

THE HOLY COUPLE:

JOY OF THE CHURCH. WITNESS TO THE WORLD.

DO NOT BE AFRAID, LET'S GO...



Saints Zelia and Louis Martin

2019 – 2020 STUDY TOPIC



Teams of Our Lady

Equipas de Nossa Senhora • Equipos de Nuestra Señora

US SUPER-REGION

ERI INTRODUCTION

When Pope Francis published his Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, March 2018 – on the call to holiness in today’s world, he concluded:

“It is my hope that these pages will prove helpful by enabling the whole Church to devote herself anew to promoting the desire for holiness. Let us ask the Holy Spirit to pour out upon us a fervent longing to be saints for God’s greater glory and let us encourage one another in this effort. In this way, we will share a happiness that the world will not be able to take from us”. (GE, 177)

This is also the objective of the Study Topic for this year: to promote more and more the desire for holiness, holiness grounded in life - in our daily life - of all couples in Teams of Our Lady.

This is what Fr. Henri Caffarel was referring to in 1949:

“The Teams of Our Lady have as their essential aim to help couples to strive after holiness. No more, no less.”¹

For this reason the aim of Teams of Our Lady is to help couples develop the richness of the sacrament of matrimony, and to live a spirituality that comes from the reality of married and family life. In this way, couples are encouraged to be witnesses of Christian marriage. This great spiritual and social heritage in the Church and in the world, is a path to love, happiness and holiness.

This Study Topic is connected to the guidelines of the Movement for the period 2018 - 2024, which encourage us to go out in mission, seeking to fulfil our role as missionary disciples of Jesus Christ.

With this Study Topic, the Movement wants to help us, so we can grow in our faith, following in Christ’s steps.

Nobody is called to live a mediocre life. On the contrary, we are called to live a full spiritual life, in which loving God and each other becomes the path to holiness.

¹ Guide of Teams of Our Lady, 1st edition 2001, chapter III – **The Reason for the Teams of Our Lady**

We hope that all couples belonging to the Teams of Our Lady will highly benefit from this Study Topic. Each meeting should be a moment or a step towards our effort to become holier as a person, couple and Team.

Let's not forget what Pope Francis tells us: **Holiness is the most attractive face of the Church.** (GS, 9) And, certainly is the most attractive face of a Church movement, such as Teams of Our Lady, whose charism is growing in conjugal spirituality in order to attain holiness and marital and family happiness.

However, it is essential that each one of us is able to understand and to follow his/her own journey of holiness, loving God and making him present to our brothers and sisters, wherever we are.

Do not be dismayed, says Pope Francis, "because the power of the Holy Spirit enables you to do this, and holiness, in the end, is the fruit of the Holy Spirit in your life. (GS 15)

Clarita and Edgardo Bernal

Paris, April 2019

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY TOPIC

a) THE CONVOCAION OF THE 2018 FATIMA GATHERING

The Letter from Fatima alerts and calls us: *Do not be afraid, let's go*. Let's go, so we can be active in the Church and in the world, starting with the challenges around us. We have the charism of Teams of Our Lady - which is married spirituality and sanctification of the couple within the sacrament of matrimony – as the essence and the catalyst of our mission as team couples. Hence, we are encouraged to be aware of our vocation and mission, and we are called to have a missionary spirit as members of a base team in the TEAMS Movement.

Dear couples: *Do not be afraid, let's go out*, means to not be afraid of Christ and his Church, and of Teams of Our Lady. For there, we find the treasure that fills our life with joy and that strengthens us to fulfill – thanks to faith – our dreams and sacrifice ourselves to serve the ones who need divine love the most, sharing generously with “the least” who are on the peripheries of the Church.²

As Pope Francis states in the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* (the call to holiness in today's world), “life does not have a mission, but is a mission”. (GE, 27) This means every man and woman, every child, youngster, adult and elder, and every couple, is a mission. This is the reason why we all live here in this world.

We are attracted and sent by God to fulfill our vocation and mission, as a great challenge. Vocation and mission are part of our innermost being. “I am a mission on this earth; that is the reason why I am here in this world. We have to regard ourselves as sealed, even branded, by this mission of bringing light, blessing, enlivening, raising up, healing and freeing. All around us we begin to see nurses with soul, teachers with soul, politicians with soul, people who have chosen deep down to be with others and for others. But once we separate our work from our private lives, everything turns grey and we will always be seeking recognition or asserting our needs”.³

Then, Pope Francis goes on: “It is not healthy to love silence while fleeing interactions with others, to want peace and quiet while avoiding activity, to seek prayer while disdaining service.

² Pope Francis Message World Mission Day, 2018

³ Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* – Pope Francis, The Joy of the Gospel, 273

Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission". (GE, 26)

This Study Topic – *Holy Couple: Joy of the Church, witness to the world* – aims to call our attention to the following fact: the more we sanctify ourselves as people, couples and as Base Teams – our ultimate vocation – the more we will become fruitful to the Church and to the world; and the more fruitful will be our mission. Vocation and Mission!

For us as team members, sanctification is a journey together, as a team in the ecclesial community. Each spouse is an instrument of sanctification for the other spouse. Each team member is an instrument of sanctification to the other team members.

Pope Francis says clearly: "I do not believe in holiness without prayer". Therefore, "The saints are distinguished by a spirit of prayer and a need for communion with God". (GE, 147) This is what we look for in a team meeting, when we gather in Christ's name: to sanctify ourselves and each one present, through prayer and reflection on God's Word.

When we – truly – form a base team, in Teams of Our Lady, Christ is present. As an *ecclesia*,⁴ our meetings are not just a meeting once a month. They are a true encounter with Christ. That way, the couples can pursue together a journey of holiness, and be able to transform the Team into a holy and missionary community of the Church. Vocation and mission!

b) GENERAL STRUCTURE

It is from this perspective, that the sequence of the Study Topic meetings was conceived, bearing in mind that holiness is a gradual dynamic journey which leads us to mission.

- The first two meetings present in a general way the conceptual basis of holiness, in the life of the couple.
- The next two meetings are about some of the weaknesses and obstacles that may hinder the experience of holiness and the sense of mission that springs

⁴ The term *ecclesia* is used by Father Caffarel to explain the true meaning of a team meeting. The meaning of this term will be explained throughout the meetings of this Study Topic.

from it. These may be concrete (economic, social, political and cultural) or ideological difficulties.

- The fifth and sixth meetings discuss prayer and Eucharist as requirements for holiness. This is because there is no holiness without prayer and Eucharist.
- The seventh meeting asks us to become saints today in our present situation: couples united in the sacrament of marriage, surrounded by joys, accomplishments, weaknesses and sufferings.
- The eighth meeting directs us in a positive and encouraging way to the charism of Teams of Our Lady, as a real means to reach holiness.

In a systematic way, here is the proposal for the nine meetings of this year's team activities:

MEETINGS	OBJECTIVES	BIBLICAL CITATIONS
1. Holiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To reflect on the vocation of each person to attain holiness as a gift of God and as a personal undertaking. • To acknowledge that holiness, God's gift, is within the reach of everyone from the "weakest" to the "strongest". • To commit to make your life a path to holiness in the context of your everyday life. • To understand that nobody can become holy alone, but in community. 	Matthew 5:43-48
2. Journey of Holiness as a Couple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To recognize the sacrament of marriage as a path to holiness as a couple. • To be thankful as a couple, for the communion that comes out of this spiritual journey towards holiness • To commit to each other as a couple, to work each day on the path towards holiness. 	Genesis 2:18-24
3. Weaknesses: present times and social inequalities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be aware that the path to holiness must be undertaken within the context of everyday life. • To identify cultural weaknesses in contrast to the Gospel values (Beatitudes). • To understand that a holy life is possible, in spite of the weaknesses of a world of inequality between people and nations. 	Matthew 5:1-12
4. Enemies of holiness:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To be aware that God's grace sanctifies us. • To recognize intellectual arrogance and pharisaic prepotency as obstacles to holiness. 	Matthew

Gnosticism and Pelagianism	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To recognize that Gnosticism and Pelagianism can lead us astray from our holiness path. 	23:13-15; 23-28
5. Prayer: requirement for holiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand there isn't holiness without prayer. To acknowledge that through prayer and with prayer we learn how to serve others, to walk in faith and to do God's will. To commit to a life of personal prayer, as a couple and family. 	Matthew 6:5-13
6. Eucharist: origin of holiness	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To understand that the Eucharist is the heart of holiness (the core of life) of the Church. To understand that the Eucharist is the secret and the strength of holiness. To understand that the Eucharist cannot be separated from personal, married and family life. To make us aware that our whole life must be eucharistic 	1 Corinthians 11:23-26
7. To become a holy couple today	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To thank God for our vocation to holiness, as a couple. To understand that the path to holiness is a gradual one. To understand that holiness must be lived today, in our time, facing our challenges. 	Tobias 8:1-9
8. Conjugal spirituality: specific contribution of the Teams to the sanctity of the couple	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To rejoice in conjugal spirituality, the path of holiness of the couple. To commit to live the Teams charism. To acknowledge the importance of the sacrament of Holy Orders and spiritual accompaniment, in the holy journey of couples. 	Ephesians 5:21-33
9. Balance Sheet	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To share and to review the journey of personal and conjugal holiness throughout the year. To share and to review the Team journey throughout this year and its contribution to each team couple. To do a review as a Team at the end of the year, in relation to the mystique and sharing of the Endeavors. To acknowledge that the couple's call to sanctity is closely linked to mission. 	Luke 13:6-9

c) Structure of each Meeting

1) Objectives

At each meeting, a number of objectives and outcomes are presented. These should be reviewed at the end of the meeting.

Each of these objectives help to structure the content of the Study Topic, so the meetings can become dynamic and motivational, as in an authentic *ecclesia*.

2) General Introduction

Each meeting starts with a general presentation of the topic to be discussed. This introduction seeks to establish a parallel between the messages of Pope Francis and Father Henri Caffarel, particularly in their approach to holiness.

3) The Word of God⁵

After the biblical text for each meeting has been chosen, there is a short reflection. It is desirable that the Word of God has been intensively lived in the period before the meeting.

Prayerful Reading of God's Word, or *Lectio Divina*, is suggested as a fundamental element of spiritual life for any married Christian. Below, there is a brief explanation of a particular method called *Lectio Divina*. It consists of four steps suggested for the Prayerful Reading of Scripture (described more fully in the annex):

- a) **Reading:** to read, to study, to get to know the text;
- b) **Meditation:** to find out what God wants to tell me;
- c) **Prayer:** to enter in dialogue and in a loving communion with God;
- d) **Contemplation:** to put into practice God's word, discovering "a new way" of living (a transforming commitment), mainly in that month.

4) Support Texts

There will be a presentation of two texts. Each represent the central focus of the topic in each meeting: one is of Pope Francis and the other one is of Father Caffarel. These texts allow us to understand the great proximity of their thinking.

Next, there will be a short presentation on the suggested texts, with the objective of creating a deeper study of subjects discussed in each meeting.

5) Guidelines for preparing the Team Meeting

⁵ The reference text of the Holy Bible used in several meetings is the official translation of the National Bishops Conference in Brazil, 1st Edition, 2018

Before some suggestions for the monthly meeting, some written reflections of Father Caffarel taken from the text *ecclesia* are distributed. These were part of a conference addressed to representative couples of the Teams in Brazil in 1957, which point to a “**theological approach**” about the Team’s meeting.⁶

It is a text of extreme importance to the Teams and for each Team in particular, as it establishes the basic requirements for the team meeting to be a real community gathered in Christ’s name, or a “small Ecclesia”.

It is important to recall, that according to the Teams Charter, a team meeting includes five parts:

- a) Meal
- b) Prayer and Meditation
- c) Sharing about the Endeavors
- d) Deep Sharing (Pooling)
- e) Exchange of ideas about the topic for reflection

This order can be changed, according to the will and/or needs of the Team. However, these are parts or moments to be lived in each team meeting, in order to keep and to strengthen the teachings of the Movement.

5.1- Welcome and initial encouragement

At the start of the meeting, the team is given a short motivational text. This is to be read, for example, by the couple leading the meeting.

5.2 – Prayer and Meditation on the Word of God

For each meeting it is suggested that the biblical text be read. Then, using a Prayerful Reading approach, each member should meditate and pray based on the text. At the end of meditation, it is suggested there should be a Liturgical **Prayer**, preferably the Responsorial Psalm for the mass of the day. This common prayer unites us with the whole Church.

5.3 – Sharing

Each month, an Endeavour will be highlighted to be lived in a special way, either as a couple or as a team member. That way at the end of the year, we will have the

⁶ Teams of Our Lady, **Lectures and Conferences – Father Henri Caffarel**, São Paulo, Super Region Brazil, 2017. This is a special edition that publishes Father Caffarel communications while visiting Brazil.

opportunity to discuss in depth the way the Endeavors were lived, and be more willing to welcome the Holy Spirit that acts in us and make us grow in our married spirituality.

Also, a statement from Fr Caffarel or another Spiritual Counselor about this Endeavor should be highlighted. It is also suggested to read a document about this Endeavor, which is usually available in the library, bookstore or website of the Super Region, or Region connected directly to ERI.

5.4 – Deep Sharing (Pooling)

Deep sharing or pooling is a moment of mutual support. Some guidance is provided in the instructions for each meeting below. The objective is to reflect, and get know relevant issues, which happened during the last month.

5.5 – Questions for exchange of ideas and experiences

This time is not intended to be for theoretical or academic reflections, because holiness is existential. It is necessary to reflect, in the team, on the way our heart is becoming like Christ's heart in our everyday lives.

Because of the fact that holiness is a gradual journey, the questions have been written, as much as possible, to guide a reflection on the life of the couple or the person.

5.6 – Prayer for the Canonization of Father Caffarel, Magnificat and sending Couples on mission

At the end of the meeting, it is suggested that we pray for the canonization of Father Henri Caffarel, a servant of God, (prayer attached), followed by the Magnificat prayer and final blessing.

The final blessing is an act of sending couples on their mission and a farewell with the grace of God, which is the perfection/holiness that we seek.

It is of utmost importance, that all return to their homes/families and to their social, professional and ecclesial environment, with a commitment, with hope, with a feeling of having grown in spirituality and fraternity, and with a decision to be witnesses of God's love and fidelity.

HOLINESS

OBJECTIVES

- To reflect on the vocation of each person to attain holiness as a gift of God and as a personal undertaking.
- To acknowledge that holiness, God's gift, is within the reach of everyone from the "weakest" to the "strongest".
- To commit to make your life a path to holiness in the context of your everyday life.
- To understand that nobody can become holy alone, but in community.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The following words from Father Henri Caffarel are crucial, when considering the objectives of Teams:

"The Teams of Our Lady have as their essential aim to help couples to strive after holiness - no more, no less". ⁷

This is how Pope Francis begins His Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*: "God wants us to be saints and not to settle for a bland and mediocre existence". (GE, 1) It is a call to everyone, without distinction: "This is God's will: your sanctification." ⁸

The followers of Christ are called by God, not because of their works, but according to His own purpose and grace. They are justified in the Lord Jesus, because in the baptism of faith they truly become (children) of God and sharers in the divine nature. In this way they are really made holy. Then too, by God's gift, they must hold on to and complete in their lives this holiness they have received. ⁹

We should not think about holiness as a set of extraordinary gestures or unusual ways of acting, rare and distant from the people we live with. Each is called to holiness where they are in their life. Each follows their own path to holiness. It is important, then, to

⁷ Guide of the Teams of Our Lady, 1st edition 2001, Chapter III – **The Reason for the Teams of Our Lady.**

⁸ Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* about the Church, no 39

⁹ (9) *Idem*, no 40

understand that each person follows his own path, unique and unrepeatable according to their mission, either as an individual or as a couple.

“This holiness, to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures” (GE, 16) of love and sharing, self-sacrifice, prayer, participation in the Sacraments, life in community, testimony, caring for others, following Jesus’ footsteps in this world. After all, everything done with a “spirit of holiness” is open to a supernatural action that purifies and enlightens. (GE, 31)

The vocation of all the baptized is based on Christ. In Him they are grounded. They see the reason for their existence and only in Him can they understand it. Jesus Christ is the prototype, the paradigm, the criterion and the parameter of each Christian’s search for holiness. We are called to be the image of Christ in our daily lives; that is, to configure ourselves to Him.

Pope Francis highlights: “Do not be afraid of holiness. It will take away none of your energy, vitality or joy. On the contrary, you will become what the Father had in mind when he created you, and you will be faithful to your deepest self”. (GE, 32)

And the Pope goes on: “Do not be afraid to set your sights higher, to allow yourself to be loved and liberated by God. Do not be afraid to let yourself be guided by the Holy Spirit. Holiness does not make you less human, since it is an encounter between your weakness and the power of God’s grace. In the end “... the only great tragedy in life is **not to become a saint**”. (GE, 34) ¹⁰

BIBLICAL TEXT: Matthew 5:43-48

You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you: love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

¹⁰ (10) In this passage, Pope Francis quotes Léon Bloy, a French catholic writer in: **The poor woman** Régio Emília 1978, II, 375 14

PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE

We suggest to each person and to the couples, to follow the four steps of Prayerful Reading of the Bible – **Reading, Meditation, Prayer and Contemplation**, when reading the biblical passage during the month. The guidelines to be followed can be found in the outline and questions presented in Annex 1.

BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL PASSAGE

“Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”. (Mt 5, 48)

Christ invites us to love without limits, which is the measure of true love. It is not the kind of love that uses a “calculator” to figure out if it is worth helping others. Thus, the perfection proposed by Jesus is free, unconditional and generous love. It is not the love that expects something in return.

This Word teaches us that the original source and the measure of holiness are in God, because it is only through divine love that we can become perfect, as our heavenly Father is perfect. As we are human, imperfect and sinners, Jesus asks us for perfection (holiness) through the practice of love, loving our enemies, praying for those who persecute us, being different from pagans and publicans. In fact, we must love without distinction.

On the cross Jesus forgave all of those who took his life. Likewise, in order to be perfect, we have to forgive those who take lives: who use violence against the defenseless and the innocent; who offend and mistreat us; who are not gentle; who are indifferent; who harm us.

“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God abides in him” (1Jn 4:16). According to Pope Benedict XVI, in his Encyclical Letter *Deus Caritas Est*, “these words express with remarkable clarity the heart of the Christian faith (...)” (no 1).

Why would it be, that Luke when addressing the same topic – love for enemies – replaces Matthew expression: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”, with “Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful”? (Lk 6:36).

In fact, this is to show us that it is in compassionate closeness to the least, the rejected and the sinners, that Jesus reveals in a special way the “perfection” and the “holiness” of God as Father. He invites us to learn how to act like the Father and Himself, so we can become “children of God who is in heaven”.

The sanctity of God is not only an inspiring example for us as Christians. It acts from our innermost being and is reflected in our concrete gestures of love and sharing in our daily lives, either towards those whom we love or those who are our enemies.

Christ tells us that the “Christian path” to perfection and holiness is never-ending. We need to navigate this path with our eyes fixed on God, who awaits us at the end of our earthly journey. We will never be perfect or equal to God. However, the call to perfection must be the parameter to guide us in our journey to our heavenly homeland.

For that reason, we have to ask the Lord to give us “a resolute mind”, a spirit that encourages and sanctifies us in our resolve. It is imperative to opt for holiness every day, to choose it each day.

SUPPORT TEXTS

Presentation of the texts

We frequently start thinking that holiness is an aim for just a few. The questions that we must ask are: What does it mean to be holy? Who is called to become a saint?

