

# THE LETTER



OF  
FRIENDS

OF FATHER  
CAFFAREL

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## EDITORIAL

### **Message from Father Caffarel : “Holiness according to the teaching of Saint Paul”**

Maria-Carla and Carlo Volpini



Dear friends,

A team is working with generosity and devotion to promote the “cause of canonisation of Father Caffarel”. We are referring therefore to the holiness of Father Caffarel. This editorial gives us the opportunity of reading again what Father Caffarel wrote about the meaning of the word “Holiness” in “*Pray 15 days*” (Page 19).

*“Holiness, what does it mean? We do not want some abstract definition. Rather we must look at models of holiness and at Saint Paul among them. It becomes immediately evident to us that a saint is one who is passionate about Christ. In every page of the Apostle’s letters we see his burning love for the one who has conquered him by force, manifesting itself. As we know, Christ appeared to him one day (2 Co 15: 8) and he saw him (1 Co 9: 1). Henceforth, his life was radically transformed: ‘What were once my assets, I now, through Christ Jesus, count as losses. Yes, I will go further: because of the supreme advantage of knowing Christ Jesus, my Lord’.*

*The love of his Lord urges him on ((2 Co 5: 4) and he is confident that nothing will ‘cut him off’ from it (Rom 8: 35-37). He is not even afraid of his own weakness; it too will not cut him off from his Master: ‘It is then about my weaknesses that I am happiest of all to boast so that the power of Christ may rest upon me... For it is when I weak that I am strong.’ (2 Co 12: 9-10). His union with Christ is to the point of identifying himself with him:*

*‘I have been crucified with Christ, living in me’ (Ga 2: 20). Such is Christian holiness, namely love: his love for Christ that consumes Paul’s heart.”*

Father Caffarel was passionate about St Paul and invited us to imitate him in this respect. He was impressed by the Apostle’s unshakeable attachment to Christ. What pleased him in St Paul’s Epistles was that he found in them a tremendous echo of his own deep conviction that what is essential is to seek Christ. He wants us to be “Seekers of God”.

*“Your marriage will bear an even more explicit witness to God if it is the union of two “seekers of God”, to use the admirable expression of the psalms. You will be two seekers whose mind and heart yearn to know and meet God. You will be passionate about God and impatient to be united to him”*

What can we add?

## **Consecration of Teams to Our Lady:**

### **1954 : a Great Date**

*(Extract from the “Newsletter of Equipes Notre-Dame”  
N° 9, June 1954)*

In 1947, Father Caffarel had placed the Teams under the patronage of Our Lady. Seven years later, in Lourdes 1954, on the feast of Pentecost, 850 Teams members ratified Father Caffarel’s initiative. During a meeting on the “Life of Teams”, presided over by Mgr Théas, bishop of Lourdes, Father Caffarel began by giving a brief history of the Movement. Constantin Sipsom, a member of the Leading Team, then called out the names of all the teams and, in the names of those present and of those they represented, read out the words of consecration of the Teams quoted below.

‘Consecration’ is a much-used word that has lost a lot of its significance; and yet it is one of the richest words in our vocabulary. To ‘consecrate’ is to dedicate a profane object, such as a monument, to the service of God. It is to let go of something that is ours and offer it to God. By the consecration of Equipes Notre-Dame to Our Lady, we formally affirmed the dedication of our Movement to her and, through her, to God. We asked her to keep it safe, to assume responsibility for it, to guide and lead it on behalf of the Lord and use it to the glory of His Son.

Mary was already highly honoured among us. We must henceforth put even more regularity, keenness and loyalty in living in the spirit of this consecration and in belonging to Our Lady.

Do not read the following text as an item of information, but truly as a prayer and as a personal commitment:

*“Holy Mary, Mother of God, we have come to Lourdes to express, in union with all our Christian brothers and sisters, our great joy and pride at the wonderful privilege of your Immaculate Conception that was proclaimed a hundred years ago.*

*We were anxious also to express the gratitude of our generation for having received the immense grace of becoming aware of the greatness of Christian marriage. We are well aware that all graces come from Christ who died and rose again for us. And so it is to Him, in the first place, that we express our gratitude. But we are also well aware that you stood at the foot of the Cross, sharing his sacrifice and offering your Son for us and for our children. Hence it is right and proper that, in our gratitude, we do not separate you from Him from whom you were never separated*

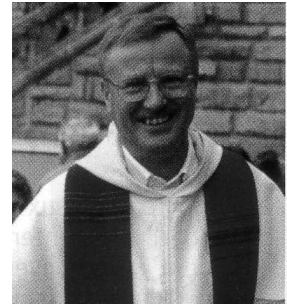
*Our journey has yet another objective that is close to our hearts: Seven years ago, Father Caffarel placed us under your patronage as Christian parents do when they lay their little child on your altar after their baptism. We longed to ratify this consecration. The time has now come to do so.*

