



Henri Caffarel, prophète pour notre temps
Colloque International – 8 & 9 Décembre 2017

BUILDING ON FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL'S MOMENTUM, THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY IN THE SERVICE OF MARRIAGE

Father Louis de Raynal

"How beautiful you are!" exclaimed the Little Prince in front of the flower as it emerged at sunrise. When faced with the beauty of the things that surround us, we are amazed and captivated. In their fragility, these things contain a mystery to be revealed to us. In his *Cantique de la Rose* (The Canticle of the Rose), the poet Paul Claudel wondered,

*"What is a rose? Oh rose! Yes indeed! When we breath that smell that provides for the gods, will we not arrive at that little unsubstantial heart, that, once we seize it in our fingers, loses its leaves and fades? Ah, I'm telling you, that is just not the rose! It is its smell, breathed in for a second that is eternal!"*¹

A family house is also a marvellous place for smells and contemplation. *"Yes, family, how beautiful you are, you bear within you such a beautiful Mystery!"* From the beginning, a Mystery was present at the heart of marriage, but was difficult to decipher. Unfortunately, there are too many illiterates, Father Caffarel realised, who lack the gaze of faith to discover the divine meaning of the human realities of love, marriage and the family. This gaze asks God, for the person who possesses it, *"conjugal and family life is like a picture Bible where all the images speak of God."*²

In this talk where I want to highlight the dynamic of the Teams of Our Lady based on the momentum given by Father Caffarel, I suggested that we start with a consideration. Indeed, this was the experimental path he took. His bible on marriage was not written while seated at a desk. Although he worked out coherent, profound and luminous thoughts on marriage, he was foremost a practitioner who saw, heard, touched and contemplated a treasure: by meeting with couples, he sensed a deep mystery of life and grace hidden in them. For this first part, therefore, we are going to follow our guide, Henri Caffarel, in order to discover the treasure of the sacrament of marriage.

By combining the data from the conjugal experience with those from Christian Revelation, Father Caffarel reshaped marriage on solid foundations. The second step will be to see how this treasure, or charisma, developed and how it was born and experienced in the Teams of Our Lady Movement over the past fifty years.³ Modestly, I will explain the four ways that the Movement outlined.

Christian marriage is hidden in a field that is the Church's field in the world. Christian couples are not spared ordeals. When human love becomes unstable, how do you change it into a lasting and tasty wine?⁴ In the contemporary context, where so many marriages become unstuck, it is an enormous challenge that

¹ Paul CLAUDEL, *Cantate à trois voix, Œuvre Poétique*, Gallimard, Pléiade, p. 336.

² Henri CAFFAREL, « Le mariage, ce grand sacrement », *L'Anneau d'Or*, n° 111-112, May-August 1963, p. 199.

³ *L'Anneau d'Or* ceased publication in 1967. Father Caffarel retired from the Movement in 1973.

⁴ ... Like the wines of a village in Burgundy that are noted for being "nourishing, theological and preventing illness."



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invites the Church to mobilise all its energy. The audacious voice of the recent popes has shown couples the royal porch through which they ought to pass and allow themselves to be changed.

I- Father Caffarel reshaped the Sacrament of Marriage

- Discovering the Treasure

With couples, Father Caffarel found a treasure and set up a conjugal and family spirituality, in a context where a moral and case-based comprehension of marriage prevailed.⁵ At that time, “*Love is one thing, marriage another*” was commonly heard. In the catholic doctrine, marriage was seen primarily as a “remedy for concupiscence” and as an imperfect Christian way in comparison to the priesthood or religious life.

And so there we are in 1939, when Father Caffarel encountered four young couples, who were radiant with an all-new love. He took the initiative to gather them together to think with them about the sacrament of marriage and married life. Let us listen to Father Caffarel speaking about the beginnings,

*Let us go back up the river to its source, where we find four young couples full of an all-new love. As convinced Christians, they planned to live out their conjugal love in conjunction with their faith. Lacking any precise ideas, a bright intuition filled them with hope and led them to see a priest saying, “This human love that is our treasure and our Joy, God surely had something very beautiful in mind for it. Help us discover that.” Listening to them, I easily realised that their deception would be cruel if I just gave them legal definitions and moral rules. In a similar situation, I had already had the following ironic and disappointed reply, “We talk to you of love and you answer with the family!” But I was scarcely more advanced than my interlocutors. My reply was, “Let us seek together, if you like? Let us set out to discover...”*⁶