Pope Francis says that “nothing is more enlightening than turning to Jesus’ words and seeing his way of teaching the truth. Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes.”¹¹ (GE, 63)

For Jesus the word “happy” or “blessed” thus becomes a synonym for “holy”. It expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness. (GE, 64)

Pope Benedict XVI in one of his catechesis about holiness, says: “Holiness, the fullness of Christian life, does not consist in carrying out extraordinary enterprises but in being united with Christ, in living his mysteries, in making our own his example, his thoughts, his behavior. The measure of holiness stems from the stature that Christ achieves in us, in as much as with the power of the Holy Spirit, we model our whole life on his”.¹²

¹¹ Cf. Mt 5: 3-12; Lk 6: 20-23

¹² Pope Benedict XVI. **Holiness**. General audience, Plaza S Peter, April 13, 2011. In: https://w2.vatican.va/content/Benedict_xvi/pt/audiences/2011/documents/20110413.html

In this context, “the Beatitudes are like a Christian’s identity card”. To be a good Christian, trying to live a holy life, is “to do what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives”. (GE, 63)

When we look at the life and work of Father Caffarel, we can see that holiness for him was a personal demand, both in his service to others and in his spiritual life.

He was “thirsty for God.”¹³ This thirst for the living Christ was one of his obsessions. He wanted the Teams to have this thirst, to be “God seekers”, in love with God, putting Him above all and always looking for the essential: Jesus Christ.¹⁴

Then, what is holiness? As the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* states, it is: (67-94)

- To be poor of heart: **this is holiness.**
- To react with meekness and humility: **this is holiness.**
- To know how to mourn with others: **this is holiness.**
- To hunger and thirst for righteousness: **this is holiness.**
- To see and act with mercy: **this is holiness**
- To keep a heart free of all that tarnishes love: **this is holiness.**
- To sow peace all around us: **this is holiness.**
- To accept daily the path of the Gospel, even if it may cause us problems: **this is holiness.**

Pope Francis’ Text ¹⁵

“To be holy does not require being a bishop, a priest or a religious. We are frequently tempted to think that holiness is only for those who can withdraw from ordinary affairs to spend much time in prayer. That is not the case. We are all called to be holy by living our lives with love and by bearing witness in everything we do, wherever we find ourselves. Are you called to the consecrated life? Be holy by living out your commitment with joy. Are you married? Be holy by loving and caring for your husband or wife as

¹³ (13) Jean Allemand. **Henri Caffarel: um homem arrebatado por Deus.** São Paulo, ENS- Super Região Brasil

¹⁴) Fr. Henri Caffarel “Um amor que dá testemunho do Deus amor”. Published in **Centelhas de sua Mensagem.** São Paulo ENS – Super Region Brazil, p 30

¹⁵ (15) Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate* from the Holy Father Francis on the call to Holiness in Today’s World.

Christ does for the Church. Do you work for a living? Be holy by laboring with integrity and skill in the service of your brothers and sisters. Are you a parent or grandparent? Be holy by patiently teaching the little ones how to follow Jesus. Are you in a position of authority? Be holy by working for the common good and renouncing personal gain".
(GE, 14)

"This holiness to which the Lord calls you will grow through small gestures. Here is an example: a woman goes shopping, she meets a neighbor and they begin to speak, and the gossip starts. But she says in her heart: "No, I will not speak badly of anyone".

This is a step forward in holiness. Later, at home, one of her children wants to talk to her about his hopes and dreams, and even though she is tired, she sits down and listens with patience and love. That is another sacrifice that brings holiness. Later she experiences some anxiety, but recalling the love of the Virgin Mary, she takes her rosary and prays with faith. Yet another path of holiness. Later still, she goes out onto the street, encounters a poor person and stops to say a kind word to him. One more step".
(GE 16)

Father Caffarel's Text:

The "temptation of holiness".¹⁶

I am going to present to you an introduction to the "spirituality of the married couple". To start with, let's reaffirm that there are not several types of holiness; there is only Christian perfection. Saint Thomas Aquinas defined it as: "All beings are perfect, if they attain their aim that is their ultimate perfection; thus, the ultimate aim of human life is God and we are united to Him through love". According to Saint John: "Whoever remains in love remains in God and God in Him". The perfection of Christian life is then grounded in love. The definition of holiness is the same for lay people and the consecrated person.

Every Christian – and consequently every married Christian - is called to perfection.

However, it is necessary to acknowledge that when a lay person becomes aware of that, they sometimes panic. Nothing is so clear (revealing of this panic) as the following

¹⁶ Father Henri Caffarel. **For a Spirituality of the Married Couple.** L'Anneau d'Or, no 84, 1958

confession of Jacques Rivière: "My God, take away this temptation of holiness. It is not for me. Be happy with a pure and patient life, which I will strive to give you. Do not deprive me of the wonderful joys I have known and loved so much. I very much desire to find them again. Do not get confused. I am not the kind you need. I am married and I am a father and a writer. Do not tempt me with impossible things. I would waste my time with that – time I can use to serve you in another way!"

ORIENTATIONS TO PREPARE FOR THE TEAM MEETING

Team Meeting as *Ecclesia*:

When you have a monthly meeting in one of the homes, and the couples enter that welcoming home one after another, you are called to a meeting that may be just like any other, or it may be an *Ecclesia*.

If this meeting is an *Ecclesia* – and I will tell you soon about the requirements for that to happen – then these few couples together are, in fact, a cell of the great Church. Just as an image represents the original, this cell represents the great assembly of the wider church and also makes it present. This is what needs to be fully understood, in order to understand the mystery: The great invisible assembly is made present through these few couples together (or reunited). The mystery of the big Church is present in the small Church.

WELCOME AND INITIAL ENCOURAGEMENT

Before starting the team meeting, the couple leading the Meeting can read the following motivational text:

At the beginning of our first meeting, we should be totally aware that holiness is not something we seek, or get because of our qualities or capacities. Holiness is a gift from our Lord Jesus, when He takes us, transforms us in his own image. Holiness is the most beautiful face of the Church: it is to live in communions with God, in the fullness of his life and love. Holiness is a gift given to all: nobody is excluded because of their distinctive character.

READING OF THE WORD OF GOD AND MEDITATION: Matthew 5:43-48

See biblical passage on page 14

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm – as suggested on page 11)

SHARING ON THE ENDEAVORS

We should recall that the origin of our Endeavors is the Lord's call to "be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect". It is an audacious call to be radically faithful to God, to follow his path, and to correspond to his love. Thus, the Endeavors are a true pedagogy for happiness, holiness and growth in the spiritual life of the Christian couple. Let's remind ourselves that living the Endeavors takes into account three orientations suggested by the Teams Movement:

- ✓ **Progression:** to want (to have a desire) to progress in spiritual growth.
- ✓ **Personalization:** personal journey and as a couple
- ✓ **Effort:** a decision to progress, to take steps further

Father Caffarel used to say that Sharing is an excellent moment of purification. It is a gesture of sincerity and truth, which ensures there will be no more misleading each other. When we are gathered around Jesus and in his name, we are only poor sinners. It is necessary to remove masks. It is necessary to let go of "outsmarting" others. Then, our sharing will have a very beneficial outcome, as it puts us in an attitude of purity and humility.

Father Bernard Olivier states: ¹⁷

"Sharing is supposed to be a communication in depth about life, centered on the Endeavors. Those are precisely the main beams of the couple's inner life. Therefore, it is necessary to center sharing on those points, but also to be able to go beyond and share true life experiences. This way, it is possible to help each other in depth. It is not enough, just to say that you have abided by the Endeavors. From there, you should be able to share authentic life experiences."

¹⁷ Father Bernard Olivier was Spiritual Adviser for the ILT – International Leading Team during the period 1986-1994. He coordinated a project on Conjugal Sexuality within the e movement of the Teams.

- At the beginning of this new year for the Teams, each one should share with their team what it has meant to live the Endeavors, during the last month and during the vacation.
- Each couple is asked to share a little more about the Endeavors and how they have helped in their spiritual married life, as a journey of sanctification.

DEEP SHARING (POOLING)

- To share in the Team, about the lived experiences during the month that were significant for each person or couple.
- To share in a simple and concrete way at least one gesture or simple attitude that we had (individually and/or as couple) that contributed to our journey towards holiness.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

(Exchange of ideas about the topic)

At this point, we are not asked to do a theoretical reflection about holiness, or an academic discussion on how to behave in daily life in order to make progress towards holiness. We are going to discuss as a Team – as a form of mutual help – how we live or try to live holiness in our daily lives.

- During your youth, have you ever thought that you would like to become a saint? Tell the Team your answer, either a negative or a positive one.
- And as boyfriend/girlfriend, fiancé/fiancée, did you talk about matrimony as a journey of holiness? If the answer is affirmative, what and why did you talk about it? If not, what did you expect to live in your marriage?
- In the middle of today's challenges, does holiness still strike a chord in today's youth?

PRAYER FOR THE CANNONIZATION OF FATHER CAFFAREL

MAGNIFICAT

SENDING FORTH THE COUPLES ON MISSION

SECOND MEETING

JOURNEY OF HOLINESS AS A COUPLE
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OBJECTIVES

- To recognize the sacrament of marriage as a path to holiness as a couple.
- To be thankful as a couple, for the communion that comes out of this spiritual journey towards holiness
- To commit to each other as a couple to work each day on the path towards holiness.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The goal of married life that joins the hearts of two people who love one another, joined in unity and indissolubility by matrimony, “is not simply to live together for life, but to love one another for life! [...] only in the light of the folly of the gratuitousness of Jesus’ paschal love will the folly of the gratuitousness of an exclusive and life-long conjugal love make sense and *usque ad mortem* (until death).¹⁸

The couple attains holiness, little by little each day, with the grace of God through married and family life. Meanwhile the couple participates in the cross of Christ, which transforms difficulties and sufferings into a gift of love. The spouses are able to live a holy life through God’s grace.¹⁹

Father Caffarel used to say that the “the blessings of matrimony become fruitless without the cooperation of spouses”, thus, their spiritual wealth is buried and unproductive when the couple does not cooperate with the conjugal blessings received from God through the sacrament. Because of that, for the Christian couple the journey of holiness is a “journey of love”, in which the spouses love each other more and more. It is God’s grace that “invites the best love”; and the best love opens itself more to the grace of God”.²⁰

¹⁸ Synod of the Bishops. **The Vocation and Mission of the Church in Contemporary World**. Final Report of the Synod of the Bishops to Pope Francis. XIV Regular General Assembly, no 1.

¹⁹ Pastoral Constitution *Gaudium et Spes*, no 49/2

²⁰ Father Henri Caffarel. “Cooperation”. In **Grace and love**, chapter II – Great is this mystery.

As Father Olivier states, “the deep communion within the life of a couple, is beyond doubt one of the most gratifying experiences that contributes to the blossoming of the couple. It is a source of great happiness”.²¹

Therefore, conjugal life is a covenant of love with the highest spiritual meaning, in which each spouse is for the other a sign and an instrument of closeness to the Lord, who does not leave them alone in this journey of holiness. “I am with you always, to the very end of the age.” (Mt 28:20)

BIBLICAL TEXT: Genesis 2:18-24

Then the Lord God said:

“It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.” Now out of the ground the Lord God had formed every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens and brought them to the man to see what he would call them. And whatever the man called every living creature that was its name. The man gave names to all livestock and to the birds of the heavens and to every beast of the field. But for Adam there was not found a helper fit for him. So the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon the man, and while he slept took one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh. And the rib that the Lord God had taken from the man he made into a woman and brought her to the man. Then the man said, “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken of Man”. Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.

PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE

It is suggested to each person and to each couple to follow, during the month, the four steps of Prayerful Reading of the Bible – **Reading, Meditation, Prayer and Contemplation**, according to the presented outline and questions in Annex 1.

²¹ Bernard Olivier, **Love Happiness and Holiness**. Published by Super Region, Brazil, updated edition, 2010, p 74

BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Therefore, a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh. (Gn 2:24)

Saint Paul VI, when addressing the couples of the Teams, said: "It is essential to remember everyday this first page of the Bible, if we want to understand what should be a human couple, a home."²²

He also stated in his reflection: "As the Holy Scripture teaches us, marriage, before being a sacrament, is a great earthly reality. The union between man and woman is completely different from any other any human associations, being a unique reality, a union that is based on the mutual giving of the spouses:", "and they shall become one flesh". (Gn 2:24)

This unity, that it is indissoluble and irrevocable, is the seal of a free and mutual union between people who are no longer two people, but one flesh (Mt 19:6). This unity will take a social and judicial form through matrimony, expressing itself in a life of communion, whose fruitful manifestation is the carnal gift.

Through marriage, the spouses express a willingness to belong to each other for life. The laws and demands of this bond are not a form of subservience. On the contrary, they are a guarantee and a true support, as you have experienced in your daily lives.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (CCC) when stating that God created man and woman in perfect equality, teaches that they were made for each other: "he created them to be a communion of persons, in which each can be 'helpmate' to the other, for they are equal as persons ('bone of my bones ...') and complementary as male and female. In marriage, God unites them in such a way that, by forming 'one flesh' (Gn 2:24), they can transmit human life: 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth' (Gn 1:28). By transmitting human life to their descendants, man and woman as spouses and parents cooperate in a unique way in the Creator's work." (CCC, 372)

SUPPORT TEXTS

²² Saint Paul VI Address to couples Of Teams of Our Lady, Rome May 4, 1970.

Presentation of texts

Christian marriage is a sacrament of mutual sanctification for each of the spouses. Therefore, conjugal life is a journey of holiness, and a unique means of sanctification for the spouses. By virtue of the mystery of the death and resurrection of Christ, of which the spouses are made part in a new way by marriage, conjugal love is purified and made holy, states St. John Paul II. ²³we cannot talk about holiness in conjugal life without living the reality that constitutes it, and living the demands it brings with it. It means that the sacrament of matrimony brings to the spouses the gift and grace of God, as much as the obligation of living every day the sanctification received through this covenant or alliance of love.

God's gift does not end in the celebration of matrimony, but it accompanies the spouses during their entire lives, which made Saint John Paul II say: "a person, who cannot choose to love forever, can hardly love for even a single day."²⁴

Conjugal love, that shapes a style of life, is an inner requirement, "it is something inside the heart", where only God can see it (cf. Mt 5:28). Thus, "everyday in the morning, each spouse renews his/her vows of fidelity in front of God, independently of whatever happens during that day. Also, when each one goes to bed, they hope to get up to continue this adventure, trusting that the Lord will help". (AL, 319)

TEXT FROM POPE FRANCIS

"All that has been said so far would be insufficient to express the Gospel of marriage and the family, were we not also to speak of love. For we cannot encourage a path of fidelity and mutual self-giving without encouraging the growth, strengthening and deepening of conjugal and family love. Indeed, the grace of the sacrament of marriage is intended before all else "to perfect the couple's love". (...) (AL, 89)

Saint Paul's hymn to love ²⁵ has prepared us to discuss conjugal love. This is the love between husband and wife, a love sanctified, enriched and illuminated by the grace of the sacrament of marriage. It is an "affective union", spiritual and sacrificial, which

²³ *Apostolic Exhortation Familiaris Consortio (The Mission of the Christian Family in Contemporary World), no 56*

²⁴ *Saint John Paul II. Homily in Eucharist for the families, Córdoba (Argentina), April 8, 1987. Quoted in Apostolic Exhortation Amoris Laetitia, no 319*

²⁵ *1 Cor 13, 4-7*

combines the warmth of friendship and erotic passion, and endures long after emotions and passion subside. Pope Pius XI taught that this love permeates the duties of married life and enjoys pride of place. Infused by the Holy Spirit, this powerful love is a reflection of the unbroken covenant between Christ and humanity that culminated in his self-sacrifice on the cross. "The Spirit which the Lord pours forth gives a new heart and renders man and woman capable of loving one another as Christ loved us. Conjugal love reaches that fullness to which it is interiorly ordained: conjugal charity". (AL, 120)

"Marriage is a precious sign, for "when a man and a woman celebrate the sacrament of marriage, God is, as it were, 'mirrored' in them; he impresses in them his own features and the indelible character of his love. Marriage is the icon of God's love for us. Indeed, God is also communion: the three Persons of the Father, the Son and the Holy Spirit live eternally in perfect unity. And this is precisely the mystery of marriage: God makes of the two spouses one single existence". This has concrete daily consequences, because the spouses, "in virtue of the sacrament, are invested with a true and proper mission, so that, starting with the simple ordinary things of life they can make visible the love with which Christ loves his Church and continues to give his life for her". (AL, 121)

Father Caffarel Text: ²⁶

The source of Christian love is not in man's heart. It is in God. There is only a good advice for couples who want to love, who want to learn how to love more and more: seek God, love God, be united with Him and give Him all the room.

The one, who gets away from God, loses love. On the other side, love grows in proportion to God's love. The couple union with God determines the conjugal union, in terms of human quality and eternal quality.

The more they are open to God's love the richer will be their mutual love. Ahead of them there are infinite perspectives: their love will never stop growing, as they can be more united to God's gift. If they want their love to be a bright flame, always higher, they must love God more, each day.

²⁶ Father Henri Caffarel. "Vocation of Love". Originally published in **Conjugal Spirituality – a suspicious word**, Anneau d'Or, 1945. Also published in the newsletter Friends of Father Caffarel, Liaison Newsletter no 8, January 2011.

It is through prayer and the sacraments that couples drink in the fountains of divine grace. Penance keeps their heart transparent and the spark of fire that the Eucharist ignites in each one of them, lights and warms marital life.

The decline of love in many situations is explained by having forgotten this basic principle. Turning away from God and sinning against Him; is to sin against love, by moving away from its source. To refuse God is to refuse love, the daily bread, to your spouse. You lie, if you say that you value love, but at the same time, you despise Love.

DIRECTIONS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING

Team Meeting as *Ecclesia*:

1st Requirement: Faith

Many times, in his journey Christ would ask the sick and the sinner who asked him for help: "Do you believe? If you believe, it will be given to you according to your faith". When you are gathered together for your monthly meeting at a team member's home, listen to what God is asking all of you: "Do you believe? It will be given to you according to your faith". The meeting will be *Ecclesia*, according to your faith. That is why it is important that all members of your team acquire this vision of faith. Also, they should not look at their meeting as any meeting, but be able, little by little, to attain this mentioned vision and become aware of the mysterious presence of Christ among them.

WELCOME AND INITIAL ENCOURAGEMENT

At the beginning of this second meeting, in which we reflect upon the sacrament of matrimony as a path to holiness, we become aware that it is conjugal love that gives life to married life, and therefore to family. It is through this act of love that mutual giving becomes strong. This conjugal giving is continuously nourished by the sap of this total and unique love of the couple. This requires a daily change of heart; it demands that there is a relearning in everyday life of what it is to love and what it is to make the other happy. This is conjugal spirituality.

READING OF GOD'S WORD AND MEDITATION

See biblical text on page 23

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm – as suggested on page 11)

SHARING

- When the Endeavors are accepted and lived by the couple, they are going to result in a new way of thinking, feeling and acting, which will lead to some new attitudes to life. Those attitudes are essentially three:
 - a) To cultivate in a steady way, openness to God’s will and love;
 - b) To develop one’s capacity to live the truth;
 - c) To increase one’s capacity of togetherness and communion.
- These are basic attitudes of a Christian. However, in Teams they acquire an aspect of conjugality, because they are lived within the life of the couple.
- In this spirit, each one is supposed to share with the team what it has meant to live the Endeavors during the last month, and also how each one tried to live the three attitudes referring to the Endeavors.
- If the couples want to know a little bit more about how to improve their living of the Endeavors and how to share them more accurately during the Team meeting, they can read the document **Sharing on the Endeavors**, available at their Super Region Materials’ Office.

What is sharing? ²⁷

“Sharing is the heart of the Team Meeting. It is the moment in which the couples share with an open heart their spiritual journey. This is done in a spirit of prayer and fraternal listening, with a loving attitude which does not exclude mutual encouragement and help. Sharing must focus on efforts and attitudes. It is not about informing whether or not we have done what was requested. Instead, it is about sharing the changes of attitude in our spiritual life, as well as the way they happened and the difficulties we found making those changes”.