*All of us here present, in our name and in the names of all members of Equipes Notre-Dame who were not able to be with us, gave you, unreservedly and unconditionally, our Movement and all the couples that make it up as a homage of love and trust. It is yours. You can do with it entirely as you please for the greater glory of your Son. We agree here and now with all that you will ask and do.*

*At the foot of the Cross, after having heard the words of Jesus: “This is your mother”, Saint John took you into his home. All the couples of Teams open themselves to you, Mary: Come into our homes. Teach us to know your Son. Teach us to love and imitate him. Watch over our children and cause many vocations to the priestly and religious vocations to arise among them. May your prayer obtain for our families the fullness of the gifts of the Holy Spirit as it did for the Apostles gathered in the Upper Room; and may it be impossible for us, as it was for the Apostles, not to go out and proclaim the wonders of God and, particularly, the wonders of the sacrament of marriage to those who do not know them”.*

## Note from the Postulator

Father Paul-Dominique Marcovits , o.p.



### **Father Caffarel invites himself...**

Father Caffarel died twelve years ago. Memories are liable to fade; nevertheless, something that is strong and very much alive remains: his presence. He is here. He is in the light that the Lord gives. He is here by the grace of God; he can wake someone up... It happens fairly often that someone says to the Postulator: “When you asked me to give a testimony on Father Caffarel, I saw in it a sign from him for the difficult time that I am experiencing at present”; as though Father Caffarel wanted to give him courage, light, peace... What are we to understand?

Father Caffarel invites himself... To ask the Church for the canonisation of Father Caffarel (of which beatification is the first stage) indicates, first of all, that there is a living, deep and essential dialogue between him and us. This dialogue was not initiated by us, but by him. It is he who invites himself to resume our conversation and to redirect our life towards God alone. Although he is living now in the presence of God, in the splendour of his love, Father Caffarel still wants to do the will of God, do good on earth, especially among those that the Lord entrusted to him for a time during his life on earth and forever in heaven.

Father Caffarel invites himself also as he comes to people who have not known him... Couples and many individuals find strength and encouragement in his writings. What is more: they discover his presence. He invites himself everywhere. Try it out for yourself: read aloud such or such a page of his writings: the lucidity of his thoughts, the relevance of



his illustrations, the warmth of his words... it all rings a bell with us... he speaks to us. Spiritual energy and dynamism comes from his words.

Many ask the Postulator: “Is the Cause of his Canonisation progressing?” Everyone works at it as required. Everyone... A cause is carried forward by the living dialogue between the Servant of God and the faithful. This dialogue is not imposed; it is an ‘invitation’. Father Caffarel wants to lead us to Christ who fills his life totally and we, for our part, want to ask for his help. The aim of the Cause is that the Lord be glorified in us.

## State of progress of the Cause

Marie-Christine Genillon,  
Vice-Postulator



Here is, briefly, some news of the work done to date by the various people who are working to further the Cause of Canonisation of Father Caffarel.

The Postulator and the Vice-Postulator have met 19 new witnesses and have received 5 new folders and several written testimonies.

The work of evaluating and listing various documents, carried out by Bernadette Chovelon and Sister Anicette, has well progressed. A meeting of the Vice-Postulator, Marie-Christine Genillon, has taken place with the members of the historical commission to which all documentation so far gathered has been presented. A third member has been appointed to this commission to conform to the new directives of the Congregation for the Causes of Saints.

The publication “The Upper Room” and a certain number of writings and brochures have been listed and numbered by Mgr François Fleischmann. Theologians have therefore continued to receive CDs or printed versions of all these documents. All conferences and talks, indexed following the various evaluations, are to be assembled into a single folder and thereafter similarly listed and numbered.

The members of the Diocesan Commission have interviewed 27 witnesses in Paris or in the provinces, between June 2007 and June 2008, to obtain answers from them to the official questionnaire on Virtues.

Furthermore, Mgr François Fleischmann and the Postulator, Father Paul-Dominique Marcovits, have been asked by Sector Couples on several occasions to give talks at Sector Gatherings on Father Caffarel, his spirituality and his message, as well as on the Cause of Canonisation.

## Archives

### Letter on Contemplative Prayer

By Father Caffarel



*This is taken from a letter from Father Caffarel, dated December 1966, included in the third series on “Initiation” from the “Booklets on Contemplative Prayer”*

#### **Listen to Him**

Whereas the Gospels offer us innumerable words of Christ, they only gave us three short sentences from the Father. How precious they should be to us! One of them is a word of advice, the only word of advice from the Father to his children. With what infinite and filial deference must we receive it and with what eagerness must we follow it!