One of the first four couples in 1945 had this to say:

*We had understood, together, that we had to set out and seek attentively and passionately (I use that word on purpose) God’s thinking on our marriage. Not about “life in the home,” or education, etc. But indeed, firstly about the source from whence all that came. And that source was our sacrament of marriage in itself. What is it? What does it do/produce in us? What is its inherent grace? And how finally does it give us to God and how does it give God to us?*⁷

The Teams of Our Lady Movement was born! With the central intuition that gave birth to what would be called “conjugal spirituality,” meaning that married people are called to sanctify themselves, not despite marriage, but in and through marriage. It was a genuine revolution in the Church!⁸

In order to better explain conjugal spirituality, Father Caffarel used notions of “mystery” and “mystique.”

⁵ For an introduction to the conjugal and family context in France, on a spiritual and sociological level, cf. Guillaume CUCHET, *La spiritualité conjugale et familiale à la lumière de l’Anneau d’Or (1945-1967)*, Paris, Sorbonne, 1995.

⁶ Henri CAFFAREL, « Vocation et itinéraire des Équipes Notre-Dame », *L’Anneau d’Or*, n° 87-88, May-August 1959, p. 241.

⁷ *Lettre des Équipes Notre-Dame*, n° 20, November-December 1977, p. 3: Testimonial of Pierre & Rozenn de Montjamont, one of the first four couples.

⁸ Jean and Annick ALLEMAND, « Aux sources des Équipes Notre-Dame », *Les Équipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens*, Equipes Notre-Dame, Paris, 1988, p. 11-26.



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“Mystery” is what is hidden in marriage, its source, its model and its aim: the union of Christ and the Church, and the Trinitarian gift. “Mystique” is the spouses’ free and loving response to this gift, thanks to the mediation of the Church. Father Caffarel pointed out, *“Mystery is objective, while mystique is subjective. But both are closely linked inasmuch as the mystique can only be understood in connection with the mystery.”*⁹

- “Mystery”: Marriage as a Trinitarian Gift

Father Caffarel mentioned the example of a couple, Priscilla and Aquila, whom Paul took on as collaborators during his trips.¹⁰ These Christians of great (moral) value were tent-makers and came from the Jewish diaspora. Paul met them in Corinth and then in Ephesus. They were his work mates, but also and above all, friends who helped him in his mission of announcing the Gospel. The Church met in their house.

As he spent time with them, Paul sensed a great and profound mystery. And suddenly, all became clear! When he met spouses, who loved each other with Christ’s love, these spouses managed to pass on to his heart a little bit of the divine charity that unites Christ to the Church.

*When a husband loves his wife like Christ loves the Church, when a wife loves her husband with that tender veneration and loving submission that the Church surrounds her Lord, they achieve something together of the great mystery, they accomplish redemption, they unite in the very love of Christ and the Church. When they give birth to children, when they raise them with the same heart as Christ when he formed his apostles, when they radiate about them the love that they experience, they participate in the immense mission of Christ and the Church, they evangelise and they save the world.*¹¹

Christian marriage is a “great mystery” in the Pauline meaning of the term, a sacrament according to the catholic theological meaning: an efficient sign of grace.¹² Through their conjugal love, the union of a man and woman is the sign, that not only reveals and represents the mystery of the Christ-Church union, but also contains it and radiates it. But let us not be afraid to take the extra step:

*To get to the bottom of things, it is the richness of the love between the Father, Son and Spirit that makes for the richness of the union between Christ and the Church, and by repercussion, that of the Christian couple where the Mystery takes place. Let us not be afraid, in sketching out this Trinitarian theology of the couple, of becoming too abstract; nothing is more concrete, more alive, hotter, than this presence of the Trinity at work in human love.*¹³

- “Mystique”: Marriage as the Spouses’ Love Response

Father Caffarel’s big discovery with the radiant young couples in 1945 was the primacy of love within the

⁹ Henri CAFFAREL, « Mystère et Mystique du mariage », *L’Anneau d’Or*, n° 51-52, May-August 1953, p. 207.