DEEP SHARING (POOLING)

²⁷ TEAMS Study Topic about Team Meeting. 5th meeting: “What is sharing?” May 2010

- To share with the Team, lived experiences of the month which were meaningful for each person or couple.
- To share, in a simple and concrete way, a gesture or attitude we had, which contributed to our journey towards holiness.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

(Exchange of ideas about the topic)

At this moment, it is not about a theoretical reflection about holiness. We are going to discuss with the team, as a form of mutual help, how we live or try to live holiness as couples in our daily lives.

- How does the arrival and caring for children influence the search for and experience of holiness in the couple's life?
- Does being married for a short time or a long time, help or hinder the experience of holiness? What are the main difficulties?
- Do retirement and the "empty nest"²⁸ help or hinder the longing to live holiness as a couple?

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²⁸ Empty nest syndrome is a natural process in couples' lives. It is the physical or mental loneliness that parents feel, when their children leave home. Children grow, leave the family and they go on with their lives. They become independent and decide to live on their own, either because they are going to marry, go to college, or to look for autonomy.

THIRD MEETING

WEAKNESSES:**CONTEMPORARY CULTURE AND SOCIAL INEQUALITIES****OBJECTIVES**

- To be aware that the path to holiness must be undertaken within the context of everyday life.
- To identify cultural weaknesses in contrast to the Gospel values (Beatitudes).
- To understand that a holy life is possible, in spite of the weaknesses of a world of inequality between people and nations.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In each of our countries today, we live a reality marked by big changes, and these have profoundly affected our society and its institutions. There are several causes for these changes, which have been felt at a dizzying pace in all corners of the planet.

Those changes affect people, families and couples, their values, their lifestyle, their way of looking at things, relating to God, others and nature. We can see, for example, a kind of “new cultural colonization” which imposes an artificial homogenized culture, in all sectors of society.” This culture can be defined by individualism leading to indifference towards others, when they are not needed or when there is no feeling of responsibility. People would rather live their daily lives, without plans for the future, or personal or community attachments. Human relations are being considered as commodity items, producing relationships without responsibilities and definite commitments.²⁹

In his Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium* (The Joy of the Gospel), chapter IV, Pope Francis discusses the social dimension of evangelization. He states: “The need to resolve the structural causes of poverty cannot be delayed, not only for the pragmatic

²⁹ (29) CELAM Document of “**Aparecida**”. Summary text of V the General Conference of Latin American and Caribe Bishops, May 13 - 31, 2007. Brasilia: Editions CNBB, 3rd edition, 2007, no. 46

reason of its urgency for the good order of society, but because society needs to be cured of a sickness which is weakening and frustrating it, and which can only lead to new crises (...). As long as the problems of the poor are not radically resolved by rejecting the absolute autonomy of markets and financial speculation and by attacking the structural causes of inequality, no solution will be found for the world's problems or, for that matter, to any problems. Inequality is the root of social ills. (EG, 202)

As Christians and Jesus' disciples, we have to take care of the different situations of human fragility and vulnerability, where we can recognize the suffering Christ. As Christians and disciples of Jesus, we are called through our respective roles in Church and society, to respect and promote basic rights of human beings. We must be especially concerned with the rights of the ones who are hungry and thirsty; who are sick and naked; who are foreigners or migrants; who are in jail or being tortured, or excluded from an adequate education, deprived from dignifying work, or forced to work as slaves, those who are sexually abused, or those living outside society in inhuman conditions.

What Jesus Christ sought most while among us, was the happiness of others, announcing to them that the Kingdom of God and its presence was among us. We know this today when we live out the Beatitudes in our everyday life.

We are called, by our faith and testimony, to contribute by encouraging people in their desire to know God and to be part of a Church guided by the Gospel values. In today's cultural context, with so many social inequalities, we need above all to be delighted by the beauty of human life, Christian matrimony, and the family. Through our example, we need to attract the world to these same values. That is our challenge! Let's not be afraid, let's go...

BIBLICAL TEXT: Matthew 5:1-12

When Jesus saw the crowds, he went up on a mountainside and sat down. His disciples came to him, and he began to teach them. He said: "Blessed are the poor in spirit for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted. Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth. Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled. Blessed are the merciful, for they will be shown mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart for they will see God. Blessed

are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God. Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE

It is suggested, to each one and to the couple, that a Prayerful Reading of Scripture is done during the month. The steps **Reading, Meditation, prayer and Contemplation** should be followed, according to the outline and questions in Annex 1.

BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. (Mt 5:3)

Humans have always been driven by the desire to be self-sufficient, and this has created throughout history, particular ways of living that have moved away from the direction of the Creator. In today's globalized world, we see cultures that undervalue marriage and family. We realize that many customs contrary to holiness have emerged in so-called Christian societies.

In Jesus' time within Judaism, there were also customs that strayed from the path to holiness. It was in that environment, that Jesus began his preaching that attracted multitudes. One day, he went up "on a mountainside" and he began to teach the gathered crowd. He summarizes in the Beatitudes a plan for sanctification. Jesus was radical in his proposal, but those who accept it and strive to put it into practice are happy. He introduces us to holiness as happiness. The true joy of the disciple is a joy that becomes mission.

Many times, we might read the Beatitudes interpreting them as a heavy obligation, while not thinking carefully about the word "happy" or the causes of happiness. The message of Jesus that we have reflected upon in the first meeting, "Be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Mt 5, 48), is also in the Beatitudes as an action plan leading "towards holiness". In fact, it is a plan for us to react against the culture of "political correctness" and "to swim against the tide". However, sometimes these behaviors have forgotten God and His children. These are inappropriate

behaviors, presented in an attractive way, and without vigilance, can become the way of living for many Christians.

We have some advice from Pope Francis, about “listening to” the Beatitudes: “Let us allow his words to unsettle us, to challenge us and to demand a real change in the way we live. Otherwise, holiness will remain no more than an empty word. (GE, 66)

Pope Francis, talking about the big social and economic problems of today’s world, especially hunger and migrations of those running away from hunger, wars and persecutions, puts actions in favor of the needy, as acts of mercy and love, benefiting primarily the ones who give and welcome. He quotes Saint Thomas of Aquinas: “...they are the works of mercy towards our neighbor, even more than our acts of worship. We worship God by outward sacrifices and gifts, not for his own benefit, but for that of ourselves and our neighbor”. (GE, 106)

This Gospel invites us to reflect on the inequalities of our society and how the Word of God inspires the attitude of those who seek holiness. It guides the actions of those who want to be in the company of those who are called by God: “Come, you who are blessed by my Father”.

It is important to live the spirit of poverty as a couple. How many disagreements, fights and even separations of couples, are due to an excessive attachment to money or lack of it! How much suffering, when there is no meekness in the daily relationship of the couple and with their children! How many grudges and fights between the couples and within the family, if there is not an attitude of merciful and compassionate love towards those at fault and a willingness to forgive! Happiness passes through the cross, but also goes beyond it, as witness to Jesus Christ himself.

During the month, we can reflect on the Beatitudes, one at a time, and meditate on how the spouses are living them in their lives: as a couple, parents, grandparents, as members of a community, as citizens of a country.

SUPPORT TEXTS

Presentation of the texts

The Beatitudes are at the core of Jesus’ preaching and they answer our natural desire for happiness. As the Catechism of the Catholic Church states: “The desire for

God is written in the human heart, God never ceases to draw man to himself. Only in God will he find the truth and happiness he never stops searching for". (CCC. 1718)

Then, we can affirm that the beatitudes show us where to look to discover the signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God in the world we live in. They tell us about the need to take care of each other, especially the most vulnerable, and about the need to be a Church that goes out. To be a Christian and a disciple of Christ, we need to embrace our brothers and sisters who have been hurt in their dignity, rights, human and divine nature.

Pope Benedicts XVI highlights many times, the relation between love and truth in his writings. Our gaze is only truthful, when it is one of love. It becomes only love, if it regards both the other's truth and his needs. ³⁰

The eyes of those who seek holiness can see the needs of the poor. They can see those who suffer, those who are tormented, the most vulnerable, the ones living in inhuman conditions. The Good Samaritan sees a man lying on the side of the road and he is full of compassion. The priest and the Levite didn't really see him. Those who see a problem, are the ones who go beyond ritual purity, who return late to their home and families.

Through the beatitudes, Jesus "confronts us with decisive moral choices. The beatitudes invite us to purify our hearts of bad instincts and to seek the love of God above all else. It teaches us that true happiness is not found in riches or well-being, in human fame or power. It is not found in any human achievement - however beneficial it may be - such as science, technology, and art, or indeed in any creature, but in God alone, the source of every good and of all love". (CCC, 1723)

Pope Francis Text

(...) Jesus explained with great simplicity what it means to be holy when he gave us the Beatitudes (cf. Mt 5:3-12; Lk 6:20-23). The Beatitudes are like a Christian's identity card. So, if anyone asks: "What must one do to be a good Christian?" the answer is clear. We have to do, each in our own way, what Jesus told us in the Sermon on the Mount. In

³⁰ Pope Benedict XVI, Encyclical Letter *Deus caritas Est* (about Christian love).

the Beatitudes, we find a portrait of the Master, which we are called to reflect in our daily lives. (GE, 63)

The word “happy” or “blessed” thus becomes a synonym for “holy”. It expresses the fact that those faithful to God and his word, by their self-giving, gain true happiness. (GE, 64)

Though Jesus’ words may strike us as poetic, they clearly run counter to the way things are usually done in our world. Even if we find Jesus’ message attractive, the world pushes us towards another way of living. The Beatitudes are in no way trite or undemanding, quite the opposite. We can only practice them if the Holy Spirit fills us with his power and frees us from our weakness, our selfishness, our complacency and our pride. (GE, 65)

We may think that we give glory to God only by our worship and prayer, or simply by following certain ethical norms. It is true that the primacy belongs to our relationship with God, but we cannot forget that the ultimate criterion on which our lives will be judged is what we have done for others. Prayer is most precious, for it nourishes a daily commitment to love. Our worship becomes pleasing to God when we devote ourselves to living generously, and allow God’s gift, granted in prayer, to be shown in our concern for our brothers and sisters. (GE, 104)

Similarly, the best way to discern if our prayer is authentic is to judge to what extent our life is being transformed in the light of mercy (...) Mercy “is the very foundation of the Church’s life”. (GE, 105)

Text of Father Caffarel:

Cross or joy? ³¹

The generation which you belong to, has found again some of the essential values: The words that continually return in conversations and writings witness to this: humanism, joy, love, balance, incarnation, renewal, etc.

You must make a point of these values. In the first place, for yourselves, but also for the non-believers around you. You expect them to be attracted to these values and if they do not convert, at least, they will appreciate Christianity. I do not argue these values are authentically Christian, but the jealous, susceptible, exclusive attachment that many of

³¹ Father Henri Caffarel, French Monthly Newsletter, no 3, March 1948. This text can also be found in **Chosen Texts of Father Caffarel**”, Study topic 2009, chapter 4

our contemporaries have for them, seems suspicious to me. Would he not conceal the refusal of other non-authentic Christians values, such as renounce mortification, penance, and the cross?

Let's not forget Christ's words: "Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross daily and follow me". (Lk 9:23), and Saint Paul's words:" Jews demand signs and Greeks look for wisdom, but we preach Christ crucified: a stumbling block to Jews and foolishness to Gentiles." (1Cor 1:22-23).

The Christian balance is expressed by the Pauline binomial: Death – Resurrection. If we eliminate or underestimate one of these terms, we will alter Christian spirituality. You are right in wanting to show non-believers the joyful and strong side of love and faith. However, do not forget that Passion precedes Resurrection and that joy is fruit from the Cross. "Who does not take up his cross daily" or who does not mortify his growing egoism all the time, who does not accept suffering small or big, as ways of purification, will never be able to present a show of a radiant joy and an attractive religion."

ORIENTATIONS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING

Team meeting as Ecclesia

2nd Requirement: Rupture

Whoever says Ecclesia, says Convocation: Summoning God, calling his own.

If we go to the team meeting, it is because of God, it is because Christ calls. Now, that we are called, we must also leave behind our attachments.

When Christ passed by Levi, the tax collector, he said: "Come and follow me!" Levi leaves his co-workers and follows Christ. (...)

In the same way, there can be no Christian meeting without a break (or rupture) from the things that often keep us separated from God. This may include worries that do not belong in a Christian assembly, or simply problems with home and children. It is important that each team member comes to the meeting with an open mind and heart.

WELCOME AND INITIAL ENCOURAGEMENT Our third meeting is about some of the weaknesses which influence some people in their path to holiness: contemporary culture and unjustified socioeconomic inequalities. In fact, we live a time of change, which for many is a moment to get rid of the “attachments” that no longer help us to live and transmit the Gospel. This time of change is characterized by a globalized culture, and also permeated by individualism, consumerism, short-term gratification and secularization. Because of this, the religious dimension is no longer present in institutions, traditions and objective norms. Pope Francis proposes in *Gaudete et Exsultate* “an integration of Christian life in its demand of unity with the Lord (our interior life), while practicing works of mercy and promoting justice. The love of God leads us to *love* of the other. Prayer and works of mercy cannot be understood or lived apart from these demands for a life of holiness. Mercy is “the beating heart of the Gospel”. (GE, 48)

READING OF GOD’S WORD AND MEDITATION

See page 30

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm - as suggested on page 11)

SHARING

- Each person shares with the Team what living the Endeavors has meant during the last month.
- In a special way, share about **Listening to the Word of God**. How do you place yourself in relation to Christ, during this moment of listening to the Word of God? Is the Word of God the main nourishment of your daily spiritual life as a couple?
- During this month try to reserve more time than usual in your everyday life to create silence. The objective is to listen to what the Lord has to say to you and your spouse, your family and community of faith. This relationship with Him is the cornerstone of all our spiritual life.

- If the couple wants to know a little bit more how to improve their daily listening of the Word of God, they can read the document LISTENING TO THE WORD OF GOD, available in the library of their Super-Region.

Father Henri Caffarel states: ³²

“Listening is not only a matter of intelligence. It is all our being - soul and body, intelligence, heart, imagination, memory and will - that must pay attention to the word of Christ. Open up to it, give it a special place, let yourself be taken and driven by it, without reservation.”

“Ascesis in the sense of a journey towards holiness, asks for an active and persevering search of God, including the study of Scripture. This study is a weak spot in the personal life of the couple, in their conjugal life, and in their Team. From now on, there is a need for embracing it in a more deliberate way. We will then see miracles coming from the Word of God, because the Word is creative. It gives life to those who open themselves to its virtue and it brings joy to the home”.

DEEP SHARING (POOLING)

- To share with the Team, the lived experiences of the month which were significant for each person or couple.
- Deep share in a simple and concrete way, how we live with cultural values different from ours, and how this living affects our journey towards holiness.
- We still can deep pool, if there is time, about economic-and social hardship situations, in the couple or family, which have taken us away from the Church, and led us to question our faith.

³² Teams of Our Lady. **Listening to the Word of God**. Published by Super Region of Brazil, July 2017, chapter 1, no 3.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

(Exchange of ideas about the topic)

At this point, we are not asked to do a theoretical reflection about what holiness is. We are going to discuss with the Team – as a form of mutual help – how we live or try to live holiness in our everyday lives.

- What bothers you the most in today's culture, in relation to your journey towards holiness? And what do you appreciate the most or see as positive?
- What are the most noticeable social inequalities in the context of your daily lives? Do you believe that these are obstacles to holiness for people living this reality?
- Up to this day, what have you done – as a couple, family or church community – to help reduce these social inequalities? Can you cite any concrete examples of help on a permanent basis, not just occasional or transient assistance?
- Individually or as a couple, do you bear witness to a Christian life, based on the values of the Gospel?

PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FATHER CAFFAREL

MAGNIFICAT

SENDING FORTH THE COUPLES ON MISSION

FOURTH MEETING

ENEMIES OF HOLINESS: GNOSTICISM AND PELAGIANISM

OBJECTIVES

- To be aware that God’s grace sanctifies us.
- To recognize intellectual arrogance and pharisaic prepotency as obstacles to holiness.
- To recognize that Gnosticism and Pelagianism can lead us astray from our holiness path.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In chapter II of the Apostolic Exhortation *Gaudete et Exsultate*, Pope Francis reflects on two falsehoods of holiness, which can lead us astray from our path:

Gnosticism and Pelagianism.³³ The Pope refers to these two heresies: “they are from early Christian times, yet they continue to plague us.” (GE, 35)

The Catechism of the Catholic Church states that holiness comes from God’s grace and occurs thanks to the initiative of God’s mercy. It is the fruit and gift of grace in the life of the Church.³⁴

Thus, holiness it is not fruit of our own efforts. It is not a mountain we climb supported by our own strength. It means that is not possible to implement strategies or pastoral programs to “produce” holiness. It means, above all, that it is Christ himself who initiates and perfects holiness in each human being who desires it faithfully. Therefore, holiness is the treasure of the Church. Because, if there are saints, it means that Christ is alive and continues working in them, protecting and changing their lives, and we can see their effects.

³³ **Gnosticism** puts forward a model of salvation that is merely interior, perhaps an intense union with God, “but incapable of welcoming the newness of the Spirit, our relation with others and the created world”. It makes it hard to understand the meaning of the flesh of Jesus towards the mysteries of the unknown divinity. **Pelagianism** understands the individual as autonomous, the one who can save himself. “Christ is rather a model, who inspires generous acts, by his words and actions, instead of being The One, who transforms human condition”. See: Congregation for the Doctrine of Faith. Letter *Placuit Deo* about some aspects of Christian salvation. Rome, February, 2018.

³⁴ Catechism of the Catholic Church 1987 to 2016

And, for that reason, it is also true that “misleading proposals” of Pelagianism and Gnosticism represent an obstacle to the universal call to become saints. These proposals suggest in different ways the old pelagian or gnostic falsehood: this is, they hide or cancel the need of the grace of Christ, or they empty the free and real dynamics of their action.

The Pope at the end of chapter II, asks the Lord himself to set the Church free from these new forms of Gnosticism and Pelagianism, that weigh down and block progress along the “path to holiness” (GE, 62).

Sanctification demands the conquest of many enemies. The primacy of Grace enables us to fight everyday against arrogance and prepotency. There is no holiness without God’s grace and spiritual warfare.

BIBLICAL TEXT: Matthew 23:13-15; 23-28

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You lock the kingdom of heaven before human beings. You do not enter yourselves, nor do you allow entrance to those trying to enter. Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You traverse sea and land to make one convert, and when that happens you make him a child of Gehenna twice as much as yourselves.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You pay tithes of mint and dill and cumin and have neglected the weightier things of the law: judgment and mercy and fidelity. [But] these you should have done, without neglecting the others. Blind guides, who strain out the gnat and swallow the camel!

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites. You cleanse the outside of cup and dish, but inside they are full of plunder and self-indulgence. Blind Pharisee, cleanse first the inside of the cup, so that the outside also may be clean.

Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, you hypocrites! You are like whitewashed tombs, which appear beautiful on the outside, but inside are full of dead men’s bones and every kind of filth. Even so, on the outside you appear righteous, but inside you are filled with hypocrisy and evildoing.

PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE

During the month, we suggest to each one of you and the couple, to start with the biblical text and to follow the four steps of Prayerful Reading of the Bible – Reading, Meditation, Prayer and Contemplation, according to the outline and questions presented in Annex 1.

BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Jesus confronted Pharisees and Scribes on several occasions. They did not welcome Jesus' actions and teachings to the poor and the sick, especially his healings on the Sabbath. The Scribes were scholars of the Holy Scriptures. They believed they were the faithful interpreters. On the other hand, the Pharisees were very zealous about the faithful fulfillment of the laws.

In the proposed text for Prayerful Reading of this meeting, Jesus addresses these two groups directly, using the exclamation "woe", not only to condemn these two groups, but also to express his pain. These two leading religious groups, with their attitudes, were an obstacle for the people to practice a true religion, making it a burden and not an occasion to praise the Lord.

Even worse, they were imposing too many laws and rules to follow, as if they were core to their holiness. They didn't pay close attention to the practice of the commandments, especially the most important of all, "to love God above all things and others as ourselves".