This advice holds the secret to all holiness and is simple and expressed in three words: “Listen to Him” (Mt 17: 5), said the Father pointing to his Beloved Son.

To practise contemplative prayer is therefore the great act of obedience to the Father; it consists in sitting, like Mary Magdeleine, at the feet of Christ and to listen to his word or, better still, to listen to Him who speaks to us. It is indeed to Him, even more than to his words, that we must be attentive.

It follows that, to precede contemplative prayer by reading a page from the Gospel, is very commendable provided one reads it, not as a professor of literature, but as a lover who, through the words of a letter she receives, hears the beating heart of her beloved.

It is a great art to know how to listen. Christ himself warns us about it: “Take care how you listen” (Lk 8: 18). If we are on the edge of the path, or on rock, or in the middle of thorns, his Word will not grow in us. We have to be the good soil in which the seed finds what is necessary to germinate, develop and ripen (Lk 8: 5-8).

Furthermore, to listen is not only a matter of the mind: it is our whole being, body and soul, heart, imagination and mind, memory and will, that must be attentive to the Word of Christ, to be open to it, make room for it, to allow oneself to be besieged, invaded, seized by it, to give it our unreserved adherence.

You understand why I am using the word ‘listen’ rather than ‘meditate’. It has a more evangelical tone and, especially, it indicates, not an isolated activity, but a heart to heart encounter or exchange that is the essence of contemplative prayer.

In reality, without grace no one would know how to listen to Christ, for we are all deaf by birth, sons and daughters of a race of deaf people; but, at our baptism, Christ said the word that, since the cure of the deaf-mute man in the Decapolis territory, has opened the ears of millions of disciples: “Ephphatha”, that is “Be opened” (Mk 7: 34).

When, by contemplative prayer, we open the door to the Word of Christ, it converts us and makes us “pass from death to life” (Jn 5: 24); it resuscitates us; it becomes in us and for us a gushing spring of eternal life.

However, listening to the Word is not sufficient. “Blessed are those who hear the Word of God and keep it”, said Christ (Lk 11: 28). They delight in it, feed on it, take it with them as Mary took the child she had conceived who was the substantial Word of God. Through her, Jesus sanctified those she met, and caused John the Baptist to leap in his mother’s womb. He wants to do the same through us.

There is even more to it than that. It is important that this Word that is listened to and kept, be “put into practice” (James 1: 25). Understand from this that we must be attentive throughout the day to his active

presence in us and be opened to his suggestions and to his formative influence. It is God's dynamism that will cause us to multiply our good deeds and to work, strive, live and die for the coming of the Kingdom of the Father.

If we are faithful, our joy will be great for Jesus said: "*My mother and my brothers are those who hear the Word of God and put it into practice*" (Lk 8: 21)

**Henri Caffarel**

**Henri Caffarel,**  
**In the Church, for the World**

Father Pierre JOLY



*Father Pierre JOLY, Spiritual Counsellor, gives us here, with his usual enthusiasm, a few striking features of this man of God with whom he closely collaborated for ten years.*

Caffarel!...Caffarel!... Thank you!... Caffarel!...

The return train was moving off. Leaning out of windows, pilgrims, full of joy, were cheering Father Caffarel standing on the quay. This was 1959, at the end of the first pilgrimage of Teams to Rome. What an event: 1,000 couples in Rome! A great “First”.

For all that, Father Caffarel did not think of himself as a “star”. He too, indeed, rejoiced over what these 1,000 couples had just experienced; he rejoiced for this initiative of the Movement, for the Church’s recognition of Teams at the highest level, and for what all this meant in the life of the Church. A whole pastoral ministry to the family was developing in a new way to serve the couples of the world.

**Listening to lived experience.**

It all began when Father Caffarel was faced with the reality of couples wanting to really live out their sacrament of marriage. He helped them to understand that it was their personal way to holiness through all the aspects of their life (family, social, job...), as well as their mission in the world.

The following resulted from this research:

- The Movement of Equipes Notre-Dame and the periodical “L’Anneau d’Or” to help others to share its riches.
- A new pastoral ministry through the establishment of Centres for Preparation for Marriage;
- Support for widows in various forms (movements, periodicals);
- The Booklets on Contemplative Prayer, to guide individuals on how to pray;
- Not to mention retreats that were to become numerous and, thanks to which, many Christians will be led to assume responsibilities in the life of the Church and society.