¹⁰ Cf. Act 18 :2, 26; 16:19; Rom 16:23. Charles de Foucauld often mentioned this couple as the example to be followed by evangelisers in an indifferent, even hostile, world. The emeritus Pope Benedict XVI, “*We find in them (Priscilla and Aquila) the model of the Church, God’s family for all times.*” (General Audience, February 7th, 2007).

¹¹ Henri CAFFAREL, « Propos sur l’Amour et la grâce », *L’Anneau d’Or*, n° 69-70, May-August 1956, p. 240.

¹² Cf. Eph 5:21-33. This text can be presented as the charter of marriage!

¹³ Henri CAFFAREL, « Le mariage, ce grand sacrement », *L’Anneau d’Or*, n° 111-112, May-August 1963, p. 212.



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couple. It was when he actually met them that it all became clear to him: this love that bonded them was the image and participation of God's love. In 1961, the 100th issue of *L'Anneau d'Or* was published. Father Caffarel tried to extract, with hindsight, the meaning of the search that they all had undertaken over the past sixteen years.

To say that marriage is a sacrament is to say that Christ transmits his grace to the spouses through marriage, through this gift of love that they give to each other. Christ's love here uses human love, just like elsewhere it uses consecrated water or oil, to express itself and to communicate.¹⁴

Father Caffarel indicated the means by which Christ communicated his grace to spouses, which was also the path by which they would go to him: the spouses' mutual gift of themselves to each other. Through it, Christ gives himself to the spouses and through him the spouses give themselves to Christ. *"Thus, it is by always loving more and more, with body and soul, and by accomplishing the mission of their love that they progress towards holiness."*¹⁵ As Father Caffarel used to like to repeat, *"Marriage means giving oneself to the other person in order to give each other together."*

A small Church cell, enlivened by the gift of the Holy Spirit, the conjugal community allows itself to gradually heal, be purified and transfigured. But it does not wait to be perfect before participating, in its own particular manner, in the Church's mission. Father Caffarel, as a prophet, did not hesitate in presenting the couples' common vocation!¹⁶

II- The Teams of Our Lady's Journey under Father Caffarel's Impetus

Building on this charisma, how did the Teams of Our Lady fare? I suggest four ways that are like many other ways that enabled and enable today the Teams of Our Lady to assimilate the treasure of the sacrament of marriage, to live from it and to bear witness to it in a spirit of fidelity and creativity. I found these ways when consulting the Movement's documents.¹⁷ Here are the four ways and they are not exhaustive: Marriage as an encounter with Christ, Marriage as a mission, Second Wind, Team Life and concrete means.

- Marriage as an Encounter with Christ

1970 was marked by the IV International Gathering of the Teams in Rome and Assisi. This pilgrimage took place at a time when the Teams were troubled by great interrogations, what with the events of May 1968 in France and the *Humanae vitae* encyclical of July 25th, 1968. On May 5th, 1970 in the Basilica of St Paul's

¹⁴ Henri CAFFAREL, « Pèlerinage aux sources de la spiritualité conjugale », *L'Anneau d'Or*, n° 99-100, June 1961, p. 347.

¹⁵ Jean and Annick ALLEMAND, « Aux sources des Équipes Notre-Dame », *Les Équipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens*, p. 15.

¹⁶ Henri CAFFAREL « Le sacerdoce du foyer », *L'Anneau d'Or*, n° 111-112, May-August 1963, p. 225-240.

Well before Vatican II and inspiring it (cf. *Lumen Gentium* n° 11. 34. 41), Father Caffarel introduced the idea of Christ exercising his vocation of love at the heart of the family. The couple and the family participate in a specific manner in the prophetic, priestly and royal mission of Jesus-Christ and his Church. Father Caffarel also anticipated what Saint John Paul II would say in a sublime way in *Familiaris consortio* n° 49-64 concerning the Christian family's triple participation in Christ's mission.

¹⁷ Documents consulted: archival notes, letters to teams, talks and conferences given at the various international gatherings, ideas at gatherings for international Responsible Couples.