There are people who preach a very spiritual religion, without taking into consideration the human condition, both body and spirit. This condition was dignified by the very word of God Himself, made flesh, who did not come to help angels, but to free mankind from sin (cf. Heb 2, 15-16). Those are people without humility or with a false humility, who intend to enter into the mystery of God only through study. They think that they will be saved through acquired knowledge, forgetting the practice of love and humble prayer. They feel superior to simple people, because of their intellectual knowledge. In this way, they place themselves on the opposite side of the Gospel's simplicity.

Another element present in today's Church, which is still an obstacle for living an authentic religion, is believing salvation is a consequence of man's will alone. In this

way, people believe that it is through their own efforts that mankind can be saved, while not taking into account the mystery of the merciful grace of God and human limitations. This is a proud attitude, similar to the Pharisees, who imposed a rigorous following of religious rules, as if salvation would come from the law, not from God.

A Christian certainly must try to know more about his religion and strive to progress along the path to holiness, but always accepting with humility, the unfathomable mystery of God's mercy. God is the only one who can save and make the human being holy.

SUPPORT TEXTS

Presentation of the texts

Pope Francis in his regular magisterium, has referred many times to two tendencies, which represent two detours in our path to holiness. They are similar in some respects to two former heresies, **Pelagianism and Gnosticism**.

The Pope states: "A new form of **Pelagianism** is spreading in our days, one in which the individual, understood to be radically autonomous, presumes to save oneself, without recognizing that, at the deepest level of being, he or she derives it from God and from others. According to this way of thinking, salvation depends on the strength of the individual or on purely human structures, which are incapable of welcoming the newness of the Spirit of God". On the other hand, "a new form of Gnosticism puts forward a model of salvation that is merely interior, closed off in its own subjectivism. ... It presumes to liberate the human person from the body and from the material universe, in which traces of the provident hand of the Creator are no longer found, but only a reality deprived of meaning, foreign to the fundamental identity of the person, and easily manipulated by the interests of man" . (...) ³⁵

Father Caffarel in his text below alerts us to the danger of a couple belonging to Teams of Our Lady. What would be this danger or dangers? There are several: To think that by belonging to the Movement, the couple will have assured salvation; To believe that belonging to the movement is an end in itself; To see the Endeavors ("obligations") as an

³⁵ Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter *Placuito* Deo on some aspects of Christian salvation. Rome, February 2018.

end and not a means of happiness and sanctification; To believe that to be a Christian couple is to just to follow the “law”, or the Endeavors, : To think that their mission in the Church is just the Movement; To consider their base Team is “a clan of the righteous and saints”, etc.

In another article entitled “Be suspicious of Afonso”, which is recommended reading, he highlights that asceticism is essential for the Team couple. In order to avoid a pharisaic attitude, he reiterates the central role of prayer in the couple’s life. Referring to the Movement, he emphasizes that “a religious group which is not a school of prayer” is extremely dangerous; “it will be no more than a factory of Pharisees”.³⁶

POPE FRANCIS TEXT

According to Pope Francis, in our times, many Christians, perhaps without realizing it, can be seduced by these deceptive ideas. (GE, 35)

CONTEMPORARY GNOSTICISM:

Gnosticism presumes “a purely subjective faith whose only interest is a certain experience or a set of ideas and bits of information which are meant to console and enlighten, but which ultimately keep one imprisoned in his or her own thoughts and feelings”. (GE, 36)

a) An intellect without God and without flesh

Thanks be to God, throughout the history of the Church it has always been clear that a person’s perfection is measured not by the information or knowledge they possess, but by the depth of their charity. “Gnostics” do not understand this, because they judge others based on their ability to understand the complexity of certain doctrines. They think of the intellect as separate from the flesh, and thus become incapable of touching Christ’s suffering flesh in others, locked up as they are in an encyclopedia of abstractions. In the end, by disembodiment of the mystery, they prefer “a God without Christ, a Christ without the Church, a Church without her people”. (GE, 37)

b) A doctrine without mystery

³⁶ Fr Henri Caffarel. **Suspicious of Afonso**. Published in the French monthly newsletter, January 1958, and can also be found in **Chosen Texts of Father Caffarel**, Study topic 2009, chapter 4

Gnosticism is one of the most sinister ideologies because, while unduly exalting knowledge or a specific experience, it considers its own vision of reality to be perfect. Thus, perhaps without even realizing it, this ideology feeds on itself and becomes even more myopic. It can become all the more illusory when it masks itself as a disembodied spirituality. For Gnosticism “by its very nature seeks to domesticate the mystery”, whether the mystery of God and his grace, or the mystery of others’ lives. (GE, 40)

c) The limits of reason

A dangerous confusion can arise. We can think that because we know something, or are able to explain it in certain terms, we are already saints, perfect and better than the “ignorant masses”. Saint John Paul II warned of the temptation on the part of those in the Church who are more highly educated “to feel somehow superior to other members of the faithful”. In point of fact, what we think we know should always motivate us to respond more fully to God’s love. Indeed, “you learn so as to live: theology and holiness are inseparable”. (GE, 45)

CONTEMPORARY PELAGIANISM

Gnosticism gave way to another heresy, likewise present in our day. As time passed, many came to realize that it is not knowledge that betters us or makes us saints, but the kind of life we lead. But this subtly led back to the old error of the gnostics, which was simply transformed rather than eliminated. (GE, 47)

a) A will lacking humility

Those who yield to this pelagian or semi-pelagian mindset, even though they speak warmly of God’s grace, “ultimately trust only in their own powers and feel superior to others because they observe certain rules or remain intransigently faithful to a particular Catholic style”. When some of them tell the weak that all things can be accomplished with God’s grace, deep down they tend to give the idea that all things are possible by the human will, as if it were something pure, perfect, all-powerful, to which grace is then added. They fail to realize that “not everyone can do everything” and that in this life human weaknesses are not healed completely and once for all by grace. (...) (GE, 49)

b) An often-overlooked Church teaching

Only on the basis of God's gift, freely accepted and humbly received, can we cooperate by our own efforts in our progressive transformation. We must first belong to God, offering ourselves to him who was there first, and entrusting to him our abilities, our efforts, our struggle against evil and our creativity, so that his free gift may grow and develop within us: "I appeal to you, therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God" (Rom 12:1). For that matter, the Church has always taught that charity alone makes growth in the life of grace possible, for "if I do not have love, I am nothing" (1 Cor 13:2). (GE, 56)

c) New Pelagians

Still, some Christians insist on taking another path, that of justification by their own efforts, the worship of the human will and their own abilities. The result is a self-centered and elitist complacency, bereft of true love. This finds expression in a variety of apparently unconnected ways of thinking and acting: an obsession with the law, absorption with social and political advantages, a punctilious concern for the Church's liturgy, doctrine and prestige, a vanity about the ability to manage practical matters, and an excessive concern with programs of self-help and personal fulfillment. Some Christians spend their time and energy on these things, rather than letting themselves be led by the Spirit in the way of love, rather than being passionate about communicating the beauty and the joy of the Gospel and seeking out the lost among the immense crowds that thirst for Christ. (GE, 57)

d) The summation of the Law

To avoid this, we do well to keep reminding ourselves that there is a hierarchy of virtues that bids us seek what is essential. The primacy belongs to the theological virtues, which have God as their object and motive. At the center is charity. Saint Paul says that what truly counts is "faith working through love" (Gal 5:6). We are called to make every effort to preserve charity: "The one who loves another has fulfilled the law... for love is the fulfillment of the law" (Rom 13:8.10). "For the whole law is summed up in a single commandment, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal 5:14). (GE, 60)

Father Caffarel Text:

“DANGER”³⁷

Why becoming a member of Teams of Our Lady can become dangerous?

When we did not yet have the Charter, Teams were threatened by the danger that lies in wait for all movements whose ideal is not backed up by obligations. People are enthused by the ideal, but their life remains stagnant. Today, thanks to the Charter, team members are considerably sustained by the obligations. But let us beware of a new danger: that of emptying the obligations of their spirit. We must indeed fear in case the practice of the obligations becomes an end in itself: a lofty aim, a ceiling. We must fear in case it should appear to members of Teams that Christian perfection consists in observing the obligations of the Charter. They would think themselves perfect on easy terms and would rest snugly on the couch of self-satisfaction and of a good conscience.

I received a letter recently which clearly proved to me that this peril is not an illusion. It came from a couple of outstanding human and spiritual worth. This is what they wrote to me: “We have left our Team of Our Lady after having belonged to it for many years. We felt stifled in it: a world shut in on small problems, a world that did not want to see the real demands of the Gospel ideal. The observance of the Charter became, on some days, like some hypocritical screen behind which one could be self-satisfied on easy terms and could close one’s eyes and ears to all the questions raised by society today”.

Many times in my travels, I have had occasion to hear criticism of a team in the same vein: for being shut in upon itself, for being a ‘clan of the just’, a ‘sect of the pure’.

I am well aware that most teams do not deserve such reproaches. Nevertheless, I cannot refrain from asking myself the agonizing question: will our teams train Christians or produce Pharisees?

The goal is Christian life in its fullness, just as it is outlined on the first page of the Charter: “Be perfect as your heavenly Father is perfect”.

ORIENTATIONS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING

Meeting as Ecclesia:

3rd Requirement : Called in the name of Christ

³⁷ Editorial of the French monthly newsletter No. 3, Year XIII, December 1959

Pay close attention to what the Lord says. He does not say: “For where two or three are gathered together, I am in the midst of them”, but He emphasizes: “For where two or three are gathered together in my name”. Here we have an important fact. We are called by Him, we answer his call and we are there in his name.

Therefore, if we just go to the Team meeting because of the friendship, or for a nice experience, we do not go in the name of Christ. It is for this reason, that sometimes teams formed with couples who did not know each other, have a great beginning: What would gather them, besides the desire to meet Christ?

Thus, at the end of one, two or three years, these couples already know each other very well. Mutual help and friendship have grown. Even though this is a happy situation, sometimes this friendship can become the only reason for meeting, because they are good friends. To gather together in Christ’s name is no longer a reality. What happens in those teams, I often call the temptation of friendship.

Christ cannot act in his plenitude, because the couples’ main reason to be together is not really Christ.

That is why it is necessary to purify the intention and to strengthen it. We came in the name of Jesus. It seems to me, that the role of the Spiritual Counsellor and the Responsible Couple (of the team) are very important to maintain the tone of the meeting.

WELCOME AND INITIAL ENCOURAGEMENT

In our fourth meeting, we will discuss two old heresies, Pelagianism and Gnosticism, which are still two subtle enemies of holiness. Even today, they still attract many Christians (even Team couples), perhaps without awareness on their part. They use misleading proposals. In Pelagianism, man attempts to save himself, relying on his strength (and perhaps trusting too much on his own structures and strategies), without acknowledging his dependence on God and his need for constant help, in addition to his relationship with others. In neo-Gnosticism, salvation becomes something “merely interior, closed in subjectivism”, putting intellect above “the flesh of Jesus”.

We need to acknowledge that Christ is the Savior: “He did not merely show us the way to meet the Father by following a path we can walk by ourselves, while obeying his word

and following his example. He did more. In order to open the door of liberation, He became the way”.

READING AND MEDITATION OF God’s word – Matthew, 23, 13-15.23-28

See page 39

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm – as suggested on page 11)

SHARING

- Practicing the Endeavors as a mere formality or obligation, does not guarantee sanctification of the couple. It is also necessary to go out on mission and to bear witness to marriage and family.
- In this context each one shares with the Team what living the Endeavors meant during the past month.
- During this month, each couple will pay particular attention to the **Endeavor of the Sit Down**.
- If the couple wants to know a little bit more about how to improve **the Sit Down**, they should try to read the document THE SIT DOWN, available in their Super Region’s Materials Office.

Father Henri Caffarel states: ³⁸

“If a couple does not find time to stop and reflect, then very often moral and material trouble comes and settles insidiously. Prayer together, meals, and all the family rites become routine. Parental teaching is reduced to the reflectios of more or less nervous parents, and the union starts to break apart. These deficiencies and many others can appear not only among couples without formation, who are unaware of education problems and conjugal spirituality, but also among couples who are considered to be knowledgeable in the family sciences. They are indeed skilled ... but only theoretically”.

³⁸ **The Obligation of Sitting Down.** Published by Super Region, Brazil, 2017. It is part of Father Caffarel reflection: *An unknown obligation*, 1945

DEEP SHARING (POOLING)

- Share your lived experiences of the month, which were meaningful for each person or couple.
- Deep share, in a simple and concrete way, gestures or attitudes that you have or have had in relation to these “subtle enemies of holiness”.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING**(Exchange of ideas about the topic)**

At this moment we are not asked to reflect in theory on what holiness is. We are going to discuss as a team – as a form of mutual help –how we live or try to live holiness in our daily lives.

- Did you know what Pelagianism was? Now that you know, evaluate if you tend to seek holiness, trusting more in your own efforts than relying on God’s grace.
- How can we serve the Church and the Teams Movement with responsibility, while exercising humility?
- Did you know what Gnosticism was? Now that you know, evaluate if you put regulations and rules above God’s command for merciful love.
- How can we use our reasoning and our knowledge to understand and analyze, and not think of ourselves as “masters of the truth”?

PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FATHER CAFFAREL**MAGNIFICAT****SENDING FORTH THE COUPLES ON MISSION**

FIFTH MEETING

PRAYER: REQUIREMENT FOR HOLINESS

OBJECTIVES

- To understand there isn't holiness without prayer.
- To acknowledge that through prayer and with prayer we learn how to serve others, to walk in faith and to do God's will.
- To commit to a life of personal, couple and family prayer.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Pope Francis makes constant prayer an essential requirement for holiness. He states: "I do not believe in holiness without prayer, even though that prayer need not be lengthy or involve intense emotions". But, "the saints are distinguished by a spirit of prayer and a need for communion with God". (GE, 147)

The level of holiness is given by Christ's influence on us, once we model all our lives on His, with the strength of the Holy Spirit. Prayer is also about following Him; it is an adventure in faith, a love relationship.

The apostles saw Jesus praying constantly and they showed Him their desire to learn how to pray. Jesus didn't refuse. He was not jealous of his intimacy with the Father, because in fact, He came to make possible our relationship with the Father. Thus, He became the master of prayer for his disciples, as he certainly wants to be for all of us. We also should say: Lord, teach me how to pray. Teach me.³⁹

Pope Francis says, that we cannot pray like pagans or like many Christians, who believe that to pray is "to talk to God like a parrot". "No! Prayer is with the heart, from the inside. On the contrary – says Jesus – when you pray, go to God as a son goes to his father. Your father knows what you need before you ask him. (cf. Mt 6, 8). The "Our Father" can also be a silent prayer: ultimately it is enough to put oneself under God's gaze, to remind ourselves of his Fatherly love. This is all we need in order to be heard".

³⁹ See Pope Francis Catechesis about **Our Father** in:
<https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/pt/audiences/2018>

When we ask for 'daily bread', we ask "God that 'the daily bread' is good not only for the body, but also for the soul and the heart, that is, material bread but also a divine bread. We ask that what we build every day is something with a transcendent dimension and not just something meaningless. We also ask that our work is not only a mechanical and compulsory activity, but that there is more to it: The Love of God, the Heart of God, and the Life of God".⁴⁰

As Don José Tolentino Mendonça states, "Jesus does not give us formulas. He brings us an existential and practical dimension and gives us access to an experience of being sons and daughters of God. Jesus gives us a way, an appreciation of God and a taste of God".⁴¹

BIBLICAL TEXT: MATTHEW 6:5-13

When you pray, do not be like the hypocrites, who love to stand and pray in the synagogues and on street corners so that others may see them. Amen, I say to you, they have received their reward. But when you pray, go to your inner room, close the door, and pray to your Father in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will repay you. In praying, do not babble like the pagans, who think that they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them. Your Father knows what you need before you ask him.

This is how you are to pray:

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name, your kingdom come, your will be done, on earth as in heaven. Give us today our daily bread; and forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors; and do not subject us to the final test but deliver us from the evil one.

PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE

⁴⁰ José Tolentino Mendonça **Our Father on Earth – the Our Father open to believers and non-believers**. Paulinas Editora, 2014, page 51. Archbishop D. José Tolentino Mendonça did the daily meditations in the International Meeting of Fatima: Today he is the archivist and the librarian of the Holy See.

⁴¹ Idem page 103

We propose to each one and to each couple during the month, to start with the biblical text and to follow the four steps of Prayerful Reading of the Bible - **Reading, Meditation, Prayer and Contemplation**, according to the outline and to the questions presented in Annex 1.

BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name Mt 6:9

We are all aware of the need for prayer as part of our journey to sanctification. Jesus has given us the example of going to the mountainside, where many times He spent the night in prayer. He teaches us that we are not to be like the hypocrites, who pray pretending to be what they really aren't, or like the pagans who multiply words, thinking that the gods will hear them. A disciple of Jesus prays with humility, hidden in 'his room', as only God needs to hear his petitions.

Christ's disciples ask him to teach them how to pray and Jesus teaches them what we call the Our Father. Whoever prays the Our Father must do it as a trusting child, calling God Abba, 'daddy'. However, if there is a vertical direction in prayer, that is between me and God, there is also a horizontal direction of fraternal love. God is not only 'my', but also 'our' daddy, Father of all saved by Jesus Christ. In the language Kirundi (from Burundi), 'Our Father' was translated by 'Father of all of us' (*Dawe twese*), in the sense that we are all one family, children of the Eternal Father.

In this prayer we present seven petitions to the Father. In the first one, we ask that his name be hallowed. God is holy; no holiness can be added to him. To hallow God's name means to honor him, sanctifying our actions and giving thanks to him. The other petitions relate to the first one.

"Your will be done, on earth as in heaven". We pray that the earth becomes like heaven. For that we need to fulfill the commandments of love, in order to create the great family of the Father: "For whoever does the will of my heavenly Father is my brother, and sister, and mother" (Mt 12, 50).

Then, we ask for daily bread. If we are the Father's family, we ask for the material and spiritual needs of everyone.

The following petition, "forgive us..." takes us to Jesus Christ – mercy of the Father – who came to redeem humanity. We ask for forgiveness but there is a special condition: "as we forgive...". To be able to forgive and to be forgiven is essential to live

with others, especially in the couple and in the family. The Church teaches: “Forgiveness is the fundamental condition of the reconciliation of the children of God with their Father and of men with one another” (CCC, 2844).

The two last petitions are interconnected: “and do not subject us to the final test”, “and deliver us from evil”. Only through a lot of prayer, can we be delivered from temptation and have the discernment to act appropriately, because as the apostle Saint James says: “...each person is tempted when he is lured and enticed by his own desire” (James 1:14).

Great is God, who in spite of our weaknesses and sins, has sanctified us in Jesus Christ and made us his children. He rejoices when we talk alone with Him and call him Our Father.

SUPPORTING TEXTS

Presentation of the texts

Father Caffarel writes: “a saint is not, above all, as many people imagine, a champion who accomplishes feats of virtue or some great spiritual achievement. He is mainly a man seduced by God, who turns his entire life over to God”.⁴²

Tirelessly, Father Caffarel made a point of highlighting that the Teams Movement is a school of formation in Christian life, and therefore a school of prayer and of worshipers of God.

Once, he did a reflection on the 96 quarter hours of a day. He asked each person to count how they distributed the time during the day: sleeping hours, work (professional or housekeeping), meals, going places, reading the paper, etc and finally prayer time. He asked for people to compare the time spent in each one of these daily activities.

After this he asked: If all those activities are of vital importance, is not prayer ? Fr Caffarel warns of the condition of “spiritual anemia” or “low resilience” in the lives of those who do not devote themselves to daily prayer. Then he warns: “A Christian who

⁴² Father Henri Caffarel. L’Anneau d’Or, special number 111-112, May-August 19

doesn't devote 10 to 15 minutes daily (1/96 of his day), to the kind of prayer which we call inner prayer, will not mature; or rather will languish".⁴³

Father Caffarel lived his prayer life in a demanding way. He wished, insistently and strongly, the same for all team couples, because prayer is the privileged place of encounter with God.

