



## **Teams of Our Lady: a school of married spirituality and holiness for couples.**

### **On the way to holiness**

In 2018, in the apostolic exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* on the call to holiness in today's world, Pope Francis reminds us that the vocation of every man and woman is holiness. To be holy does not mean to be perfect, as a prerequisite for being a Christian. To be holy is to turn to God, to say yes to his love and to set out on the journey of following Jesus Christ.

When we set out on our journey with Christ, this of course has consequences for our lives. As Saint Paul explains to the Colossians (3:12): *"Since you have been chosen by God, sanctified and loved by him, clothe yourselves with tenderness and compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience."*

Father Henri Caffarel also tells us that the path to holiness is a path of full and intense life: *"Holiness is for this man [Saint Paul], Jesus Christ. It is not a theory, it is a man, for whom he nurtures an untiring passion [...]. The journey towards holiness is not a desert, it is a love that tends towards a fullness and it is an intensity of life. [...] So the goal is holiness."*<sup>1</sup>

In chapter 25 of his Gospel, Saint Matthew relates concrete consequences of the path of holiness: *"For I was hungry, and you gave me food; I was thirsty, and you gave me drink; I was a stranger, and you welcomed me"*. (Mt 25:35)

### **Holiness in marriage, conjugal spirituality**

The Teams of Our Lady were born in 1939 from the question raised by couples: *"Is this requirement for holiness also addressed to married people? And our priest, Father Caffarel, affirmed: "This also*

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<sup>1</sup> Conference by Father Caffarel in Sao Paulo, 1972

*concerns you, that's for sure" [...] It is not only that sanctifying ourselves is possible in marriage, but that our marriage is really in itself a call to holiness."*<sup>2</sup>

And so the purpose of Teams of Our Lady is to accompany couples united by the sacrament of marriage on the path to holiness.

It is very important that the Movement remains connected to its source of inspiration, enriched by the contributions that come from the experiences lived by couples.

Father Caffarel explains to us how the conjugal spirituality that has developed progressively within the movement was born: *"Thus, they come to marriage with two loves in their hearts: their great human love and the love of Christ. They go to the theologians to find out how to live these two loves beautifully and together, and this is what is at the origin of all this effort to develop a conjugal spirituality."*<sup>3</sup>

These two loves, that of the spouse and that of God, are not opposed to each other, nor do they compete with each other. On the contrary, they nourish each other, and they strengthen each other.

Father Caffarel intuitively understood that married life, nourished by the sacrament of marriage, was an authentic path to holiness. There are many other reflections on his part which illustrate this.

Celibacy, especially for consecrated persons and priests nourished by the sacrament of Holy Orders, and married life, are two different states of life but two authentic paths to holiness. In both cases, there is a common action of sanctifying grace: God is the source of all holiness. In the first case, grace spreads and radiates widely from the beginning. In the second case, grace is convergent, personalised and shared in reciprocity with their spouse, which then allows the couple to radiate around themselves.

Pope Francis describes the link between conjugal love and the mystery of God's love:

"Seen this way, the couple's fruitful relationship becomes an image for understanding and describing the mystery of God himself, for in the Christian vision of the Trinity, God is contemplated as Father, Son and Spirit of love. The triune God is a communion of love, and the family is its living reflection. St. John Paul II shed light on this when he said: "Our God, in his deepest mystery, is not solitude, but a family, for he has within himself, fatherhood, sonship and the essence of the family, which is love."  
(AL11)

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<sup>2</sup> Testimony of Pierre and Rozenn de Montjamont, 20th November 1977

<sup>3</sup> Henri Caffarel, l'Anneau d'Or, « Signe des temps, signe de grâce », n°30, novembre-décembre 1949

It is good to remember that marriage should not be confused with a merely human institution. Married love is at the basis of marriage, and this love is not just a feeling, it is a choice, a reciprocal commitment that is possible because it comes from God. This is why it is a sacrament. Let us listen to Father Caffarel:

*"When we say that marriage is a sacrament, it means that all the realities of marriage are bearers of graces for the spouses who live it according to the divine will. It is in and through the context of married life that Christ communicates his grace to each of the spouses."*<sup>4</sup>

### **Pedagogy**

The pedagogy of the movement built up by Father Caffarel and the first couples, is at the service of each couple on their path to holiness. It is a question of deepening what the sacrament of marriage is, that is, to discover how God gives himself to each one through the concrete realities of married life.

Dialogue as a couple, prayer, listening to the Word of God, and all the Endeavours, meetings and team life, and the other activities proposed by the movement, contribute to the couple receiving the teaching of Jesus. "But at the beginning of creation, God made them male and female. For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. So they are no longer two, but one flesh. Therefore, what God has joined together, let no one separate." (Mk 10:6-9)

There are two prerequisites pointed out by Jesus: the "leaving" and the "assuming" with actions articulated by an objective: "leaving father and mother" and "being united with one's spouse to become one flesh".

The experienced Father Caffarel established the Endeavours as a pedagogical means for the mysticism of the Movement, and thus to develop conjugal spirituality. We must not consider them as an end, so as not to become routine, complacent and unexpressive couples in a world whose structures have been shaken up.

What is proposed is an active and dynamic attitude that engages at the spiritual level and also in concrete actions. Conjugal spirituality does not mean that what is important in conjugal life is only spiritual, as opposed to the body or the material. Conjugal spirituality is about discovering how the Holy Spirit breathes and is present in the heart of the bodily and material aspects of married life.

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<sup>4</sup> Henri Caffarel, l'Anneau d'Or, « Pour une spiritualité du chrétien marié », n°84, novembre-décembre 1958, p 253

Holiness is characterised by compassion and mercy, by love lived in the existential dimensions of one's physicality.

This is the soul of the Christian life: God is love. Love of compassion, understanding, mercy and forgiveness, divine elements, potentially present in the conjugal relationship.

In Chapter II of *Amoris Laetitia*, Pope Francis highlights the difficulties and challenges that currently affect married life and that deserve attention in a pedagogy of marriage.

For this to happen, the couple must be open to this love, within the limited conditions of their existence. "Jesus Christ does not guarantee a quiet and peaceful future, free from new challenges and crossroads. Experience shows us that new calls and new imperatives push the Christian throughout his or her life."

## **Conclusion**

The Teams of Our Lady movement is a school of marital spirituality and holiness for couples.

Its concrete, tried and tested pedagogy enables couples to learn to live conjugal love by receiving it from God, based on the grace of the sacrament of marriage.

By drawing from the source, conjugal spirituality allows love to blossom between the spouses, and then to radiate outwards to their children, to those around them and to the community. By advancing along the path of holiness, the couple becomes salt of the earth and light of the world.

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