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in Rome, Father Caffarel gave a striking talk on the topic, “*The Teams of Our Lady and Atheism.*” According to him, the Teams were at the forefront, spreading the “*Good News about human love.*”

I hope that I have conveyed my conviction to you that a couple of seekers of God, in our world that no longer believes in God, that no longer believes in love, is a theophany, a manifestation of God like that burning, flamboyant and unconsumed bush in the desert was for Moses.¹⁸

For the Teams of Our Lady to become the regenerative Movement that the Church needed, Father Caffarel insisted on instigating new spiritual demands in order to encounter Christ: the Word of God, ten minutes of daily prayer and asceticism. In 1973, when he retired from the Movement, he realised that the Teams had begun to move into a new phase.¹⁹ Following Jesus even closer was the message passed on in 1974 by Louis and Marie d’Amonville.

The world and the Church today need couples who, instead of discussing endlessly the limits of what is allowed and what is not, commit resolutely to following Christ with all his demands, despite their weaknesses that they are very aware of, let us say, even because of their weaknesses, because, precisely, they stake everything on Christ, recalling this phrase, ‘It is impossible for men, but for God everything is possible.’²⁰

Journeying with Christ, personally, as a couple and with the family, experiencing all the graces of the marriage sacrament, learning to love the other person, such was the Team members’ road map. Since the Movement’s beginnings, Christ’s call, “*Come, follow me!*” has never ceased to resonate in spouses’ hearts. The Gospel texts that are used at the great gatherings, encounters and for the study topics are eloquent: The Miraculous Catch of Fish, the calling of the disciples, Cana, the Samaritan Woman, the Prodigal Son, the Good Samaritan, the Last Supper, the Washing of the Feet, Emmaus, etc.

- Marriage as a Mission

“*The good news of the marriage sacrament must be carried to the edges of the world!*” Some of you here will have heard this phrase of Father Caffarel’s from his very mouth, and it continues to resonate in our hearts! In 1970, at the Rome pilgrimage, Father Caffarel finished his talk by challenging the slightly sleepy couples:

Next Spring, at your Team’s end of year Review meeting, all couples will have to answer not this question, “Do we like the Movement?” (The latter is not day-care for adults),²¹ but this one, “Have we decided to commit deeply to the Teams, and, with the help of Teams, to the mission of being God’s witnesses in the midst of this world that the high tide of atheism is threatening to submerge?”²²

¹⁸ Henri CAFFAREL, « Face à l’athéisme », *Les Équipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens*, p. 147.

¹⁹ “*The turning point began with our great pilgrimage to Rome in 1970. I reiterate, it began. A great effort of prayer, reflection and transformation remain to be implemented with a fierce will to discover God’s will for the Movement and its mission, all the while remaining faithful to the grace of its origins and with an understanding of the needs of our times.*” Cf. Henri CAFFAREL, « A Dieu », *Les Equipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens*, p. 163.

²⁰ *La Lettre des Équipes*, November-December 1974.

²¹ Twenty years earlier, Father Caffarel was already talking about, “day-care for good Christians,” *La Lettre mensuelle des Équipes Notre-Dame*, October 1953.

²² Henri CAFFAREL, « Face à l’athéisme », *Les Équipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens*, p. 159.



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On the basis of this momentum, in 1976, at the V International Gathering of the Teams of Our Lady in Rome and Assisi, the Movement realised and recognised more strongly its own vocation in the Church's evangelising mission. Pope Paul VI's speech insisted on the family's evangelising potential as a domestic Church. The speech of Father Tandonnet (Father Caffarel's successor) on the topic of *"Evangelisers in Today's World"* took the same line.

*This evangelising vocation is inscribed in the constitution of your couple by the marriage sacrament. Founded by God himself, your conjugal community is called to announce, in its own particular way, God's fruitful, liberating and transforming love.*²³

In 2002, the Pontifical Council for the Laity recognised the Teams of Our Lady as a private international association of the faithful and underlined the Movement's apostolic impact. In 2012, Brasilia hosted the XI International Gathering, the first one to take place outside Europe. The meditations, inspired every day by the Gospel of the Good Samaritan, are a good illustration of the theme chosen for the Gathering, *"Dare to Live the Gospel."*

Pope Francis' pontificate is a also favourable opportunity to highlight mercy as the Church's essential mission. When he met the Responsible Couples in Rome in September 2015, the Pope invited them to grow in maturity and to fraternally support other couples, especially by testifying to the joy of the gospel. *"In fact, a happy and balanced family, inhabited by the presence of God, speaks in and of itself of God's love for all men."* The influence of love ought to touch young couples before and after marriage, as well as wounded families.²⁴

