

Meditation A reading from the Gospel according to St Luke 10: 1 - 9

After this the Lord appointed seventy others and sent them on ahead of him in pairs to every town and place where he himself intended to go. He said to them, "the harvest is plentiful, but the labourers are few; therefore ask the Lord of the harvest to send our labourers into his harvest. Go on your way. See, I am sending you out like lambs into the midst of wolves. Carry no purse, no bag, no sandals; greet no one on the road. Whatever house you enter, first say, "Peace to this house!" And if anyone is there who shares in peace, your peace will rest on that person; but if not it will return to you. Remain in the same house, eating and drinking whatever they provide, for the labourer deserves to be paid. Do not move about from house to house. Whenever you enter a town and its people welcome you, eat what is set before you; cure the sick who are there, and say to them, "The kingdom of God has come near to you".

Responsorial Psalm 127

" O blessed are those who fear the Lord and walk in his ways."

- 1 O blessed are those who fear the Lord
and walk in his ways!
By the labour of your hands you shall eat.
You will be happy and prosper

- 2 Your wife like a fruitful vine
in the heart of your house;
your children like shoots of the olive
around your table.

- 3 Indeed thus shall be blessed
the man who fears the Lord.
May the Lord bless you from Zion
in a happy Jerusalem all the days of your life.

Concluding Prayer

Heavenly Father, help us in the midst of the world in which we live, to be a sign pointing to you, and may we show in our lives that living in love and service is more important than security and wealth. **Amen**

Commentary For September

A friend told me the other day that in 1923 his grandfather went into the railway station in Cork and was struck by the three clocks that he noticed on the station wall – all telling different times! He was puzzled and asked the Station Master why the times were all different. ‘Well, it’s like this’, the Station Master replied. ‘What’s the point of having three clocks if they all tell the same time?’ The man missed the train!!

What is the point of God creating us if we are all the same? I think that we should give thanks for our individuality, culture and background. The fact that we are all different means that we can bring variety to the world. It could be easy to say, ‘I have nothing to contribute to society, I am not clever enough, too young or too old!’ Each and everyone of us has something that only you and I can do and give. If we fail to celebrate our uniqueness and our valuable contribution to the community, then we miss the train of life.

In St Luke’s gospel we hear of Jesus calling the oddest bunch of disciples to follow him. Why? Because they were all unique and different and they had something enormously important to contribute to the mission of Jesus Christ building up his Church – so do you.

Canon David Hoggood, Portsmouth Cathedral

Commentary For October

Giant turtles on the Galapagos Islands live for 200 years and beneath their thick, thick shells, they are pretty safe from anything the world can throw at them.

A few years ago, when the first tourists arrived, forest fires broke out and changed dramatically their traditional habitat. The smart turtles recognised something new had arrived, stuck their necks out, moved to safe areas and survived. The other turtles did what they had always done when danger threatened, retreated to their shells, waited for the threat to go away - and perished.

We all get very used to a particular way of doing things. Most of us hate change and most especially when it affects the routine or way we live our lives. But nothing ever stands still. God sent his son Jesus into our world that we might have the trust and courage to face change. In his Gospel, Luke recalls how Jesus sent his disciples out like lambs among wolves, carrying no purse or bag or sandals – they had to break their routine and go where they had never been before. These were smart men and women. Like the turtles, they survived! As Christians, the Lord calls us to reach beyond our comfort zones and not bury our heads in the sand.

Canon David Hoggood, Portsmouth Cathedral

STUDY TOPIC in preparation for the International Gathering 2012

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 & 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. Seneca 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,

Study Topic For October

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?