POPE FRANCIS TEXT

Finally, though it may seem obvious, we should remember that holiness consists in a habitual openness to the transcendent, expressed in prayer and adoration. The saints are distinguished by a spirit of prayer and a need for communion with God. They find an exclusive concern with this world to be narrow and stifling, and, amid their own concerns and commitments, they long for God, losing themselves in praise and contemplation of the Lord. I do not believe in holiness without prayer, even though that prayer need not be lengthy or involve intense emotions. (GE, 147)

For this to happen, however, some moments spent alone with God are also necessary. For Saint Teresa of Avila, prayer "is nothing but friendly intercourse and frequent solitary converse, with him who we know loves us". I would insist that this is true not only for a privileged few, but for all of us, for "we all have need of this silence, filled with the presence of him who is adored". Trust-filled prayer is a response of a heart open to encountering God face to face, where all is peaceful, and the quiet voice of the Lord can be heard in the midst of silence. (GE, 149)

In that silence, we can discern, in the light of the Spirit, the paths of holiness to which the Lord is calling us. Otherwise, any decisions we make may only be window-dressing that, rather than exalting the Gospel in our lives, will mask or submerge it. For each disciple, it is essential to spend time with the Master, to listen to his words, and to learn from him always. Unless we listen, all our words will be nothing but useless chatter. (GE, 150)

⁴³ It is recommended Father Henri Caffarel reading **Sleep, work, meal...Prayer...** Monthly French Newsletter, November,1952. It can be found in **Father Caffarel – Prophet of Marriage.**

TEXT OF FATHER CAFFAREL:**If Christ is alive in us, He is there praying.** ⁴⁴

For Christ, to live is to pray. Join him, take hold of his prayer, make it yours. Or rather, since the words I have just used lay too much emphasis on your action, allow his prayer to grip you, to invade you, to lift you up and take you to the Father. I do not promise that you will understand it. I only ask you to believe it, and in the course of your quiet prayer, renew your full adherence. Leave space for prayer totally. May his prayer take hold of every fiber of your being, just like the fire penetrating the wood and making it glow.

To pray is to agree to what Christ asks of us: "Lend me your understanding, your heart, everything that in a human being has the potential to become prayer; so that I may be able to call forth from you a great hymn of praise of the Father. Have I come for anything else than to set the earth on fire, a fire that spreads from near and far, transforming all the trees of the forest into living torches? This fire is my prayer. Agree to it".

Christ is as present in a newly baptized baby as in a great mystic; but the life of Christ in one is not at the same stage of development as in the other. Though the prayer of Christ is already vibrating in the soul of the newly baptized, it is as yet only a spark of fire. It is only in the course of existence and dependent on our cooperation, that it becomes more intense and gradually takes possession of our whole being.

Our cooperation consists first of all in associating ourselves, with our deepest will, to the prayer of Christ in us. But please make a special note of the very strong meaning I attach to the expression 'associate ourselves to'. It does not mean some kind of lukewarm attachment, an agreement lightly given, but a total gift in the way that a log that is placed in the fire submits itself to the flame to become fire in its turn. Furthermore, our cooperation consists in seeking, with all our understanding, what constitutes the prayer of Christ in us. Its main elements are praise, thanksgiving, offering and intercession.... Our goal is to adopt them more perfectly.

⁴⁴ Published in *L'Anneau d'Or*, May-August 1967, It can also be found in **Father Caffarel: Prophet of Marriage**, chapter 1

ORIENTATIONS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING

Team meeting as Ecclesia

4th Requirement: Fraternal help

(...) united in Christ, united in fraternal love. If there is no fraternal love, there is no Christian assembly or no Christian love, shall I say. I think that your responsibility is to do your best to turn this Christian love into reality, into a love which excludes no one, eliminates all boundaries and all barriers. Christian love shares everything. We read before: "Among them, all was shared". This defines the first apostolic Church and also should define our meetings. This love ought to be shared when it comes to the material level. If you want to follow on the path of the first Christians, it is really impossible to be satisfied only with spiritual help. The first Christians gave us, clearly, the example of this mutual material help. Meanwhile the essential is, of course, mutual spiritual help, and it comes into practice when sharing. In fact, I think that "Sharing" on the obligations of the Charter (Endeavors), if well done and well understood, is fraternal help.

Mutual help is also present in what we call deep sharing (pooling): joy, sadness, life problems and discoveries... indeed all our lives. It is the pursuit of this ideal that we should look for, more and more. Without it, you will not be brothers who love each other, as you keep to yourself what matters to you. If you do not open up to each other, you will be in the meeting, but working only at an intellectual level.

WELCOME AND INITIAL ENCOURAGEMENT

At the beginning of our fifth meeting, constant daily prayer is presented as a requirement for holiness. We are reminded that constant daily prayer is the life of a new heart, redeemed by Jesus Christ. He must nourish our hearts and encourage us in every moment of our lives.

In prayer, we open up our soul to the Lord, so He comes to dwell in our weakness, transforming it into strength for the Gospel.

In a world, where we are in danger of relying only on the efficiency and strength of human resources, consumerism, images and appearances, we are called to rediscover and to witness to the power of God. We receive strength through prayer, by which we grow every day, living our lives in Christ, our Master in prayer.

READING AND MEDITATION OF GOD’S WORD

See page 49.

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm – as suggested on page 11)

SHARING

- Each one shares with the Team, what living the Endeavors has meant to them during the last month.
- Each couple speaks a little bit about how they do **Conjugal Prayer**, and how it helps in their spiritual conjugal growth.
- As a concrete suggestion for this month, we propose that husband and wife intensify their CONJUGAL PRAYER to get closer to each other and the two with the Lord.
- If the couple wants to know a little bit more about how to improve their Conjugal Prayer in everyday life, they are advised to read the document CONJUGAL PRAYER, available in their Super-Region’s Materials Office.

Father Henri Caffarel states: ⁴⁵

“If all Christian couples were convinced of the importance of conjugal prayer, if in all those homes conjugal prayer was alive, we would see in the world a big increase in joy, love and grace”.

“Christ is present, in a very special way, every time the couple prays. The spouses not only renew their ‘yes’ to God, but they also get a depth of union, which comes expressly from the union of their hearts and souls through the sacrament of marriage. “When we pray together, we form a prayerful community. There is no better foundation for our marriage and for our family!”

⁴⁵ Teams of Our Lady **Conjugal Prayer**. Published by Brazil Super Region, 2016

DEEP SHARING (POOLING)

- To share with the Team, lived experiences during the month, which were meaningful to each one's life or to the couple.
- Deep share, in a simple and concrete way, a lived experience where prayer was relevant and decisive.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

(Exchange of ideas about the topic)

At this moment, we are not asked to reflect in theory about what holiness is. We are going to discuss as a Team – as a form of mutual help –how we live or try to live holiness in our daily lives.

- What is the role of prayer in your personal life and as a couple? Can you explain the time you devote to it daily?
- What kind of prayer do you usually do, either personally or as couple? How do you do this prayer? Do you usually use existing prayers?
- Do you think, or do you have any doubts that prayer is the path to holiness? Speak a little about your present experience of prayer and how it has evolved throughout time.

PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FATHER CAFFAREL

MAGNIFICAT

SENDING FORTH THE COUPLES ON MISSION

EUCHARIST: SOURCE OF HOLINESS

OBJECTIVES

- To understand that the Eucharist is the heart of holiness (the core of life) of the Church.
- To understand that the Eucharist is the secret and the strength of holiness.
- To understand that the Eucharist cannot be separated from personal, married and family life.
- To make us aware that our whole life must be eucharistic

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

Vatican Council II stated that the Eucharist is “source and center of all Christian life”, because it is the union with Christ’s life that transforms man’s life. Therefore, “taking part in the Eucharistic sacrifice, the source and summit of the Christian life, they offer the divine victim to God and themselves along with it. And so, it is that both in the offering and in Holy Communion, each in his own way, though not of course indiscriminately, has his own part to play in the liturgical action”.⁴⁶

To receive Christ in the Eucharist transforms us to become like Him, for “whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (Jn 6:56).

As Pope Francis states “to nourish oneself of the Eucharist means to allow oneself to be changed by what we receive”. Thus, each time we receive the Eucharist, “we resemble Jesus more; we transform ourselves more fully into Jesus”. At the end, “we become what we receive”.⁴⁷ Eucharist is the source of our holiness.

The Eucharist “holds the central place in the Church”, because “the Church draws her life from Christ in the Eucharist. By Him she is fed and by Him she is enlightened.”⁴⁸ As

Pope Francis states, “the Eucharist holds the central place in the Church because it is “what makes the Church”.⁴⁹

⁴⁶ Dogmatic Constitution about the Church *Lumen Gentium*, no 11

⁴⁷ Pope Francis Catechesis on Eucharist, March 21, 2018, Holy See site.

⁴⁸ Pope John Paul II encyclical Letter *Ecclesia de Eucharistia*, -Eucharist in its relation to the Church, no 2 and 6

⁴⁹ Address of Pope Francis, International Eucharistic Congress, September 27, 2014

As the Synod of the Bishops summarizes: the Eucharist is source and summit of the life and the mission of the Church. This happens because “from the very beginning, the Church has drawn her life from the Eucharist. This Sacrament is the reason for her existence; the inexhaustible source of her holiness; the power of her unity; the bond of her communion; the source of her dynamism in preaching the Gospel; the principle of her evangelizing activity; the font of charity; the heart of human promotion; and the anticipation of her glory in the Eternal Banquet at the wedding feast of the Lamb (cf. Rev 19:7-9).⁵⁰

Therefore, “Sunday is a holy day for Christians, and is rendered holy by the celebration of Eucharist, which is the living presence of the Lord amongst us. Thus, Mass defines Christian Sunday. What sort of Sunday can it be, if it is lacking an encounter with the Lord?”⁵¹

All of this is gift and task; to receive Christ in communion is a gift and to become like him is a task. This is the most evident logic towards holiness!

BIBLICAL TEXT: 1Corinthians 11:23-26

For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you: That the Lord Jesus on the night when he was handed over, took bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, “This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me. In the same way he also took the cup after supper, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me. “For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE

We propose to each one and to the couple, that during the month they read the biblical text, following the four steps of Prayerful Reading of the Bible – **Reading, Meditation,**

⁵⁰ Bishops Synod. XI General Regular Assembly. **Eucharist: source and summit of the life and the mission of the Church.** *Instrumentum Laboris*, Introduction.

⁵¹ Pope Francis, Catechesis on Eucharist, December 13, 2017. Holy See Site.

Prayer and Contemplation, according to the outline and questions presented in Annex 1.

BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the death of the Lord until he comes. (1Cor: 11:6)

Christians from Corinth had gone astray in their behavior, transforming the Lord's Supper into sumptuous dinners, which created some division among them. Saint Paul reprimands that community and reaffirms what he had already taught them: In the Lord's Supper, the bread and the wine are transformed (transubstantiated) into the body and the blood of the Lord, as Jesus Christ said and did the night before his passion and death.

The institution of the Eucharist is the highest point in Jesus Christ's mission. In it he announces his imminent death for the remission of the sins of mankind: "This is my body that is for you"; "This cup is the new covenant... in my blood". More than that, Jesus announces his resurrection, telling them to do what he is doing ("do this in remembrance of me"). He is asking them to celebrate this mystery, in which he is alive, in body and blood: "For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes".

In the gospel according to Saint Luke (22:15), when Jesus celebrates his last Judaic Passover, he talks to the apostles this way: "I have eagerly desired to eat this Passover with you", because he was concluding his visible mission with humanity and in its favor, to hand over his life for the remission of all sin. In addition, he makes a new covenant with humanity, a lasting covenant, sealed with his own blood. He did that because of his infinite love. His burning desire is to give eternal life to each person. Through his death he overcomes sin, and through his resurrection he gives full life to those who follow him. Jesus is the new Passover. He is the Passover of new life, eternal life in God. That is why the Eucharist is also an announcement of the heavenly feast of the 'lamb' in God's kingdom.

This mystery is celebrated by Christians since the beginning of the church (cf Acts 2:42). Faithful to the Lord's command, the Church continues to do so in his memory, until his glorious return (cf. CCC 1333). Eucharist makes Christ's death and resurrection

present. It is the perfect act of thanksgiving and praise. The Son offers himself to the Father through the Holy Spirit that transforms the bread and the wine into the body and blood of Christ.

In the Eucharist, the bread and the wine are indeed the body and the blood, and that is why Jesus says to eat “this bread” and drink “this cup”. He affirms: “For my flesh is true food and my blood is true drink” (Jn 6:55). However, reason will not make us understand this mystery. This truth, of which Jesus talks about insistently in John’s gospel, chapter 6 (cf Jn 6:26 ff), can only be accepted through faith.

When we receive the Eucharistic bread, we are in communion with Jesus Christ. “Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood remains in me and I in him” (Jn 6, 56). Eucharist reveals God’s immense love for us. In Eucharist, Jesus Christ, the Holy one, enters into union with us sinners. He wants to live in us, so we can live in him and become saints. It is in the Eucharist that the Christian finds strength to fulfill the Beatitudes in his life and accomplish the new Christian commandment: “Love one another. As I have loved you, so you also should love another one” (Jn 13:34).

The Eucharist is the sacrament of unity and love. St. Augustine exclaimed, “O sacrament of devotion! O sign of unity! O bond of charity!” (CCC, 1398) Eucharist is a big help for conjugal life, because marriage is also a sacrament of love and unity. For this reason, the couple finds in it the fullness of love to live marriage to the fullest. Eucharist celebrates and makes present the definitive and faithful covenant of God with humanity. Couples witness this covenant when they live intensely the love and faithfulness that they promised to each other. Besides unifying Christ with the faithful and our brothers and sisters, the Eucharist will strengthen the couple’s union in their search of holiness.

SUPPORT TEXTS

Presentation of the texts

The selected texts of Pope Francis and Father Caffarel clearly state that Eucharist is the core and the root of Christian spiritual life. It is spiritual nourishment for our spiritual journey to God. It is the most powerful means for our sanctification, because in the Eucharist we enter into union with the “holy” and we are transformed in him. We assume the “image and likeness” of the Lord.

The secret of holiness is in Eucharist. It is this union with Christ that moves us and encourages us to personal, conjugal and family holiness, to the community experience of our faith and to apostolic dynamism. Therefore, both Pope Francis and Father Caffarel, insist on frequent participation in the Eucharistic mystery. It is in the Eucharist that we can find the spiritual energy as missionary disciples, in order to fulfill God's commandment of love. The invitation is to be eucharistic men and women.

So that it is truly Eucharist, they remind us that the Eucharist can never be separated from real life, i.e. our daily lives as people, couples or family. Eucharist takes us to real life: human life, to the needy and to one another. Eucharist also has a social aspect. To be Eucharistic men and women and to receive Christ in communion is to live like Christ lived among men.

All Christ's life was Eucharistic as he did the Father's will, offering life in abundance for all. The Church, which is all of us, has the mission to continue the Eucharistic project of Jesus. Its mission will end when the world becomes Eucharistic.

POPE FRANCIS TEXT

The Eucharist demands that we be members of the one body of the Church. Those who approach the Body and Blood of Christ may not wound that same Body by creating scandalous distinctions and divisions among its members. This is what it means to "discern" the body of the Lord, to acknowledge it with faith and charity both in the sacramental signs and in the community; those who fail to do so eat and drink judgment against themselves (1Cor11, 29). The celebration of the Eucharist thus becomes a constant summons for everyone "to examine himself or herself" (1Cor11, 28), to open the doors of the family to greater fellowship with the underprivileged, and in this way to receive the sacrament of that Eucharistic love which makes us one body. We must not forget that "the 'mystique' of the sacrament has a social character". When those who receive it turn a blind eye to the poor and suffering, or consent to various forms of division, contempt and inequality, the Eucharist is received unworthily. On the other hand, families who are properly disposed and receive the Eucharist regularly, reinforce their desire for fraternity, their social consciousness and their commitment to those in need. (AL, 186).

Each community is called to create a “God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord”. Sharing the word and celebrating the Eucharist together fosters fraternity and makes us a holy and missionary community. (...) (GE, 142)

God’s word invites us clearly to “stand against the wiles of the devil” (Eph 6:11) and to “quench all the flaming darts of the evil one” (Eph 6:16). These expressions are not melodramatic, precisely because our path towards holiness is a constant battle. Those who do not realize this will be prey to failure or mediocrity. For this spiritual combat, we can count on the powerful weapons that the Lord has given us: faith-filled prayer, meditation on the word of God, the celebration of Mass, Eucharistic adoration, sacramental Reconciliation, works of charity, community life, and missionary outreach.(...) (GE, 162)

FATHER CAFFAREL TEXT

*The daily bread*⁵²

*(...) Lay people of the twentieth century, have an underestimated, special privilege: **the possibility of receiving communion every day.** (...)*

It was necessary for Pius X to speak with a great voice at the beginning of this century. (...) He proclaimed clearly to the whole Church: “When Christ tells us to ask for our daily bread in our Sunday prayer, we should understand why, as almost all the fathers of the Church taught, it is not so much the material bread, but the Eucharistic bread that should be received every day”. (...)

*Eucharist has a central place in Christian life but it cannot be isolated from the other elements of Christian life. Some of those elements prepare the soil and some of the others are the fruit. I will be happy to mention three of them, which are of irreplaceable importance: **a deeper knowledge of the truth of faith**, especially through a habitual contact with God’s word; **prayer**: I am talking about mental prayer, called meditation; **love of one another**, an alive and effective love at the same time. Some of you will complain; “Father, you do not know our lay life”. What I know is that there is no Christianity if there is discouragement. I also know some Christians, perfectly normal, I*

⁵² Father Henri Caffarel. French Monthly Newsletter, March 1958. Partially published in **Chosen Texts. Father Caffarel**. Study topics 2008/2009, chapter 2.

assure you, who think that vital spiritual needs as well as the physical needs cannot be neglected, without great harm. (...)

*I am convinced that we can expect wonderful times for Christianity, when we will realize that **daily mass and daily communion are the normal way of living for Christians**. To excuse oneself from this sacred contact without reason, is a sign of unbelievable lack of attention to this wonderful gift of divine love; the Eucharist.*

Then we will see the increase of priestly and religious vocations. The souls of those nourished by Eucharist, aspire to a more total giving. We will also observe an unexpected growth of our catholic movements. The sacrament of Matrimony, also 'fortified' by its foundations in the Eucharist, will produce effects of fidelity, purity and conjugal holiness.

ORIENTATIONS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING

Team Meeting as Ecclesia

5th Requirement: To Listen to Christ

Certain Christian groups sometimes have a tendency to believe that love is enough, that love is Christian charity. But no! There will not be a true Christian assembly without listening to Christ, who is present. To love one another is without any doubt, a necessary condition. However, to love is to be united and to be united is to listen to Him. God speaks, Christ speaks, undoubtedly to summon us but he also speaks to give us his law, and to make his thinking understood. Thus, little by little man's faith blossoms, because his faith is like the echo of God's word. Therefore, God's word is very important in our team meetings. It is at that moment the priest clearly has a role. He is then, like the first disciples used to say, 'the minister of the Word'. He is Minister of the Word and at the same time Minister of the Eucharist. He gives to them the Eucharistic Body of Christ, the Word of Christ, and this is a way of transmitting to them the life of Christ.

Now, it is not about hearing this Word in an inattentive way, but listening in the strongest meaning of the term. It is said that King Solomon used to pray to God this way: "Lord give me a heart that hears!" It is with the heart that we listen to God's Word. For that reason, we make a point when we pray in our team meetings, of having a moment of silence. Thus, each heart little by little, lets God's Word penetrate, just as the earth receives the drizzling rain that slowly fertilizes it.

It is not only prayer that lets you listen to God's Word, but also the exchange of ideas. In a team meeting, isn't our exchange of ideas, in reality, our own seeking together to understand God's thoughts about the problems concerning family realities and lay life?