- A Second Breathe

In 1982, at their VI International Gathering in Rome, the Teams of Our Lady were asked, in the wake of the disciples of Emmaus, to recognise Christ who travelled with them. In 1987, a meeting of European Regional Responsible Couples took place in Chantilly for the 40th anniversary of the Charter.²⁵ Father Caffarel was invited and gave a remarkable speech entitled, *"The Founding Charisma of the Teams of Our Lady."* A year later, Jean and Annick Allemand revisited this speech in a fascinating talk, *"From Yesterday to Tomorrow."*²⁶

For them, the Movement was a living thing, an organism that *"under the impulse of the Holy Spirit and the Church's direction,"* must adapt without denying its heritage. It is the Holy Spirit that led to the birth of the Teams and it also the Spirit that will oversee their growth. Jean and Annick's talk was organised around three points: the luminous points, the chiaroscuro and that which remains in the shadows.

²³ 1976 Pilgrimage to Rome, archives Équipes Notre-Dame.

²⁴ The following can be mentioned as forming part of the Teams of our Lady's missionary initiatives, Tandem teams for young married or unmarried couples; Reliance teams who accompany the divorced faithful; Youth Teams of Our Lady for the 17-30 year olds.

²⁵ Forty symbolically indicates a time for questioning, a time of personal death to be reborn and grow in maturity. IN the Bible, it is the time it takes to make a good disciple according to God's heart.

²⁶ Jean & Annick ALLEMAND, « Aux sources des Équipes Notre-Dame », *Les Équipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens*, p. 174-184. This book gathers together the main documents that marked the Teams' route over the previous 40 years. Father Caffarel, who wrote the introduction, insisted on the providential mission of the Teams of Our Lady, *"Gathering together couples with the daring idea of living uncompromisingly the Christian ideal of love, sexuality and marriage."* He invited them to rediscover the charisma of the beginnings and to adhere to the Magisterium in order to be *"witnesses to a true conjugal love, that integrates and encompasses a sexuality that is both fully Christian and fully human."*



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The founding charisma is presented as eight luminous points:

- 1) Marriage is a work of God and is God's masterpiece.
- 2) Marriage has a soul that is love.
- 3) Men and women cannot be faithful to love without Christ's helps, and this is why he invented the sacrament of marriage.
- 4) Married Christians are called to holiness.
- 5) Conjugal life comprises very great treasures as well as very great demands or requirements.
- 6) It is vital to put together a spirituality that is specifically aimed at couples.
- 7) This cannot be experienced without the help of a movement.
- 8) The movement is rooted within the Church, its nourishing environment. The movement, in the service of its mission, proposes the necessary resources for couples, sanctified by Christ.

Jean and Annick then talked about what the chiaroscuro meant, what gradually started to appear in the lives of the Movement's couples. After the enthusiasm of the early years of Teams, "*a slowing down, wear and tear, the routine*" appeared in the lives of many and even for some "*a breaking point, a failure.*" In order to face the reality of sin that undermined, it was important to wager completely on the dynamism of love and grace. It was also important to remind couples that they needed to walk on both feet, the ones of "*love and abnegation,*" in order to bring about the change from "for me" to "for you." An area remained to be uncovered, that of the human and Christian meaning of sexual life with a view to bringing about the couple's holiness.

Finally, Jean and Annick evoked what emerged faintly from the shadows in terms of new questions. How to welcome and integrate young couples who were far from the Church and how to adapt a pedagogy to accompany them; how to support couples who are married and committed for a long time; a renewed vision of the transmission and education in the faith; old age; unemployment.²⁷

In the same year, the VII International Gathering in Lourdes confirmed that the Teams of Our Lady's mission was to ensure the diffusion of conjugal spirituality, by reminding everyone that the marriage sacrament demanded abnegation and that it was the path of love, happiness and holiness. The document entitled, "Second Breathe" introduced the notions of gradualness and creativity and reaffirmed the keeping of the six Endeavours that were to enable three attitudes: truth, God's will and communion.

