

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?