that look of love on me is a man's gaze. Isn't he mistaken? If it were the gaze of an infallible God I may dare believing in it. And I may dare revealing to him my inner being without distress.

The Christian believes in God's love. A love that confession of his sad cowardice or even serious sins cannot repel, disgust, or weary. Self-contempt, and the collapse it causes, is no longer possible for him. The divine look puts him on his feet just like the boy who was raised by Christ.

Lucid about his illness, with an uncompromising lucidity, a son of God is lucid too, and primarily, on what in him is worthy of esteem and love. If he confesses, admits and claims his wrongdoing as he notices it, if he recognizes his goodness and makes an alliance with it, a new life and a spiritual renewal develop in him.

Christ did not come to judge and condemn. He came to save, redeem. And redemption is first revelation, the revelation of the unimaginable, the undiscouragable, the indestructible love of the Father. Father's love as reflected in the eyes of Christ, so often mentioned in the Gospel: "He looked at him and he loved him." His gaze is not anonymous, impersonal; he reaches the inner self of every being. The one who is saved is the one who experiences this gaze, recognizes his sin and condemns them. The divine love he discovers and on which he relies upon reconciles him with himself, he can finally have this love of self without which we can't live, and in him awakens and emerges the "new man" in the joy of Easter morning.

But what gaze do we put on today's world, we who, through the eyes of Christ have been forgiven and saved?

"We are always tempted to see only the negative points, the conditions of sin. Yet despite all these negative signs, we know that the Spirit of the Father is in action, we have the promise of Jesus that the Lord is with us until the end of time. The growing individualism, the violence that divides the human family and enters all relationships, the inability to sustain a long time commitment: it is clear, all that exists, we see it every day and we know that it deeply touches the reality of the couple, of our couple.

But besides this, if we want to be truly objective, we find a whole series of other values, which were not sufficiently taken into account. The search for true authenticity, for a genuine coherence that may eliminate public hypocritical behaviour, the desire for peace, not only interiorly but also globally with the respect of the rights of the people, the greatest wealth of interpersonal relationships, the ecology beyond any artificial manipulation that alters the balance of nature for economic profit, all of these values exist and prevail more and more in the consciousness of people.

The world then appears with all its positive potential, because the world is a creature of God. We discover, it is true, negative realities, because humanity is affected by sin, but we feel inside of us an always keener need for reconciliation in a new historical situation.” (EQUIPES NOTRE DAME, 40 anni dopo: il “secondo soffio”, Lettera della S.R. Italia n.133)

EVALUATE

In facing our suffering and that of others we are often tempted to respond with a mix of energy and rebellion, appealing to the physical and psychological resources we gather laboriously. To undertake this journey is human, but Christ has travelled a different path: he shared the injuries and mistakes, rather than ignored or condemned them in others. Thus along this path, we move from healed to healers and preachers of salvation.

“I am convinced more than ever that the mystical way and the revolutionary way were not opposed in Jesus. Jesus was a revolutionary who did not become an extremist, since he has not offered an ideology but himself. He was also a mystic, who did not use his intimate relationship with God to avoid the ills of his time, but he shocked the world to the point of being crucified as a rebel. Jesus made his body the way of salvation, of liberation and new life. So who proclaims our liberation is called, like Jesus, not only to heal its own wounds and those of others, but also to make his injuries the main source of his powers as a healer.

How can an injury become a source of healing? Responses such as “Do not take it that way, I am suffering too, like you” do not help anyone. Making our own wounds a source of healing requires a constant willingness to understand that the pain and individual sufferings emerge from the depths of the human condition, in which we participate.

Anyone wishing to put themselves in an attitude of attention to human suffering must be in harmony with oneself, that is to say that he must discover in its intimacy the centre of his existence. When the mind is agitated, when one is carried away by various and often contrasted stresses, between people, ideas and anxieties of the world, how can we create the place and space where everyone can freely enter without feeling like an intruder?

We will come to understand that to live means to be loved, if we are not afraid to go deeper within ourselves. We can free the others only because we were liberated by Him who has a heart bigger than ours. We will then be able to bring into the space created for them, letting them dance their dance, sing their songs and speak their language without fear.

In today's world many people suffer, but when entering a really welcoming home, they realize that their injuries are like signs and that they need to continue the journey in obedience to the memory of these injuries. If we understand that we must not flee from sufferings, but that we can mobilize them for a common search for life, the sufferings will be transformed from expressions of despair into signs of hope.

A Christian community is a community that heals, because often the wounds and sufferings become opportunities to open ourselves or opportunities for a new vision. If we believe that the ministry is a sign of hope, we can understand and realize that we carry within us the source of our own search. We know that mankind suffers, and participation in the suffering can move us forward. We are called to make it that impulse forward credible, so that men do not stop, but still want to go forward, confident that the total

liberation of humanity and the world has yet to happen." (Henri Nouwen, *The Wounded Healer*, ISBN 9780232521023, 1974.)

ACT

In marriage, spouses are in a paradoxical condition. As witnesses to a mystery of reconciliation, they are called to heal their wounds, injuries they have brought upon themselves. That cannot happen, and it is important to understand this, without recognizing that the grace of the sacrament is not power, but presence. The grace of the sacrament does not give the couple an exceptional power, but allows them to recognize their own weaknesses, and encourages them to put their trust in the regenerative presence of Jesus in their midst. Here is the reflection offered by a Teams couple.