WELCOME AND INITIAL ENCOURAGEMENT

In our sixth meeting, we are going to reflect upon the Eucharist, which transforms us and creates us in the image of the one we receive: Christ. It is the Eucharist that makes us stronger and holier and leads us to a life filled with acts of charity.

READING AND MEDITATION OF GOD'S WORD – 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

See page 57.

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm – as suggested on page 11)

SHARING

- Each one shares with the Team what living the Endeavors has meant during the past month.
- Share, in a special way, the endeavor: **Meditation on God's Word**.
- If the couple wants to know a little bit more about how to improve their meditation on God's Word in everyday life, read the document **MEDITATION ON GOD'S WORD**, available in their Super-Region's Library.

Father Henri Caffarel affirms: ⁵³

"I believe after twenty years of ministry, that I can say with certainty that a Christian who does not dedicate ten or fifteen minutes of his time daily (1/96 of his day) to this meditation, which we call inner prayer, will remain as a child, or will regress".

Together (the couple), listen to Christ! In order to listen to Christ, you can start your prayer by reading the Bible, and then meditate. Only afterwards, after having listened

⁵³ ENS **Meditation (Personal Prayer)**. Published by Super Region Brazil, 2016. Also: Father Caffarel. French Monthly Newsletter, November 1952

and understood, you can talk to God, talk to him spontaneously, to show him your thoughts and feelings with the simplicity of a child.

DEEP SHARING (POOLING)

- Share about the lived experiences of the month, which were meaningful for each person or couple.
- Deep share, in a simple and concrete way, the role Eucharist has played throughout the years, for you individually and as a couple. Has it been merely an obligation, or rather an act of transformation?

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

(Exchange of ideas about the topic)

At this moment, you are not asked to reflect in theory about Eucharist and holiness. We are going to discuss as a Team – as a form of mutual help – how we live or try to live holiness in our daily life, from the Eucharist we receive.

- Have you ever thought about the existing relationship between the Sacrament of Eucharist and the Sacrament of Matrimony? How would you explain this relationship?
- Would you be able to explain the personal, ecclesial and social aspect of Eucharist?

PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FATHER CAFFAREL

MAGNIFICAT

SENDING FORTH THE COUPLES ON MISSION

SEVENTH MEETING

TO BE A HOLY COUPLE TODAY

OBJECTIVES

- To thank God for our vocation to holiness, as a couple.
- To understand that the path to holiness is a gradual one.
- To understand that holiness must be lived today, in our time, facing our challenges.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

The words of Pope Francis are well known, that there is no perfect husband, perfect wife, perfect spouse, perfect couple or perfect family. Despite this, the Pope emphasizes that there is no need to fear the imperfection or the fragility, and not even the conflicts. It is necessary to learn how to face them in a constructive way, through love, dialogue, understanding, forgiveness and accepting each other.⁵⁴

True conjugal love is not imposed in a hard and aggressive manner, but with courtesy, with generous words, dialogue, joy, and with a real habit of giving importance to the other. For this to happen, three key words are necessary: “excuse me”, “thank you”, “sorry”.⁵⁵

The Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* presents marriage as a vocation, as it is a response to a specific call to experience conjugal love as an imperfect sign of the love between Christ and the Church. This sacrament is a gift given for the sanctification and salvation of the spouses. AL, 72)

Therefore, it is not beneficial to present conjugal love as something ‘magical’ and perfect. There is no perfect couple, ‘as portrayed in some consumerist fantasies’, because it deprives them of all the stimulus for the couple’s growth in their love, their

⁵⁴ Pope Francis, Address to Families Meeting, Cathedral of Our Lady of Assumption, Santiago (Cuba), Tuesday, September 22, 2015; Message to the World Day of Social Communication. To communicate to the family: privileged meeting place of gratuity of love. May 17, 2015.

⁵⁵ Pope Francis Apostolic Exhortation *Amoris Laetitia* on family love, no 133.

relationship and their spiritual development. We have to bear in mind that the best is yet to come.

Pope Francis says: “As the Bishops of Chile have pointed out, “the perfect families proposed by deceptive consumerist propaganda, do not exist. In those families, no one grows old, there is no sickness, sorrow or death... Consumerist propaganda presents a fantasy that has nothing to do with the reality... It is much healthier to be realistic about our limits, defects and imperfections, and to respond to the call to grow together, to bring love to maturity and to strengthen the union, come what may. (AL, 135)

Likewise, Father Caffarel insists that conjugal love is a source of grace, but it is not conjugal love in itself that becomes sacrament. It is the mutual commitment following the union. However, love is inspiring this commitment and is the living soul of this conjugal union. He concluded: Conjugal love is not only sanctified, it is sanctifying, when both spouses understand that this is a “common task”.

Therefore, conjugal love is never at rest. It is not just a one-day task, or an easy task. The sanctification of the couple “demands that spouses should not be lazy”, and that they need to fight temptations of self-love and pride. They ought to accept difficulties associated with family and conjugal life, making of their life of love a constant praise to God. Thus, conjugal love becomes a reference to understand divine love.⁵⁶

The sanctification of the couple is a journey in community, a mutual responsibility that shall be done by both, because it is a divine mission received through the sacrament of marriage. It is through this sacrament that you – wife and husband – become responsible for the sanctification of your spouse.

BIBLICAL TEXT: TOBIT 8:1-9

When they had finished eating and drinking, they wanted to retire. So, they brought the young man out and led him to the bedroom. Tobiah, mindful of Raphael’s instructions, took the fish’s liver and heart from the bag where he had them, and put them on the embers intended for incense. The odor of the fish repulsed the demon, and it fled to the upper regions of Egypt; Raphael went in pursuit of it and there bound it hand and foot. Then Raphael returned immediately. When Sarah’s parents left the bedroom and closed

⁵⁶ Father Henri Caffarel. “Love Vocation”. L’Anneau d’Or. Published in Henri Caffarel, **Conjugal spirituality**.

the door behind them, Tobiah arose from bed and said to his wife, “My love, come, let us pray and beg our Lord to grant us mercy and protection.” She got up, and they started to pray and beg that they might be protected. He began with these words: “Blessed are you, O God of our ancestors; blessed be your name forever and ever! Let the heavens and all your creation bless you forever. You made Adam, and you made his wife Eve to be his helper and support; and from these two the human race has come. You said, ‘It is not good for the man to be alone; let us make him a helper like himself. “Now, not with lust but with fidelity, I take this kinswoman as my wife”. Send down your mercy on me and on her, and grant that we may grow old together. Bless us with children. They said together, “Amen, amen!” Then they went to bed for the night.

PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE

We propose to each one and to the couple, that during the month they read the biblical text, following the four steps of Prayerful Reading of the Bible – **Reading, Meditation, Prayer and Contemplation**, according to the outline and questions presented in Annex 1.

BRIEF REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

In order to understand the biblical text for this meeting, it is necessary to put it in context. It tells us the story of two families, who were exiled and geographically isolated. They remained faithful to God and to Mosaic Law, persevering in the practice of justice and acts of mercy, in spite of multiple adversities and a hostile environment. God is faithful to these families, helping them in their hardship, especially by sending them the Archangel Raphael to accompany and help Tobiah in his saga, until his marriage to Sarah, his relative, to whom he was entitled under Levirate Law.⁵⁷

Even though he knew that seven of Sarah’s husbands had died on the wedding night, Tobiah trusts God because his love for Sarah is sincere. He asks Sarah to ask God for mercy and health.

Tobiah’s prayer is a praise to God, recalling the creation of man and woman as complementary to each other, for the perpetuation of humankind. He justifies his

⁵⁷ Precept of Mosaic Law, according to which the man was required to marry a widowed sister-in-law.

Thus, the family would continue, and the widow would be guaranteed her support.

petition, affirming that his union with Sarah is not motivated by impure desire or lust, but by love.

Today, “scattered” throughout the world, Christians are under huge pressure to turn their customs into pagan ones, and to transform the relationship of man and woman into just a lustful satisfaction. Thus, marriage is emptied of the sacredness given to it by God since the beginning. This relationship was made sacrament by Christ, who makes the two “one flesh”, a living sign of his relationship with the Church, his Body.

Tobiah’s attitude in placing his faithfulness in God as the main motto of his love for Sarah and subsequent marriage, makes us reflect upon the importance that should be given to marriage.

Today happiness is ‘sold’ in many attractive ways, but these are not lasting. The couple finds long lasting happiness in love grounded in God’s love. Tobiah, with his faithful love to Sarah for the love of God, witnessed in his time the joy of a couple that fears God. The Christian couple today, who puts the love-sacrament above the values of the world, witnesses the joy of those who put their hope in the Lord.

SUPPORT TEXTS

Presentation of the texts

Pope Francis suggests some ‘secrets’ or short ‘rules’ which we know well, to sanctify us in our everyday life, as couple, parents, professionals who live in the contemporary world.

When we reflect on Father Caffarel’s text – **mutual sanctification** – we can see similar indications for the sanctification of a couple in their daily life.

When reflecting on the couple of Nazareth as an example for all Christian couples, he affirms this as an example and, at the same time, a message of hope. “If the Christian couples do not try to put aside divine teaching acting in their lives, as it acted in the couple Mary and Joseph, God will lead them “with strong hand and extended arm” to the promised land, where he awaits them. **Marriage will then have been a journey of holiness**”.⁵⁸

Father Caffarel in his message to the Brazilian Team members, for the EACRE in January 1958, insists: “My advice is the same: maximum mystique and maximum discipline. (...)”

⁵⁸ Quoted on pages 65-66 – **Father Caffarel: Prophet of Marriage**.

Brazil needs saints. It is important that each one of you seek every day the Christian perfection to which you were invited by Christ (...) It is important you help each other on the path to that perfection".⁵⁹

Father Caffarel also used to say that "one of the requirements to enter Teams of Our Lady is to have the desire to progress spiritually – as a person and as a couple". However, as he knows this is a difficult path, he immediately warns:" This desire can weaken in the sands of habit and routine. It is crucial to maintain it and to renew it".⁶⁰

The path of sanctification of the couple and the family is a hand-crafted work, which is created in the countless lights and shadows of daily life. It is a place to love from morning to night, assuming and going beyond our own imperfections and the imperfections of others. It is a reality that is transformed throughout life, without losing its own essence. It is a definite and lasting commitment, which requires and causes union with God.

POPE FRANCIS TEXT⁶¹

In the fourth chapter of Gaudette et Exsultate, Pope Francis presents some characteristics of holiness in today's world, which are "great manifestation of love to God and to one another".

a) Perseverance, patience and meekness

The first of these great signs is a solid grounding in the God who loves and sustains us. This source of inner strength enables us to persevere amid life's ups and downs, but also to endure hostility, betrayal and failings on the part of others. "If God is for us, who is against us?" (Rom 8:31): This is the source of the peace found in the saints. Such inner strength makes it possible for us, in our fast-paced, noisy and aggressive world, to give a witness of holiness through patience and constancy in doing good. (...)
(GE, 112)

b) Joy and a sense of humor

Far from being timid, morose, acerbic or melancholy, or putting on a dreary face, the saints are joyful and full of good humor. Though completely realistic, they radiate a

⁵⁹ Nancy Cajado Moncau, **Teams of Our Lady: Essay on your history**, published by the Brazilian Super Region, by New Flag Production Editorials 2000, pages 58-59

⁶⁰ Fr Henri Caffarel, *Wish*, Published in **Chosen Texts. Father Caffarel**. Study topics 2008/2009, page 13

⁶¹ Apostolic Exhortation **Gaudette et Exsultate** Holy Father Francis on call to Holiness in Today's World

positive and hopeful spirit. The Christian life is “joy in the Holy Spirit” (Rom 14:17), for “the necessary result of the love of charity is joy; since every lover rejoices at being united to the beloved... the effect of charity is joy”. (...) (GE 122)

c) Boldness and passion

Holiness is also *parrhesía*: it is boldness, an impulse to evangelize and to leave a mark in this world. To allow us to do this, Jesus himself comes and tells us once more, serenely yet firmly: “Do not be afraid” (Mk 6:50). “I am with you always, to the end of the world” (Mt 28:20). These words enable us to go forth and serve with the same courage that the Holy Spirit stirred up in the Apostles, impelling them to proclaim Jesus Christ. Boldness, enthusiasm, the freedom to speak out, apostolic fervor, all these are included in the word *parrhesía*. The Bible also uses this word to describe the freedom of a life open to God and to others (cf. Acts 4:29, 9:28, 28:31; 2 Cor 3:12; Eph 3:12; Heb 3:6, 10:19). (GE 129)

d) In community

Growth in holiness is a journey in community, side by side with others. We see this in some holy communities. From time to time, the Church has canonized entire communities that lived the Gospel heroically or offered to God the lives of all their members. (...) In many holy marriages too, each spouse becomes a means used by Christ for the sanctification of the other. Living or working alongside others is surely a path of spiritual growth. Saint John of the Cross told one of his followers: “You are living with others in order to be fashioned and tried”. (GE, 141)

Father Caffarel text: ⁶²

Mutual sanctification

God wants you to be his collaborator, first of all, when it relates to your spouse. (...) When a young couple assumes the happy and edifying initiative of mutual spiritual support, then it is not a luxury. It is a mission, a divine mission. Through the sacrament of marriage, you become responsible for the sanctification of your spouse, following Christ’s example, who becomes flesh and takes upon himself the salvation of humanity.

⁶² Father Henri Caffarel, “**The couple’s Apostolic Mission**”. Part II. Father Caffarel’s Address, in Itaici (São Paulo), 1972, at the time of his third and last trip to Brazil. Published in: **Addresses and Conferences of Father Henri Caffarel, SR Brazil**, 2017

*There is a word, which you know very well, that highlights this mutual mission: “**minister**”. You are ministers not only on the day of your wedding celebration, but in another sense, you are indeed ministering every day. A minister is a person, who acts in the name of another, in a specific task. More specifically yet, is through this other person that he acts. In matrimony this other is Christ. Husband and wife are put in charge of each other by Christ. It is a plan Christ wants to accomplish, for you and with you, along with the one He entrusted to you. He wants to give himself, through each one who gives themselves to the other. He wants each one to receive Him, by welcoming the gift of the other.*

*Therefore, you should not hesitate in using the strong word “**ministry**” to define your conjugal life. The same way we talk about the priestly ministry, we should talk about the unique, original, irreplaceable, conjugal ministry received from Christ.*

*This ministry is not only an **obligation**, but it is also **a power** and **a grace**. It is the obligation of working for the sanctification of your spouse. It is the power given by Christ for this work and the grace, the help Christ who will never leave you alone in this task.*

You ought to understand this ministry well and understand how to work in your mutual sanctification. It is not as if you were two preachers, who keep correcting and preaching to each other. You are to do this, exercising your vocation of spouse and parent. It is not about making efforts to treat the other well; it is to love and help each other, to love your children and to assist each other in your mission of paternity and maternity. (...)

SUGGESTIONS TO PREPARE THE TEAM MEETING

Team meeting as *Ecclesia*:

6th requirement: To answer God

The sixth requirement to fulfill, is not only to listen to the Word of God but also to respond to it. God speaks and it is normal that we start by listening to Him. Let us not be like so many Christians, who from the very first moment they present themselves before God, immediately begin talking to Him. And we wonder when God will be able to speak to them. Actually, God does not speak to them. Let us listen to God in the first place, and then answer him. Man’s answer to the Word of God, is his faith. Unfortunately for 20th century westerners, faith is no more than joining in spirit. In biblical terms, faith is

the force of an entire life, lived according to God's Word. Faith makes us belong to God and turn completely to Him. (...)

What leads me to wonder many times, if our team meetings are real Christian assemblies, and if Christ is really present there, is that sometimes, I do not feel any vibration of Christ's religion in the few formulas of prayer that are recited aloud. It is truly in this space that the role of the Responsible Couple and the Spiritual Counsellor is important. Little by little, after listening to Jesus speaking, the whole assembly will be able to give an answer worthy of Him.

WELCOMING AND INITIAL ENCOURAGEMENT

At the start of our seventh meeting, we are going to call attention to the suggested topic: holiness lived as a couple. To be a holy couple today, is a call and a mission that we receive through matrimony. To live holiness in marriage is for us, as team couples, a demand proposed by the pedagogy used in the Teams Movement.

Those who receive the sacrament of marriage have, together with their children, the raw materials for a life of holiness.

READING AND MEDITATION OF THE WORD OF GOD – Tobit 8:1-9

See on pages 65-66

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm - as suggested on page 11)

SHARING

- Each one shares with the Team what living the Endeavors has meant during the past month.
- This month, each couple shares a little bit more about their **RULE OF LIFE**. Without having to be precise about your Rule of Life, share how it helped us to recognize that "we are clay" in God's hands. Thus, we need to continue our progress in our Christian, conjugal and family life, in order to attain the holiness that He wants from us.

- Consequently, make a bigger effort this month to suggest a new RULE OF LIFE or to review the one you had, in such a way that it becomes a safeguard and a support to grow in conjugal spirituality.
- If the couple wants to know a little more about how to improve their RULE OF LIFE in everyday life, they can read the document RULE OF LIFE, available at their Super-Region's Materials Office.

Father Caffarel affirms: ⁶³

“What the Charter offers you is a means to progress, which holds among us a place of honor. You are asked to stop periodically in order to place your lives under the light of God's will. This is to check, with faithfulness and generosity, in what ways you are faithful to Him, in order to specify which resolutions will allow you to better correspond to His will.”

DEEP SHARING (POOLING)

- To share with the team, the lived experiences of the month which were significant for each person or couple.
- Deep share, in a simple and concrete way, about a gesture or attitude we have had, in relation to the pursuit of the holiness of our spouse.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

(Exchange of ideas about the topic)

At this moment, you are not asked to do a theoretical reflection about what holiness is. We are going to discuss as a Team – as a form of mutual help – how we live or try to live holiness in our daily lives.

- Have you ever thought that your simple daily tasks, either as a couple or as a family, can bring you to holiness?

⁶³ Teams, **Rule of Life**, published by Super Region Brazil, 2017; Father Caffarel, L'Anneau d'Or, no 87-88, 1959; special number “Mille Foyers à Rome”

- Do you consider that your marriage is truly a path of holiness as a couple? Is it an easy or difficult way?

PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FATHER CAFFAREL

MAGNIFICAT

SENDING FORTH THE COUPLES ON MISSION

CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY

TEAMS SPECIFIC CONTRIBUTION TO THE COUPLE'S HOLINESS

OBJECTIVES:

- To rejoice in conjugal spirituality, the path of holiness of the couple.
- To commit to live the Teams charism.
- To acknowledge the importance of the sacrament of Holy Orders and spiritual accompaniment, in the holy journey of couples.

GENERAL INTRODUCTION

In several writings of Father Caffarel, we read of his insistence that “to belong to the Movement (of TEAMS) is to seek Christ and once you find Him, to follow Him with all your determination”. Using the founder’s expression, objective number 1, is union with Christ.⁶⁴

He says with impressive acuity: “the only true intention (to enter TEAMS), is the willingness to know God better, to love Him better and to serve Him better. This is the aim of Teams. We come to the Teams because of God, and we remain there because of God. The reason to enter and to remain in the Teams is a religious reason, in other words, it concerns God.”⁶⁵

“Christian couples, united by the sacrament of marriage, are called to follow Christ along the way of love, happiness and holiness. The Teams of Our Lady, a gift of the Holy Spirit, is offered to couples throughout the world in order to help them to develop and to live out their married spirituality”.⁶⁶

Hence, we find the specific contribution of TEAMS to couples, along their path to holiness. There are some set ‘rules’, ‘obligations’ or ‘endeavors’, which are within the pedagogy and mystique of teams.

⁶⁴ Cf. **What do you come for, when you come to Teams?** In Monthly French Newsletter, November 1948

⁶⁵ **For God**, in Monthly French Newsletter, December, 1962

⁶⁶ TEAMS, **Guide to the Teams of Our Lady**, Introduction

They were created in order to keep faithfulness and unity to the original charism of the Movement and its 'internationality', which concerns the married laity who have received the sacrament of matrimony all over the world.