- Team Life and Concrete Means

The Charter remained intact as the founding charisma's touchstone and reference point. In 1977, "*What is a Team of Our Lady?*" was published, conceived of as "a practical update" to the Charter that would serve as the concrete criteria in the lives of the Movement's couples, "*For their members, Teams of Our Lady propose a life with a team and concrete means to help them to progress as a couple in the love of God and of their neighbour.*"

²⁷ Father Caffarel's Chantilly speech also raised the question of increased methods of contraception. "*Numerous couples in the Teams of Our Lady use methods of contraception and that worries me enormously (...) In a movement, where there is a serious proportion of people who ignore, who do not want to hear talk of God's law, then this movement risks losing its state of grace (...).*"



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In 1994 in Fatima, Alvaro and Mercedes Gomez-Ferrer, Responsible Couple for the International Leading Team, invited team members to stay on course.

This is the conjugal spirituality proposed by the Movement: recognising God's will for the couple and bringing it to live in our practical lives. This spirituality seeks its strength in our marriage sacrament. It is a question of our identity. This identity does not distance us from others, for by being what we are—a movement of couples united through the marriage sacrament—we can help them better because we have something specific to share. If, under the pretext of being closer to others, we become diluted, and lose our identity, we will have nothing to offer and we will possess nothing.²⁸

Alvaro and Mercedes answered the question, “How do we approach this conjugal spirituality?” with the means proposed by the Movement, namely, the Team meeting in the presence of the Resurrected Lord and the Endeavours. The Lourdes Gathering of 2006 enabled teams to get together under the gaze of the Virgin of Massabielle. This X International Gathering was organised around the theme of “*Teams of Our Lady, living communities of couples, and reflections of Christ's Love.*”²⁹

Today, more than ever, team life and the Endeavours constitute the Movement's DNA. Team members are aware of their limits and their weaknesses. Journeying together with a team helps them to more easily overcome obstacles and progress with energy along the path of holiness. Each team is accompanied by a priest, whose role is to help team members to receive the grace of the marriage sacrament in their daily lives.

In conclusion to this part dedicated to the paths opened by the Teams of Our Lady, let us underline the work of the “Satellite Teams.” These are research teams who propose reflection and action documents to the Movement and to couples.³⁰

III- The Voice of the Popes show couples the royal porch to go through and let themselves be transformed

In rereading the speeches of various Popes to the Teams of Our Lady, I was struck by a common thread that linked them. The allusion to the Pascal Mystery within the couple is recurrent in 1970, 1976, 1982, 1997, 2003 and 2015! What can this mean?

1970 is a key date, a pivotal year for the Movement, that gathered in Rome. Pope Paul VI met 2000 couples, who came from the five continents on May 4th in St Peter's Square. He had asked Father Caffarel beforehand what subject he would like him to speak to them about. Father Caffarel answered asking him to prepare a speech on the human and Christian meaning of sexuality, and the Pope replied, “*The time is not ripe.*” “*We did not regret asking this,*” Father Caffarel said because we have a forty-minute pastoral speech, that seems to be the synthesis of *L'Anneau d'or* and the Teams of Our Lady's research. “*One of the Movement's fundamental texts,*” Jean Allemand claimed.

²⁸ “Vocation du Mouvement aujourd'hui,” file from the 1994 Fatima pilgrimage, archives Equipes Notre-Dame.

²⁹ A gathering marked by the opening of the cause for canonisation of Father Caffarel.

³⁰ Cf. « Un mouvement de couples chrétiens », sur le site internet du Mouvement <http://www.equipes-notre-dame.fr/>



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And so, what is the essence of Paul VI's speech? It is to be found in the third part about marriage as a "vocation for holiness," where the Pope speaks of a progression in love and of the couple's participation in Christ's pascal mystery of death and resurrection!³¹ The mystery of the cross is present in spouses' lives, in one way or another. In order to get through the ordeals and transfigure them, "the sacrament is a permanent source of grace that accompanies spouses' all through their lives." Paul VI insisted on God's tenderness and mercy, "Do not be discouraged!" He called on the Spiritual Counsellors to accompany, form and support the couples. According to Father Caffarel, the Pope expressed himself in this speech as if he had just spent an evening with a couple, who wanted to go through their problems with him and get his advice.

In 1976, Paul VI met the Teams of Our Lady again on pilgrimage to Rome. In a context of opposition, he encouraged all couples to become a "domestic missionary Church" and to help couples who were having problems. The Gospel that illustrated his speech was the Marriage Feast at Cana and it "was meant to have a literal significance."