"When we are hurt deep within our being, in the most intimate part of ourselves, wounded in whom we have put all our trust, human forgiveness becomes almost impossible. Only faith can make us understand forgiveness as a 'gift from God.' Only prayer can give us the strength to forgive, 'Lord, I cannot. You alone can help me.'

Forgiveness requires a lot of love and a firm commitment to build. Forgiveness goes both ways, and it is difficult in both directions because it involves pride and self-esteem, and it deals with wounds that are still open. Asking forgiveness means having had an experience of death. To conceive that it is necessary to rebuild the couple's relationship implies that one has just accepted a difficult rejection, that the couple has been through a painful breakup.

*It was during a crisis or trial that we measure the greatness and value of the sacrament of marriage. This is the support of faith for those who want to truly understand and live the sacrament of marriage in this perspective. This act of faith is a proposition, an invitation to believe in something great, greater than our human weaknesses, an act of hope in the infinite resources of the one who receives the help of his Lord. It is also an act of hope in the power of the covenant: God guides the couple through life, as He guided His people in the desert. God's people became hungry and thirsty, they suffered, they protested, but every day they received the manna that helped them withstand day after day, and at the end of the journey they arrived in the Promised Land. With the same hope in his heart a couple who is bound by the sacrament of marriage can weather the storms." (B. & B. Chovelon, *L'aventure du mariage chrétien.*, Cerf édition, 2002)*

Renewed by the forgiveness that Christ gives to anyone who looks at himself from his own poverty, Christians are still like Peter in the world today, the witnesses of the Good News that liberates and saves men. But the temptation to forget our own past and present weaknesses is always present. Enzo Bianchi, prior of the monastic community of Bose, warns against the hypocrisy behind the commitment of Christians in today's society.

"In the current situation, many wish for a Christianity according to the paradigm of a strong religiosity lead by active and effective minorities who are capable of providing identity and visibility, and impose themselves because they are conceived according to a strategy of defence and competition. For my part, I consider instead that it is only by living the Christian difference among men that we foster a dynamism that shakes the indifference to the Christian faith and its requirements, and that shakes an attitude of indifference which belongs also to people who declare themselves Catholics.

It would therefore be desirable to consider a journey of deepening the faith within the Christian community that takes into account two requirements. The first requirement is to focus on the Gospel, on this text that the Council wanted to give back to Catholics and managed to give to them in all its completeness and its richness. Because without knowing the Gospel, how is it possible to know Jesus Christ and see him as Lord? How would we welcome his exemplary humanity? He became a man of God 'to teach us to live as men in this world', in the words of St. Paul. How would we understand that the goal of the humanization of God is the true humanization of man?

The second requirement is to listen to the men and women of today. The future of the Christian faith rests on the ability to unite the Gospel to man, and faith to the anthropological dimension. If we speak of failure, and failure there was, it is that of 'the tradition' of faith, but the antidote can only be now to restore the primacy of the Gospel and to listen to humanity. In a historical period where everything is being discussed, the conception of the relationship with our own body, with the opposite sex, with suffering, with time, with nature ... it is necessary to develop wise responses that say who the human being is and how he can be humanized through a personal and communal quality of life.

Christians and non-Christians, we must all ask a question of an anthropological nature: Who is man ? Where is man going ? How can we live in a society that struggles against barbarism and towards humanization ? The answers that everyone will be able to provide, starting from his own spiritual heritage, will certainly determine our future, but also the quality of our personal and civil coexistence today." (E. Bianchi, Per un'etica condivisa., Einaudi, 2009)

SHARE:

How do we react to what we have read in this chapter?

Questions for discussion by couples

Remember a time of tension and dryness in your married life.

How did it manifest itself ?

What weaknesses did it bring out ?

What concrete steps have we taken towards each other to overcome our misunderstandings ?

How did we confirm our reconciliation ?

What has helped us change or refresh in our relationship ?

With our wealth of experience, what would we say to couples, to believers and nonbelievers, about the difficulties they encounter on their journey ?

Questions for the Team Meeting

"We must walk with our brothers in the world today. There are problems, such as prayer or illness, the couple's relationship or parenting, where we have a long tradition, but there are others, such as democracy, international cooperation, peace or volunteering, the atheist reasoning, ecumenism, deviance and interreligious dialogue, where we are only in infancy, or which inspire us with a mix of admiration and suspicion when a couple has made specific choices to deal with them.

It takes time, effort and consistency, but why not ask what Equipes Notre-Dame have done to respond to the "Second Wind", what they did with this springtime of the Spirit mentioned in Lourdes.

To move in this direction it is important to encourage dynamics of communication within the faith and testimonies from experiences, to circulate among us thoughts and projects, to try to build a consensus about a conjugal way of life. Each couple must find its own path, a viable journey for the couple, without following the choices made by others. But what is important is that we all journey." (G. Colzani, "Una fede che trasporti le montagne", Lettera END [Italia] 89/1996.)

1. Share feedback and responses on this chapter.
2. Consider Sharing and Pooling in our Team. What place does sharing on our limitations, the obstacles we face and the personal weaknesses that manifest themselves along our journey together have in our pooling and sharing ? How do we respond when others put a different point of view ?
3. Does our journey as a team help us to identify and develop some specific priority in our witness of faith ? Does it help us recognize the weaknesses in some aspects of our lay vocation and marriage ?

Do we feel the need to adopt a more consistent lifestyle, as a couple and team, to live out the Good News that the Lord has entrusted to us?