The basic purpose of our Movement is to guide every couple, united by the sacrament of matrimony, so they can transform their married and family life in Christ.

What is conjugal spirituality? Father Caffarel answers us: It is "the art of living in marriage, the gospel ideal proposed by Christ to all his disciples"⁶⁷, or the science or art of sanctification, in and through marriage.

Conjugal spirituality is not the sum of two spiritualities, of husband and wife. Conjugal spirituality does not exclude in any way, the individual spirituality of each spouse. Conjugal spirituality is a journey together to achieve holiness, with the strength of God's grace, in the daily lives of the couple, guided by love. Conjugal spirituality is not just the sum of the spiritual potential of each spouse, but it's the possibility of multiplying their spiritual potential.

For us team members, to practice conjugal spirituality consists of living out sacramental action. It is about putting into action the sacrament of matrimony by the gestures, words and specific acts of natural love which binds the couple together. Conjugal spirituality is essentially the sacramental co-existence of two people - man and woman – in love with Christ and united by the sacrament of marriage to live a life of holiness.

It is important to highlight the presence of the priest, Spiritual Counselor in TEAMS. He is part of the charism of the Movement. His role is to help couples to be faithful to this charism. In the base team, he exercises his pastoral and spiritual ministry: to teach, to sanctify and to orient. The Spiritual Counselor participates in a team to help couples in their sanctification.⁶⁸

BIBLICAL TEXT: Ephesians 5:22-33

Be subject to one another out of reverence for Christ. Wives should be subject to their husbands as to the Lord, since, as Christ is head of the Church and saves the whole body, so is a husband the head of his and as the Church is subject to Christ, so should wives be

⁶⁷ Henri Caffarel, **COME AND FOLLOW ME**, French Monthly Newsletter, year XVI – no 2, November 1962.

⁶⁸ ENS/ERI, **The Priest Counselor and Spiritual Accompaniment in Teams of Our Lady**, Paris, March, 2017, (available from the Teams Materials' Office and from the ERI site).

to their husbands, in everything. Husbands should love their wives, just as Christ loved the Church and sacrificed himself for her to make her holy by washing her in cleansing water with a form of words, so that when he took the Church to himself she would be glorious, with no speck or wrinkle or anything like that, but holy and faultless. In the same way, husbands must love their wives as they love their own bodies; for a man to love his wife is for him to love himself. A man never hates his own body, but he feeds it and looks after it; and that is the way Christ treats the Church, because we are parts of his Body. This is why a man leaves his father and mother and becomes attached to his wife, and the two become one flesh. This mystery has great significance, but I am applying it to Christ and the Church. To sum up: you also, each one of you, must love his wife as he loves himself; and let every wife respect her husband.

PRAYERFUL READING OF THE BIBLE

We suggest to each one and to the couple, that starting with the biblical text, they follow the four steps of **Prayerful Reading of the Bible** – Reading, Meditation, Prayer and Contemplation, according to the outline and questions presented in Annex 1.

SHORT REFLECTION ON THE BIBLICAL TEXT

Husbands should love their wives as their own bodies. (Eph 5, 28)

In his Letter to Ephesians, Saint Paul talks about the great work of love that Jesus Christ fulfills for the Church and for humankind. He looks at Jesus Christ, glorious in heaven. He speaks of the mystery of Jesus acting in the Church to gather all humankind as ‘God’s people’. The aim is to bring everyone to know the mystery of Christ and the mystery of the Church, to attain fullness of life in Christ. (cf. Eph 1:9; 1:22; 3:17b-19; 4:13). For that to happen, the Christian should put away the old self and become “a new creation” in Christ (cf. Eph 4:22-24). In Chapter 5, the text for reflection starts this way: “Be imitators of God, as beloved children. Live in love, as Christ loved us and handed himself over for us...” (Eph 5:1)

It is in this context that the transcribed text should be read: looking at the finish line, perfection in Christ, but being aware that there is a long way to go. Paul shows us a behavioral teaching to get there through imitation of Christ.

“Be subordinate to one another, out of reverence for Christ” is a teaching addressed to all Christians. In this we can see Christ, who was subordinate to the will of the Father. We can also look at Mary who places herself as a servant of God. This subordination is not meant to be demeaning. On the contrary it is an act of love; it is to be available to serve your brothers.

This is also the meaning of women being “subordinate to your husbands”. Even though influenced by the culture of the time when women were considered a husband’s property, Paul elevates this subordination. He gives it a sense of loving while serving. Also under the influence of the culture of the time, Paul outlines several attributes of the husband: To love their wives as Christ loved the Church, to cherish them, to nourish them, to love them as their own body, and to be willing “to die” for them.

In fact, all these obligations are mutual: husband and wife shall love each other and serve one another. Thus, both shall imitate Christ, who gave his life to purify and sanctify the Church “to present to himself a glorious Church, without stain, wrinkle or any other defect, but holy and immaculate”. (5:27; Rv 19:7-8).

Herein lies the main reason for married spirituality: Christ wants his wife, the Church, to be holy, and for this gives her graces in her present time. Husband and wife shall love each other mutually, helping one another in a concrete way, so that both as “one flesh” grow in holiness and reach the finishing line: fullness in Christ. This is the ‘great mystery’.

It is important to look at the meaning of “flesh”. It does not refer to butcher’s meat, but to the living body. “The Word became flesh” means that God, pure spirit, became man. He also came to sanctify the human body. The couple in “one flesh” is also the union of two lives, body and spirit. Just as Christ became a living human body for human salvation, similarly man and woman shall be an instrument of salvation for each other, in their body and spirit. In their mutual love, they are united to the love of Christ for his Church. All Christ does is rooted in the love of God, who desires happiness for humankind. Therefore, the couple finds in their love, the reason for both acting in the pursuit of happiness (holiness) of one another.

SUPPORT TEXTS

Presentation of the texts

In the origin of conjugal spirituality there is a call from Christ to the couple, and this is why Father Caffarel writes, quoting a young farmer: “For us as spouses, our vocation is to walk together in Christ, one and the other, one with the other, and one for the other”.⁶⁹

The source of Christian love explains Father Caffarel, “ is not in the core of man; it is in God. For the spouses who want to love, who want to learn how to love more and more, there is one good piece of advice: seek God, love God, be united to God, give Him all the room”.⁷⁰ God is in the beginning of the couple’s love, but is also its end. Love comes from God and goes back to God; God is the alpha and omega of conjugal love.

As we can see in the texts below, living conjugal spirituality is the equivalent of Christianizing the couple’s entire life. It is to make the glory of God shine in their lives, because it is a supernatural communion, a bond inhabited by Holy Spirit. The Trinity is present in conjugal love, making itself present in this “temple of matrimonial communion”. As Pope Francis states: “marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells”.⁷¹

As no couple is a perfect reality and ‘made’ once and for all, the challenge of living conjugal spirituality represents this requirement. It is the need to mature progressively in the capacity to love in both a human and spiritual dimension.

Text of Pope Francis

Chapter IX of *Amoris Laetitia* is dedicated by Pope Francis to the presentation of some characteristics of Family and Conjugal Spirituality. He states: *Several decades ago, in speaking of the lay apostolate, the Second Vatican Council emphasized the spirituality born of family life. The Council stated that lay spirituality “will take its particular character from the circumstances of ... married and family life” and that “family cares should not be foreign” to that spirituality. It is worth pausing to describe certain basic*

⁶⁹ Henri Caffarel, “For a spirituality of the married Christian”, **Conjugal Spirituality**, page 38.

⁷⁰ Henri Caffarel . “Lotissements”. L’anneau d’Or no 35, September- October 1950, pages 310-311 (1- p 4). See also: **Love and Grace**, chapter I, pages 28-29

⁷¹ Apostolic Exhortation Post Synod **Amoris Laetitia**, no 315

characteristics of this specific spirituality that unfolds in family life and its relationships". (AL, 313)

a) A Spirituality of Supernatural Communion

The Lord's presence dwells in real and concrete families, with all their daily troubles and struggles, joys and hopes. Living in a family makes it hard for us to feign or lie; we cannot hide behind a mask. If that authenticity is inspired by love, then the Lord reigns there, with his joy and his peace. The spirituality of family love is made up of thousands of small but real gestures. In that variety of gifts and encounters which deepen communion, God has his dwelling place. This mutual concern "brings together the human and the divine", for it is filled with the love of God. In the end, marital spirituality is a spirituality of the bond, in which divine love dwells. (AL 315)

b) Gathered in prayer in the light of Easter

If a family is centered on Christ, he will unify and illumine its entire life. Moments of pain and difficulty will be experienced in union with the Lord's cross, and his closeness will make it possible to surmount them. In the darkest hours of a family's life, union with Jesus in his abandonment can help avoid a breakup. Gradually, "with the grace of the Holy Spirit, [the spouses] grow in holiness through married life, also by sharing in the mystery of Christ's cross, which transforms difficulties and sufferings into an offering of love". Moreover, moments of joy, relaxation, celebration, and even sexuality can be experienced as a sharing in the full life of the resurrection. Married couples shape with different daily gestures a "God-enlightened space in which to experience the hidden presence of the risen Lord". (AL, 317)

c) A spirituality of exclusive and free love

Marriage is also the experience of belonging completely to another person. Spouses accept the challenge and aspiration of supporting one another, growing old together, and in this way reflecting God's own faithfulness. This firm decision, which shapes a style of life, is an "interior requirement of the covenant of conjugal love", since "a person who cannot choose to love for ever can hardly love for even a single day". At the same time, such fidelity would be spiritually meaningless were it simply a matter of following a law with obedient resignation. Rather, it is a matter of the heart, into which God alone sees (cf. Mt 5:28). Every morning, on rising, we reaffirm before God our decision to be faithful, come what may in the course of the day. And all of us, before going to sleep, hope to wake up and continue this adventure, trusting in the Lord's help.

In this way, each spouse is for the other a sign and instrument of the closeness of the Lord, who never abandons us: “Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age” (AL, 319)

d) A spirituality of care, consolation and incentive

“Christian couples are, for each other, for their children and for their relatives, cooperators of grace and witnesses of the faith”. God calls them to bestow life and to care for life. For this reason, the family “has always been the nearest ‘hospital’”. So, let us care for one another, guide and encourage one another, and experience this as a part of our family spirituality. Life as a couple is a daily sharing in God’s creative work, and each person is for the other a constant challenge from the Holy Spirit. God’s love is proclaimed “through the living and concrete word whereby a man and the woman express their conjugal love”. The two are thus mutual reflections of that divine love which comforts with a word, a look, a helping hand, a caress, an embrace. For this reason, “to want to form a family is to resolve to be a part of God’s dream, to choose to dream with him, to want to build with him, to join him in this saga of building a world where no one will feel alone”. (AL, 321)

Text of Father Caffarel: ⁷²

MARITAL SPIRITUALITY

The science and the art of sanctifying oneself, in and through the priesthood, is sacerdotal spirituality. The science and the art of sanctification, in and through matrimony, is marital spirituality.

It is a matter of Christianizing all family life; and first and foremost, to look for the Christian significance of all family realities and to ask oneself the question: “Basically, what is the mind of God about love, fatherhood and motherhood, sexuality and formation in all the great aspects of home life?” It is not only a matter of discovering but of wanting to accomplish God’s plan in all these areas.

Furthermore, one must seek to discover what could be called a Christian style of home life:

⁷² Father Henri Caffarel, Published in Anneau d’Or, no 84. Also published in: **Father Caffarel – Prophet of Marriage**, Chapter IV, Study Topic, 2009

- *a Christian style of inter-personal relationships: between husband and wife, between parents and children, between parents and grandparents, between the couple and their friends;*
- *a Christian style of environment: the home, meals, expenditures;*
- *a Christian style of daily activities: work, leisure, getting up, going to bed, evenings spent together, hospitality.*

What should one do to make all this Christian, look Christian and be resplendent of Christ's grace?

- *A Christian style of days of the week: Sunday should not be lived as a Saturday, Saturday as a Thursday, Thursday as the other days of the week;*
- *a Christian style of great events: birth, sickness, trials, marriage, death... to live out these events in a Christian way. And all this "so that, in all things, God may be glorified", as St. Benedict says.*
- *Finally, the couple is not isolated from society and from the Church. Married and family spirituality is also a spirituality of involvement of the couple, in social and Church work.*

GUIDELINES FOR TEAM MEETING PREPARATION

Team Meeting as Ecclesia:

7th Requirement: Union with the Church

Would I have finished? No! There is one requirement left. The fervor of a small gathering of Christians and the fervor of prayer itself, doesn't necessarily create an authentic Christian assembly. This meeting could be no more than a cult. Indeed, how many cults have set a great example of fervor! However, Christ was not present there. They were not Ecclesia. For what reason? In fact, they did not live this inside the Church. For this reason, here we have the last requirement, to which I need to call your attention.

If my hand is cut and separated from my body, then my hand will perish. If the branch is taken away from the tree, it will rot. If the small Ecclesia is separated from the great Ecclesia, it is no longer an Ecclesia, but just some sort of gathering.

It is necessary that the soul of the big Ecclesia become a vibrating force, in the small Ecclesia. Therefore, the Charter of Teams of Our Lady states: “The current intentions of the great Catholic family are evoked so that they can be prayed for.”

In a word, if the small Ecclesia is not rooted in the Church, it will be no more than a cult. The entire reason for being of the small Ecclesia comes from its relationship with the Church; both the earthly and the heavenly one.

WELCOME AND INITIAL ENCOURAGEMENT

The start of our eighth meeting, introduced to us how marital spirituality is a specific contribution of Teams to the Christian couple’s path of holiness. We saw that it is Christ, through the sacrament of matrimony, who seals the union between two people – a man and a woman. Christ will not only be present in the life of this couple, but He will also be in them through his grace.

Conjugal Spirituality is the science and art of sanctification in and through marriage. The primary role of the TEAMS Movement is to help the couple to sanctify themselves in and through marriage.

READING AND MEDITATION OF THE WORD OF GOD – Ephesians 5, 21-33

See page 74.

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm – as suggested on page 11)

SHARING

- Each one shares with the Team what living the Endeavors has meant during the past month.
- It is possible that the couple has already participated in a **Retreat** during the Team year. However, if not, consider planning and participating in the next Retreat.
- Share the importance of Retreats for you.
- If the couple wants to know more about how to improve their participation in a Retreat, they may read the document, THE RETREAT, available in their Super-Region's Materials Office.

Father Henri Caffarel states: ⁷³

“Once in a while our faith starts to fade. It is the breath of the Word of God that wakes, strengthens and gives new life to faith. It is in the Retreat that it becomes possible to open ourselves up to the breath of the Word of God”.

DEEP SHARING (POOLING)

- To share with the Team lived experiences of the month, which were significant in the life of each person or couple.
- Deep share, in a simple and concrete way, a gesture or attitude that we had to strengthen our Conjugal Spirituality.

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

(Exchange of ideas on the topic)

At this time, you are not asked for a theoretical reflection on holiness. We are going to discuss as a Team – as a form of mutual help – how we live or have tried to live holiness in our daily lives.

- What does Conjugal Spirituality mean for you, in the context of the aims of our Teams Movement? How do you live it in everyday life, as a couple and a family?
- Do you believe that Teams provides an important aid in your path to holiness? In what way?

⁷³ END: The Retreat, published by Brazil Super-Region, 2017. See also in French Monthly Newsletter, no 5, February 1960

PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FATHER CAFFAREL

MAGNIFICAT

SENDING FORTH THE COUPLES ON MISSION

Ninth Meeting

BALANCE SHEET

OBJECTIVES

- To share and to review the journey of personal and conjugal holiness throughout the year.
- To share and to review the Team journey throughout this year, and its contribution to each Team couple.
- To do a review as a Team at the end of the year, in relation to the mystique and sharing of the Endeavors.
- To acknowledge that the couple's call to sanctity is closely linked to mission.

As the term indicates, the **BALANCE SHEET** is an evaluation and planning meeting looking at some aspects of each couple's life, especially of the life of the Team, and what needs to be strengthened, kept or, if necessary, corrected.

BIBLICAL TEXT: Luke 13:6-9

However, the gardener said to him in reply, 'Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it.

And Jesus told them this parable: "There once was a person who had a fig tree planted in his orchard, and when he came in search of fruit he found none. He said to the gardener: 'For three years now I have come in search of fruit on this fig tree but have found none. [So] cut it down. Why should it exhaust the soil?' He said to him in reply, 'Sir, leave it for this year also, and I shall cultivate the ground around it and fertilize it; it may bear fruit in the future. If not, you can cut it down.'

REFLECTIONS ON THE WORD OF GOD

The text above is a simple parable. Someone had a fig tree in the middle of a vineyard. It was a special spot because the vineyard was planted in good soil. After it

had grown, it should have given fruit, but the owner did not find any during a three-year period. He orders that it be cut down, because it is taking a spot without producing: The gardener, meanwhile, asks him to leave it for another year. He will cultivate and fertilize the ground around it and it might bear fruit.

This parable is in Saint Luke's Gospel, in a context of conversion and eschatology. Jesus talks about the need for conversion and the need to be prepared for the end of life on earth at an individual level, but also for the second coming of Christ. Nobody knows that day, but it will come. The parable is an alert, but it is also a sign of hope.

The fig tree represents each person but it can also represent a community, or a movement, or a team (of Our Lady). The owner of the vineyard is the Father. Each person is planted in good soil in the middle of the precious vineyard of the Father (the Church). The Gardener, Jesus Christ, takes special care with each one of us. He gives special grace to each person or movement, etc. to bear good fruit for the "owner of the vineyard" Even so, there is a fig tree that only occupies space in the vineyard, selfishly sucking the fertility of the land. This tree is an obstacle to the growth of the vineyard around it, causing damage.

Nonetheless, this 'fig tree' is very special and the Owner of the vineyard is worried about it. It did not bear fruit for a long time and the final time will come as a surprise.

The text, intentionally, doesn't say whether, after the increase of fertilization, irrigation etc., the fig tree bears fruit or not. The final part of this parable is in each person until the end of time. The outcome is in each person's individual effort. God always makes grace available, but He gives to each person the freedom to use this "fertilizer".

At the end of the team year, it is always very beneficial to check if the "fig tree" is bearing fruit. In the parable, the soil where the fig tree was planted was good, because it was in the middle of the vineyard. Even so, it did not bear fruit.

Perhaps, in spite of "fertile soil", the couple and the Team are not bearing good fruit. Maybe they are convinced they are self-sufficient, and already good enough. Perhaps, in an unconscious and selfish way, they are saying: "It is cumbersome to be more holy". Also, they do not care about those around them in the Lord's vineyard.

The parable is a merciful invitation from God to conversion, on the path to holiness. The Christian couple knows that they are weak and that alone they will not

bear good fruit. Therefore, they must count on the “Gardener”, Jesus Christ. The Mercy of the Father is always available to give them the gifts of the Holy Spirit, so they can bear the fruits of holiness.

Text of Father Caffarel

I AM TIRED TO FIND GOD ⁷⁴

Imagine it is the New Year, and the first meeting of a veteran team. On the agenda is: evaluation of the previous year; forecasts for the current year, and the ‘state of health’ of the team.

Head in hands, eyes looking up, fingers through the hair, hands in pockets - each one puts himself in a familiar position that triggers deep thoughts and brings them to the surface... for the great exchange of ideas.

Someone comments: “The ‘strength’ of our team is diminishing”. This statement immediately creates heated discussion. In the end, the assertion is that this is not accurate and convincing, taking into account the activities that have been implemented and the results of attained goals.

However, there is a certain doubt. Has some of the initial enthusiasm, which was the excitement of discovery, been lost?

I recall clearly – says one: with what joy we went home after each meeting! Everything was radiant. We were left with the feeling that we had interviewed God’s thinking about love, parenthood, sex and education...What enlightening perspectives! We had found out that our marriage was not a narrow alley, but a true road leading to God; and that the mystery of love takes us completely to the mystery of Christ and the Church!