*Jesus ought to be the guest every time, capable of changing the water of routine and complacency, always to be feared, into the wine of ever rejuvenated love, into a renewed ideal, into a recovered strength to conquer obstacles.*³²

In 1982, at the International Gathering Rome, John Paul II told team members, "Christian marriage is a Passover." He began by describing the crosses that run through the lives of families.

*The cross within the couple, the sacrifice of each person's selfishness, refusals, weaknesses, deceptions that call for forgiveness, ruptures. Crosses that come from the children, their limits, their infirmities, their unfaithfulness. The cross of sterile couples. The cross of those whose fidelity to the alliance arouses mockery, irony or even persecution.*³³

Then, the "Pope of the family" led couples to the sacrament of the Eucharist, the pascal source capable of totally filling their love.

Attending the Eucharist enables spouses to turn their ordeals into a path of communion, to participate in the Lord's sacrifice, a new means of experiencing the Alliance, and beyond the cross, beyond all forms of death that punctuate their existence, to reach happiness: Christian marriage is a Passover.

In 1997, in a call to couples to fully live fidelity, indissolubility and openness to life with "responsible paternity,"³⁴ John Paul II returned to Paul VI's 1970 speech, saying that spouses discovered in their marriage that "it is the pascal mystery of death and resurrection that is accomplished." And he commented, "In the Church, the family community realises that it is a small Church, made up of forgiven sinners, who walk on the path of holiness, thanks to the support of those whom the Lord has gathered in a same home."³⁵

³¹ « Discours de PAUL VI », *Les Équipes Notre-Dame, Essor et mission des couples chrétiens*, p. 130: "Within the big Church, this small church can be recognised for what it is in truth: a weak community, sometimes sinner and penitent, but forgiven and moving towards holiness, in peace!"

³² PAUL VI speech, "To the Pilgrims of the 'Equipes Notre-Dame,'" (in French only), September 22nd, 1976. All the Papal speeches can be found on the Vatican website: <http://w2.vatican.va/>

³³ JEAN-PAUL II speech to Teams of Our Lady members (not in English), September 23rd, 1982.

³⁴ PAUL VI, *Humanæ vitæ* n°10.

³⁵ JEAN-PAUL II, letter to National Responsible Couples of the Teams of Our Lady (not in English), November 27th, 1997.



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In 2003, John Paul II returned to the idea of the complementarity with priests and invited couples to testify ceaselessly and to take care of others, like the youth, fiancés, separated people, divorcees or remarried divorcees. The mission of assistance is essential in the couple and family, and also with all other people to whom the Lord sends us. The Eucharist is the source of Christian marriage. Regular attendance at the Eucharist and confession, but also the Endeavours, enable couples to enter into this new heart, because in their union, he repeated, it is indeed *“the pascal mystery of death and resurrection that is accomplished.”*

Pope Francis hosted a private audience of the Regional Responsible Couples of the Teams of Our Lady in Rome on September 10th, 2015. In today’s difficult and threatening context that leads to a shrivelling of life and love,³⁶ Francis strongly encouraged the Teams of Our Lady in their missionary vocation, in particular by showing joy and he reiterated this the following year in his apostolic exhortation, *Amoris Laetitia*. And a week before his encounter with the Regional Responsible Couples, on September 2nd, 2015, Pope Francis in his weekly general audience, discussed the process that enable Christian families to become what they are.

These same familial bonds, within the experience of the faith and love of God, are transformed, they become “filled” with greater meaning and become capable of going beyond themselves, to create a fatherhood and motherhood, and to welcome as brothers and sisters also those who are in the margins of every bond. (...) When familial affections are allowed to convert to the Gospel witness, they become capable of inconceivable things, which make tangible the works of God, those works which God performs in history, such as those which Jesus did for the men, women and children he encountered.³⁷

“Allowing oneself to be converted to the Gospel” means welcoming the initiative of Jesus, who wants to save the couple and make it missionary. It is an experience of salvation and spouses hold the key to this in their hands. The key is their faith, that enables God transfigure their love. A faith that entails the acceptance of the Holy Spirit present in the conjugal bond, thanks to the initial consecration of the marriage sacrament. A faith that is expressed by listening to the Word of God and praying, including conjugal prayer, *“the key to the treasure of graces of the marriage sacrament.”* A faith that by divine charity’s impetus will enable conjugal love to resurrect and open passages from death to life, from selfishness to charity, from sadness to joy! There is a grace for passage in asking.