### **In faithfulness to the Church.**

Father Caffarel could have boasted of having achieved a wonderful task, but he was too much aware that he was not doing it on his own account. Obedience does not consist in waiting till you are told what to do; but true faithfulness is expressed in the initiatives one takes after taking advice and having submitted them to the evaluation of competent people. He has always worked closely with other priests, theological counsellors and with the Archbishop of Paris. As a result, he has, over the years, contributed to a remarkable development of the pastoral ministry to the family and to the theology of marriage. Recent remarks by popes bear witness to this.

Far from “clinging” to his achievement, with simplicity and realism, he allowed Teams to pursue their path guided by his successors and allowed the Centres of Preparation for Marriage to operate in the midst of a changing world.

At Troussures (the House of Prayer he retired to and led), he



helped participants to live out what is essential, namely being opened to God who is the source of their whole life as Christians in the world.

### **In the Church for the world.**

Let us acknowledge that all this work benefited, in the first place, the life of the Church and its members and is bearing fruits well beyond the visible confines of the Church.

A whole work of reflection on marriage and the family and their importance in social life is available to whoever is interested in them.

Married couples, engaged couples and widows, whether Christian or not, benefit from the means available to all through the pastoral ministry of parishes. “Seekers of God” can find help to pursue their faith journey by joining the spiritual current to be found in the works of Father Caffarel.

Yes, he has truly worked in the Church for the world.

## **Testimony on Father Caffarel**

Maria and Agustin Fragueiro Ferrer

We are Maria (45) and Agustin (48) Fraguero from Cordoba in Argentina. We belong to Teams since 1991 and it is thus that we discovered Father Caffarel. We did not have the good fortune of knowing him personally but we have read many of his writings, especially those on Prayer. Gradually we learned to understand his message, to respect him and love him as a true spiritual guide.

Our first real encounter with Father Caffarel's message was in 2000 when friends brought us a present: Jean Allemand's book, "Henri Caffarel, a man gripped by God". Through reading its pages, we became closer to this wonderful man who dedicated his life to the service of God and humanity. We became aware of the importance and significance of a real life of prayer.

Prayer has become for us a time of personal encounter with God, during which we gave Him the opportunity to speak to us. Father Caffarel has asked us to spend ten to fifteen minutes a day in silent prayer (one of the Teams' endeavours). He spent two months a year himself with the Lord (in a monastery). In this way, he acquired the necessary strength to carry out his pastoral tasks. He did not only use words but practised his message himself first and then transmitted it.

We discovered that we, lay people, are little inclined to devote time to God in our lives. As a result, we feel frustrated, discouraged and failing in the way we act and live every day.

We wanted to live out these fifteen minutes dedicated daily to God as Father Caffarel had taught us. As a result, we began giving more time to God on a 'one to one' basis.

On the one hand, we felt the need to pass on to other members of Teams our discovery and, on the other hand we did not really know how

to do so. To go deeper into his message, we needed documents written by Father Caffarel translated into Spanish.

We began by searching among people we knew, among friends and acquaintances. We also looked on the Web to find out all that Father Caffarel had written. It is thus that we got hold of a few issues of the revue “L’Anneau d’Or” as well as a few books translated into Spanish that had been published a few decades previously. We also found a copy of “The Body and Prayer” in a bookshop in Chili.

With the help and enthusiasm of a few priests, we organised days of prayer in which couples from Teams participated, as well as a few of our friends.

We became more aware of what prayer means in the life of Christians. We noticed, however, that there is still a lot of ‘noise’ in the life of lay people generally. We spend most of our time looking for happiness and for the happiness of our loved ones, but we try to do it our way. We don’t realise that our happiness lies in discovering that God loves each one of us in a very personal way and has a plan for every individual in this world. If we were able to discover the plan he has established for each one of us, we would then be fully happy and able to make others happy. Prayer is the appropriate and special way of making this discovery.

Thanks to Father Caffarel, we discovered the central message that, if we live in a world of “doing”, it is necessary to stop on our way to renew our strength so as to act more and better. It is imperative for us to “rest” in the arms of our loving Father to find joy and peace. This is what Father Caffarel calls “silent prayer”. We enter into it with recollection, aware of the sweet presence of our Lord. It is a genuine feeling in the depth of our soul to know that LOVE, God present in us, urges us to live out and pass on his message of love in spite of the contradictions of the world. If we find ourselves truly with God, our life changes forever and it becomes impossible for us not to pass it on to others.

The life of prayer is a difficult conquest for human beings, but it is indispensable. We, human beings, must learn to be silent so as to allow “God to speak to each one of us”. We would then be able to live in a totally different world.

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