Such a testimony is really revealing. Enthusiasm, true enthusiasm, is the result of discovery.

Therefore, I invite you to meditate a little bit. If Christian enthusiasm is declining in your team, would it be that the spirit of discovery has been lost? More importantly; why has such a spirit been lost?

⁷⁴ Published in Brazil Monthly Letter no 469, February-March, 2013 pages 23-24; Father Henri Caffarel, French Monthly Letter, no 1, Year III, March 1955

To find out, it is necessary to look. In order to look, it is necessary to have the desire to find. To have the desire to find, it is necessary to believe that there is something out there to find.

Do you believe that there is still something to be found, or are you like those Christians who believe that, because they have some good ideas about the magnitude of marriage, they already fully understand this “great mystery” (using Saint Paul’s expression). Or, because they have attended some conferences and participated in some retreats, they are content with what they heard, leaving to others the “unfathomable riches of Christ” (as Saint Paul also states).

If you believe that there is much to find – that you never finish uncovering the infinite truth – then are you compelled by the desire for discovery? Are you hungry for the light? The lack of Spiritual appetite is very common among Christians. They are not hungry and so they don’t eat much, and they don’t benefit much from what they eat. Spiritual health can be recognized by a clear signal: They are hungry to know God, His thinking and his word.

And, if you are hungry for Christ, do you actually seek Him? Do you devote at least some moments every day to read the Scriptures? Do you know how to save some time in your busy lives to deepen your faith?

We read in Book of Proverbs: “I am tired to find God”. What about you?

Do you study the monthly topic with the spirit of discovery, I have talked about? Are your exchanges of ideas in meetings a mere intellectual discussion, or are they a search for the truths that have vital meaning for us? Are you aware that your accompanying priest (Spiritual Counsellor) is not only the one who brings to you the sacraments of Christ, but also the Word of God? Do you call upon him in meetings, as much as you could?

I suggest these questions to you and I ask you to reflect honestly on them. Indeed, your Christian vitality relies on them. There is no Christian vitality without a living faith, constantly nourished by new findings.

Team Meeting as *Ecclesia*:

(...) for a meeting of Christians to be *Ecclesia*, there are some requirements which have to be fulfilled. Father Caffarel used to say: There is a mystique of Church, which is necessary to acquire. (...)

I am convinced that the quality and splendor of your Team meetings, will really increase, meeting after meeting, if your meetings become real *Ecclesia*!

SHARING

The sharing, as we have seen throughout our meetings this year, aims to be an in-depth communication on the life of the couple, focused on the Endeavors. These Endeavors are the 'columns' or main beams of the inner life of the couples belonging to Teams. In other words, they are core to their conjugal spirituality.

Thus, it is necessary in our monthly meetings, to make the Sharing of those Endeavors the key focus, in order for those meetings to be a real *Ecclesia*. However, it is important to go beyond them to communicate the true life experiences of the couple, in order that the couples, together with their Spiritual Counselor, are able to be of deeper assistance to each other.

Therefore, in the Sharing you should not be content to just say whether or not each couple followed the endeavors, but move on from there and make a true sharing of your deeper spiritual life.

Concerning the couple:

- How did the couple feel about their spiritual progress, during this year?
- How did the Endeavors help the couple in that spiritual progress?
- Which Endeavors brought about a significant change of attitude in each one's life, individually and as a couple?
- Were you able to learn and to do Prayerful Reading of the Word of God? Tell a little bit about that experience, throughout this Team year.

Concerning the Team:

- How do you evaluate the quality of Sharing in the Team meeting, during this year?

- What contribution did you receive from others?
- How did the Spiritual Counselor contribute to the growth of the Team?

Concerning the Movement:

- How did the Movement (at the Region, Province, Super-Region and International level) offer opportunities of formation in relation to understanding the mystique of the Endeavors and Sharing? Which ones? How did you take advantage of those opportunities of formation?

QUESTIONS FOR THE TEAM MEETING

(Exchange of ideas about the topic)

At this time, you are not asked to do a theoretical reflection about what holiness is. We are going to discuss as a Team – as a form of mutual help – how we lived or tried to live holiness in our daily lives.

- What touched you the most – or was really beneficial, in the growth of your conjugal spirituality and in the sanctification the couple – in each chapter of this study topic?
- Father Caffarel's texts, used in this study topic, are 50 to 70 years older than Pope Francis' writings today. Do you think Father Caffarel's thinking in relation to couple holiness is still relevant today? Does it still provide a contribution to the theology of marriage?
- Was your Team aware, during the year, that when they met every month, it was the real *Ecclesia* together? Explain.

LITURGICAL PRAYER (Responsorial Psalm – as suggested on page 11)

PRAYER FOR THE CANONIZATION OF FATHER CAFAREL

MAGNIFICAT

SENDING FORTH THE COUPLES ON MISSION

ANNEX 1

How to do Prayerful Reading of the Bible – *Lectio Divina* - The 4 steps

a) Reflections of Pope Benedict XVI ⁷⁵

Several times, Pope Benedict XVI affirmed throughout his Pontificate that it is absolutely necessary each Christian hears the Word of God, so they are able in turn to announce it. He delivered a reminder that the Catholic Church lives from the Gospel and that the Church rejuvenates itself constantly in it. For him, “The Church does not live on herself but on the Gospel, and in the Gospel, always and ever anew, finds the directions for her journey. This is a message that every Christian must understand and apply to himself or herself: “Only those who first listen to the Word can become preachers of it”.

And Pope Benedict XVI goes on: “The Church and the Word of God are inseparably linked. The Church lives on the Word of God and the Word of God echoes through the Church, in her teaching and throughout her life”.

And he highlighted: “If it is effectively promoted, this practice will bring to the Church - I am convinced of it - a new spiritual springtime. As a strong point of biblical ministry, *Lectio Divina* should therefore be increasingly encouraged, also through the use of new methods carefully thought through and in step with the times”.

“We should pray *Lectio Divina*; listen to the thoughts of Christ in Scripture; learn how to think with Christ; think like Christ; and thus, have the thoughts of Christ, in order give to others Christ’s thinking and sentiments”, said Pope Benedict XVI.

b) Origins of *Lectio Divina*

If prayerful Reading of the Bible goes all the way back to the first Christians, the first to use the expression ‘lectio divina’ was by Origen (circa 185-254), who affirmed that to read the Bible profitably, it is necessary to do so with attention, constancy and prayer.

Later on, “lectio divina” became a mainstay of religious life. The monastic rules of Saints Pacomius, Augustine, Basil and Benedict outlined the triple base of monastic life

- the practice of divine reading,
- together with manual work

⁷⁵ Pope Benedict XVI, “**Lectio Divina**” with Seminarians, February 12, 2010; Meeting with the Priests of Rome Dioceses. **Lectio Divina**, February 18, 2010; Apostolical Exhortation Post Synod *Verbum Domini* of Pope Benedict XVI

- and participation in liturgical life.

The systematization of “lectio divina” in four steps, dates back to the 12th century. Around 1150, a Carthusian monk named Guido, wrote a book entitled *The Monks’ Ladder*, where “he set out the theory of the four rungs: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation”. According to the Pope: “This is the ladder by which the monks ascend from earth to heaven”.

c) How to pray Lectio Divina – The 4 steps

The four steps to Lectio Divina are: reading, meditation, prayer and contemplation

1.st) Reading: “Man is what he reads”

The first step is to choose the biblical text. Once you have chosen, start the reading. Read as many times as necessary, until the Word of God echoes in you and you are absorbed into it. It is in the reading that the sacred text starts coming to life: The Word, which was being read with faith, makes itself present that moment.

Also, try to understand what the text is about. What does the text say? About whom is it talking? To whom is it talking? In the next step, Meditation, you will bring the text into the reality you live today.

Write in a few words about what you have understood from the text up to this moment. For example: If the text, is about visiting a home, you can already turn it into a prayer: Jesus is also visiting my home.

2nd) Meditation: “To ignore Scripture is to ignore Christ”

The aim of meditation is to reflect upon the text you have just read. The Holy Spirit has something to reveal to you about this passage. As the reading happens, and as it has already been said, the Word of God comes into the present, it becomes concrete, real and transforming. After reading several times, ask yourself: What does God tell me in this text, in a particular and personal way?

Write down the part of the text which most caught your attention?

Through the Word of God, he exhorts many times, that the Lord visits us with love. He asks us to return and He comforts us.

Write down the fruits of your meditation.

3rd) Prayer: "Prayer is a safe road to sanctification

The one who prays consistently through the Word of God, understands that someone comes to meet him. Essentially, in prayer we should tell God about the text we have read and meditated upon.

You can praise, thank, ask or intercede. Finally, it is a special time to ask for grace to come abundantly, and that the Word fulfills its mission.

Holy Scripture says: "... So shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me void, but shall do my will achieving the end for which I sent it."

(Is, 55, 10-11) Prayer is the answer to what God said in the reading and in the meditation. What did God tell you? What is your answer?

Write down your prayer.

4th) Contemplation: "To contemplate is to enter into solitude, stop and only look at God"

After having read, meditated and prayed with the Word, it is time to savor it. Contemplation takes the worshiper to a pleasant, tranquil stillness, a pause of being and doing, a profound experience of the true God, who reveals his loving and close face. To achieve contemplation it is necessary to insist on it. Contemplation is, at the same time, a gift and a grace.

Express in writing, if during contemplation God's action visited you.

"Go into the whole world and proclaim the gospel to every creature". (Mk 16, 15)

Lastly it is time to make prayer effective, bearing witness with our attitudes of the changes the Word of God has brought into our lives.

Annex 2

Fatima Letter

Dear Teams Members and Spiritual Counselors of Teams of Our Lady:

At the conclusion of this 12th International Gathering, we have a heart full of joy and we wish to continue and reproduce all that we experienced in these intense and enriching days. Each of us is 'infected' with the immense richness of our charism of married spirituality; of living the mystique of unity with Christ which brings us together in the midst of the richness of our diversity; of the joy of walking together; of fidelity to our ethos. We carry in our hearts the grace of having felt in "**Reconciliation, a sign of love**" the profound meaning of our divine lineage and its bounty.

What we experienced in this intense week, but at the same time was all too short because we did not want it to end, cannot be left as a mere memory, but as a source of light that through our efforts we will continue to nourish and demonstrate, multiplying it in our normal surroundings for all those who could not live this grace directly.

Now is the opportune moment in which we can, with an open and willing heart, transmit the insights that have led us to the conclusion of this journey and to the beginning of another new phase. May it serve as an inspiration to begin to write a logbook of the new route that we will begin to follow, in harmony with the Church's steps, in fidelity to our origins and in the mystique of our total adherence to Christ and to Mary, our Mother, who leads and encourages us.

In the world of yesterday and of today, there have always been lights and shadows. In contrast to the shadows that lurk, today there are also many lights and signs of hope that we are called to communicate, because "Nobody lights a lamp and then covers it with a basin or puts it under the bed. You put it on a lamp stand so that those who come in may see the light. "Luke 8:16.

The route for our life plan, propounded by TEAMS, is a path that identifies with that perfect grace that was granted to us: the charisma of Married Spirituality. It is travelled by us, imperfect men and women who, in our adherence to that gift, possess

and manifest our own strengths but also our great weaknesses, because we too are bearers of lights and shadows. So, we must never lose the capacity for discernment and self-criticism. As Pope Francis reminds us, if we make the analogy with our TEAMS family: "There is no perfect family, but we must not be afraid of imperfection, of fragility, not even of conflicts", then we can never lose our mystique or our sense of collegiality to discern His will.

If there are shadows around us, it is not because others cause them. It is because we are not radiating enough light to scatter them. That is why today more than ever, the Teams of Our Lady have a specific role and a duty that we must take on. Paraphrasing Pope Francis in *Evangelii Gaudium* No 171: Today the Church and the world need us, TEAMS married couples, who, because of our formation and our experience of accompanying others, know the processes which call for prudence, understanding, patience and obedience to the Spirit, so that together we can protect the sheep that are entrusted to us from wolves who would scatter the flock.

During the Movement's last few years, we prepared ourselves to "**BE**", to understand the richness of our sacrament and our conjugality, forming ourselves, consolidating our faith, and "**SEEING**" and becoming aware of the missionary role demanded by the Church. This chronology of journeying together is the same as that running through the life of discipleship, which has a logical order that we should not change. The "**BEING**" as Christ - on the basis of a new truth that commences with the experience of encounter - leads us to "**SEE**" life with the eyes of Christ and this evangelical stance will take us, if we permit it, to live, or in other words to "**ACT**" as Christ.

Avoiding the risk of falling into the spiral of repetition, if we remain anchored by turning on our own axis, this new period in the life of the Movement starts from this 12th International Meeting and follows the same dynamics of growth as that of the disciple. The General Orientation that we propose today and that will guide our journey will continue to be an invitation to act, specifying our Vocation and Mission and bringing to life the call that says: "**DO NOT BE AFRAID, LET'S GO...**"

This will be illuminated by two biblical texts that will accompany us on this stage of the journey:

1st *"Have no fear, for I am with you; do not be afraid, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and give you help"* (Isaiah 41:10). This is a promise that encourages us to take that step that separates us from our assurances, but at the same time clothes us with authority that does not come from us, but from acting obediently and trusting in Him who calls us and whom we want to imitate.

2nd *"Take off your sandals, for the place where you are standing is holy ground"*: (Exodus 3:5). This will allow us to remember always that in the "departure" that we undertake, we are not superior to anyone else but simply instruments of God's mercy, so that all the ground that we tread, all the realities that we face, will be addressed as holy places of evangelization where God is present, even in those difficult circumstances that we cannot comprehend.

Since we walk with the Church at our "departure", we will further solidify this spirit and this new missionary dynamic to which Pope Francis invites us. Always with the purpose of aiding discovery and living the true nature of human love - discerning, welcoming and accompanying through our attentiveness and always faithful to our Charism.

In this conversation we will have as a support and reference the new **Vocation and Mission** document that, at the dawn of the third millennium, the International Responsible Team has delivered at this meeting with a vision of the past, present and future of our Movement, so that we can:

1. **Discern in our environment the challenges that we can respond to as a movement**

"And this is my prayer, that your love may grow ever richer in knowledge and in insight of every kind." Philippians (1:9)

By taking on this action, the real meaning of mission in the Church and in the world, we can see with a clear conscience, that our goal to which our charism leads us, is not only the cultivation of married spirituality and the sacramentality of marriage, which of course, we must not stop working at because it is our essence and the true "catalyst" of our sense of mission. It is also the promotion of a conscience and a missionary spirit in each member, in each team.

Spirituality is not synonymous with passivity, nor is spirituality built isolated from the world. In the recent Apostolic Exhortation "Gaudete et Exsultate", the Holy Father Pope Francis expresses it clearly: (GE 26). *"It is not healthy to love silence while fleeing interaction with others, to want peace and quiet while avoiding activity, to seek prayer while disdain service. Everything can be accepted and integrated into our life in this world and become a part of our path to holiness. We are called to be contemplatives even in the midst of action, and to grow in holiness by responsibly and generously carrying out our proper mission."*

With this purpose, and without any impairment of freedom and personal initiative of team members, TEAMS are called to seek, support and encourage, not by isolated initiatives but through our organizational structure and animation and specific programs of accompaniment to couples in situations caused by the world of today. That is our strength and that is the concrete contribution that we can make to the Church and the world today.

2. Provide a new impulse and a new spirit in the diffusion of the Movement according to the changing realities that we need to identify

"Simon answered, "Master, we were hard at work all night and caught nothing, but if You say so, I will let down the nets." (Luke 5:5)

In the context of the New Evangelization, it is important to make the riches of Christian marriage known in as many countries as possible. In TEAMS we know to what extent the pedagogy of the Teams of Our Lady and the experience of our life project enables the man/woman relationship to evolve positively in any geographical context.

In this quest for expansion, with the effort and perseverance of everyone, wonderful fruits have been obtained. We cannot stop planning and working without forgetting two key words: **multi-culturism** and **enculturation**. Firstly, to recognize that we are different, we think differently and come from different cultures that we must comprehend and accept. Secondly, mindful of our education and without losing fidelity to our origins, these must be taken and adapted to each culture from the point of view of their thinking, their expectations, their needs and pedagogy and all the influences that did not form us.

Also, our field of mission in spreading the Movement should look to the south since the angel of the Lord told Philip to "*Start out and go south on the road that leads down from Jerusalem to Gaza. (This is the desert road)*" Acts 8, 26, without falling into the temptation of quality or quantity, so that all the marriages in the world, whatever their condition, situation and origin, may know the gift and grace that has been entrusted to us.

3. And always practice "the art of accompaniment"

"Finally, be united, all of you, in thought and feeling; be full of brotherly affection, kindly and humble." (1 Peter 3:8)

The word 'accompany', as Pope Francis insists, is the key to our looking outward. As stated in the Vocation and Mission document, *TEAMS are already initiated in this skill that implies acceptance, listening, compassion, encouragement, patience, discernment, reciprocity We are called by the Church to accompany, especially during those moments of greatest fragility: the path to a firm and lasting commitment; the first years of married life; times of crisis and difficulties; complex situations derived from failures, abandonments and misunderstandings.* Every day we need to "specialize" more in the skill of accompanying all the realities that, from our specificity of married spirituality, enable us to contribute to the Church, which today needs more than ever, trained missionary disciples, a field in which Teams of Our Lady will never cease to concentrate its efforts.

As always in our actions, let us entrust ourselves to Mary, our Mother, intercessor and guide on the path that leads us to be, as Holy Mother Teresa longed for, that pencil in the hands of God, that writes what He desires.

So be it,

To and Ze Moura Soares
Leading Couple 2012-2018

Clarita and Edgardo Bernal Fandiño
Leading Couple 2018-2024

Prayer for the Canonization of the servant of God Fr. Henri Caffarel



*God, our Father,
You planted deep in the heart of your servant, Henri Caffarel,
a fountain of love which bound him totally to your Son
and inspired him with a wonderful capacity to speak of Him.*

*A prophet for our time,
he revealed the dignity and beauty of the vocation of every person
in the words Jesus addresses to each of us: "Come follow me".*

*He made couples enthusiastic about the greatness of the sacrament of marriage,
the sign of Christ's fruitful love for the Church and of His union with her.
He showed that priests and couples
are called to live a vocation of love.
He was a guide to widows: love is stronger than death.
Prompted by the Holy Spirit,
he accompanied many Christians on the path of prayer.
Seized by a devouring fire, he was a dwelling place for you, Lord.*

*God, our Father,
through the intercession of Our Lady,
we ask you to hasten the day
when the Church will proclaim the holiness of his life,
so that people everywhere will discover the joy of following your Son
in accordance with their particular vocations in the Holy Spirit.*

*God our Father, we invoke the intercession of Father Caffarel for.....
(indicate the particular favor being sought)*

Prayer approved by Monsignor Andre Vingt-Trois – Archbishop of Paris.

"Nihil obstat": 4th January 2006 – "Imprimatur": 5th January 2006.

In the case of a particular favor obtained through the intercession of Father Caffarel, contact:

The Postulator,, Association of "The Friends of Father Caffarel"

49 rue de la Glaciere – F 75013 Paris, France.



MAGNIFICAT

Teams of Our Lady

“My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
 And my spirit exalts in God my Savior;
 Because He has looked upon His lowly handmaid.
 Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed,
 for the Almighty has done great things for me.
 Holy is His name,
 And His mercy reaches from age to age
 For those who fear Him.
 He has shown the power of His arm.
 He has routed the proud of heart
 He has pulled down princes from their thrones
 and exalted the lowly
 The hungry He has filled with good things,
 The rich sent empty away.
 He has come to the help of Israel His servant,
 mindful of His mercy-
 According to the promise He made to our ancestors-
 of His mercy to Abraham
 And to His descendants forever.”

OUR LADY, QUEEN OF TEAMS,
 PRAY FOR US.