There is a common thread in the Popes’ various speeches to the team members, from Pope Paul VI to Pope Francis, and it is that in order to be a community that shines and radiates, couples and the family need to be merciful. The Popes really want couples to reform internally, in order to radiate precisely from the inside. They are the prophets who announce the “conjugal kerygma,” that is the fundamental event of salvation brought about by Christ dead and risen for the forgiveness of sins in anticipation of eternal life. Christ saves the couple! This announcement is accomplished by the couples’ testimonial: *Christ accomplished miracles in our couple that he saved, and he can do the same for you.* It is therefore a question of enabling married couples more immediately glimpse the reality of the Christian experience and help them understand that it is possible as a couple.

³⁶ During his trip to Georgia & Azerbaijan, October 1st, 2016, Pope François noted, *“Today there is a world war to destroy marriage.”*

³⁷ FRANCIS, General Audience, St Peter’s Square, September 2nd, 2015.



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By recently canonising Louis and Zélie Martin, the first canonised non-martyred couple,³⁸ the Church proclaimed the Christ of the marriage sacrament and the benefits of his presence in the couple's ordinary lives. With Him, they fully accomplished their prophetic, priestly and royal vocation. Louis and Zélie did nothing extraordinary, but they lived their life totally given up to God at every instant. Their total confidence is a precious source of inspiration and consolation for Christian couples today.

Prophets of the Joy of the Marriage Sacrament

Since Father Caffarel's death, the grain of wheat fallen on the ground has continued to bear much fruit, encouraging a solid Christian spirituality founded on baptism and marriage sprout in the heart and lives of many team members. Since the spouses were married as baptised people, they deposit their love into Christ's hand, who gives them again to one another, blesses them and gratifies them with a special effusion of his Spirit. Through the gift of the Spirit, Christ consecrates them as witnesses to his own love for the Church. We can talk of marriage as a "*permanent sacrament*" for marriage is not simply a sacrament for the day of the celebration, but is also the sacrament of the whole married life. Christian marriage is a missionary sacrament, that requires the establishment of a communal spiritual life.

How can we help spouses not remain on the threshold, but enable them take ownership of this treasure of conjugal and family spirituality? How can we reconcile harmoniously for them these two loves—their human love and the love of Christ—that they have in their hearts and through which they reach marriage? Following on from Father Caffarel's impetus, the Teams of Our Lady set up and looked at in-depth four access paths: Marriage as an encounter with Christ, Marriage as a mission, Second Breathe, Team Life and Concrete Means. Thanks to the Teams of Our Lady, a revolution is taking place in the Church: attention is paid to couples and no longer simply to the individual, a call to become holy in and through marriage, the beauty and fragility of sexuality are called to be assumed and evangelised, assistance between spouses and mutual aid between couples in the Movement is stressed, the couple's fecundity in the Church and in the world is highlighted.

We know that this revolution has a price: the Pascal Mystery. Jesus clearly said that if the Kingdom is in our midst now, we can only enter it through the cross, only through the cross. The cross reveals Jesus' open Heart and his love that is stronger than death, stronger than our weaknesses and sins. Jesus Christ is there, in the midst of couples, in order to connect with them in their weakness, their failures, their finite nature, and help them to move from their mediocrity to the fullness of love. The power of love is stronger than the evil that threatens them. In this centenary year of the Fatima appearances, the Teams of Our Lady members can dedicate themselves to Mary. The very person who said at Cana "*Do everything he tells you*" invites all those who are united in the marriage sacrament to put the dead and risen Christ at the heart of their love and their life as a couple.

In finishing my talk, I would like to turn with all of you towards Father Caffarel, using a famous metaphor used by Cardinal Marty in Lourdes in 1987.

³⁸ Louis and Zélie Martin were canonised by Pope Francis on October 18th, 2015, during the Bishop's Synod on the family's mission in the Church and in the world.



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Dear Father Caffarel, we do not want to be weeping willows! That's fine for the cemetery! And yet even there, they do not appear to believe in the Resurrection. We want to be those prophets of joy that you sought to raise from Heaven! Yes, dear Father, we, couples and priests together, would like to be prophets of the marriage sacrament! This sacrament that, accepted in faith, transfigures daily life into new wine. Pray for us! The Teams of Our Lady Movement still has so much to say to the Church and to the world!