

THE ENDEAVOURS

"A Team of Our Lady is not just a simple human community: it gathers together 'in Christ's name.' It helps its members progress in their love of God and their neighbour so that they are better able to respond to Christ's call."

In order to allow each person to progress on this path of holiness, *"the Teams of Our Lady do not impose a particular type of spirituality; they simply wish to help couples to commit to the path already mapped out by Christ. For that, they propose life orientations, Endeavours and time with a Team."*

The Endeavours: the Teams of Our Lady suggest using simple methods in order to live as a couple and in a team, in order to give each other strength, courage and support. It means "making the effort" to accomplish six very specific points: listen regularly to the Word of God; turn to God daily in silent prayer, "personal prayer;" pray together daily as a couple, "conjugal prayer" and where appropriate with the children, "family prayer;" make time each month for true dialogue together, the "sitting-down;" choose some specific points of personal effort, the "rule of life;" and go on retreat as a couple once a year.

The Profound Meaning of the Endeavours

The decision to 'live & experience' the Endeavours corresponds to the heart's compliance and it is materialised as an effort of will."

"Be holy, for I, the Lord, your God, am holy," says the Book of Leviticus (19:1). Later, Jesus will say, *"Be perfect, therefore, like your heavenly Father is perfect."* (Mt 5:48) It is the same daring call to be radically faithful to God, to walk in his ways, and respond to his Love. This is the origin of the "Endeavours," which make up a true pedagogy for the happiness and growth of Christian couples' spiritual life. Deepening our understanding of the Endeavours means bringing to light the internal coherence that unites them and gives them meaning. Putting them into practice leads to a true and profound encounter with God, which is the essential condition for our conversion.

Listening to the Word of God

"For the word of God is alive and active. Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart. "

Letter to the Hebrews 4: 12

The Word is one of the signs of God's presence, together with the Christian community and the sacraments. Recognising it as a sign means that in it, we see God, who speaks to us.

Listening regularly to the Word of God allows each Team member to come into contact with Christ' as a person. This personal contact is the pillar of all spiritual life. The creative Word of God is always an endless source of motivation and energy for our personal growth as well as that of our couple. This is why the Teams of Our Lady invite everyone to listen daily to the Word of God, by making time to read a passage from the Bible, in particular the Gospels, and afterwards to reflect on this passage in silence in order to better understand what the Lord has to say to us.

"Actually, it does not mean listening to the Word in a distracted fashion. It means listening, in the strongest sense of the term. It is said that King Solomon addressed God with this prayer, 'Lord, give me a heart that listens!' We listen to the Word of God with the heart."

Listening to the Word of God is a personal listening: it resonates within each one of us depending on our capacity to welcome and accept it. If husband and wife make an effort to listen to the Word of God, the couple will benefit. *"Those who do not keep company with the Word will quickly forget that God loves them. In contrast, couples who read and reread the Gospel with the attention that is given to a love letter where you try and figure out all the subtleties and intonations, will realise that the source of love will spring forth ceaselessly from them. Thus the Word of Christ in the Gospel makes the couple into a community of love..."*

Henri Caffarel, The Golden Ring, n° 117-118

Listening to the Word of God in order to live it demands continuous and perseverant effort, which ought to help the Teams of Our Lady couples, like every Christian couple, to put the Gospel in to practice in their daily lives, their personal lives, their lives as a couple and in the family. Indeed, the effort required is not just to listen to the Word of God, because we do that with rather easily. The effort is to remain assiduous, faithful and perseverant. This listening is essential for our personal and conjugal growth, because it acts by transforming our heart, by converting us. Spiritual conjugality, a charisma of the Teams of Our Lady, becomes a reality for us, couples, if we listen to the Word of God as a couple, as a source of life and renewal of our marriage sacrament. The Word of God is a mirror where Christian couples can discover their real image, vocation and mission.

Private Prayer

"But when you pray, go into your room, close the door and pray to your Father, who is unseen. Then your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you."

Matthew 6:6

In the Teams of Our Lady, *"...we are called to give time to the Lord for a heart-to-heart with Him and to live within His presence." "Private prayer is a 'time of discovery and acceptance of God's project for us.'"*

The idea is to experience what the Mother of God did when she *"treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart."* (Lk 2:19)

The Charter of the Teams of Our Lady provides the following description of private prayer, *"a daily meeting with the Lord, in silent prayer."* This simple and profound formulation synthesises the long pathway of the Movement, which understood that it was necessary for couples to become *"souls of prayer,"* as Father Caffarel describes it in one of his letters. We are called to give of our time to the Lord, for a personal conversation with Him, who *"is in us, at the heart of our being. Present, alive and active. There He calls us. There He waits for us to unite ourselves with Him. God is there, but we are not. Our existence happens outside of ourselves, or at least on the outskirts of our being, in the sensational, emotional, imaginative, discursive zones... Private prayer means leaving the tumultuous suburb of our being, that I spoke of, and collecting ourselves, gathering all our faculties and diving into the arid night towards the depths of our soul. There, on the doorstep of the sanctuary, all that is necessary is to be quiet and attentive."*

Father Henri Caffarel, "La Maison du Seigneur," *Cent Lettres sur la Prière*, 2000

At the International Gathering in Rome (1970), couples were asked to give *'a modest minimum of ten minutes'* a day to private prayer. In the Monthly Letter to the Teams of Our Lady, in France, in November 1952, Father Caffarel maintained, *"After twenty years of ministry, I believe I can safely say, 'A Christian who does not dedicate ten or fifteen minutes of his time (1/96th of his day) every day to private prayer that we call interior prayer will always remain infantile or worse still, he will regress.'"*

By seeing ourselves as if through God's loving gaze, we can discover and welcome God's project for us and our life. We give thanks for the marvels He has accomplished in us. We discover also the points where we need conversion, which we need to improve.

Conjugal Prayer and Family Prayer

"...Tobias got up from the bed and said to his wife, 'Get up, dear. Let's pray for the Lord to be merciful and to protect us.' Sarah got up so that they could pray together and ask God for his protection."

Tobit 8,5

Conjugal prayer is important in order to help couples grow and they thereby confide in the Lord the most important questions touching on their life and love.

Family prayer strengthens family links and their relationship with the Lord. It is the first place of learning for children and it is up to the parents to make sure that their children are awakened to the faith. This type of prayer contributes to the parents' conjugal spirituality. Indeed, conjugal prayer is a high moment of celebration for every couple. The couple kneels in God's presence and adores, praises and listen to Him as well as asking Him for the grace to live out their sacrament of marriage and human love as a reflection of His love. Conjugal prayer reinforces the link of love between husband and wife, between both of them and the Lord. Each of them maintains and develops their personal relationship with God. However, as the couple progresses in their conjugal prayer, it structures their way of praying as a couple.

Without prayer, we can do nothing. Without prayer, we cannot make progress in the knowledge or love of God. It is not an additional devotion. It is as essential as eating and breathing. Just like it is essential for a tree's roots to dig deeper into the earth to avoid drying out and dying. Human relationships are fragile. The relationship with Christ too is fragile. Just as it is necessary to talk and meet others, a father, a friend, a brother, it equally necessary to do the same with the Lord. Otherwise, the relationship dies off... Prayer is not just for specialists. All Christians ought to experience this relationship with God, this heart-to-heart, all through their life. We are not able to do this by ourselves. The practice of prayer is a work of God, a gift from God. But it is also the work of mankind. Man ought to collaborate with perseverance. It is a science, which necessarily has laws and techniques. It is an art, like painting or playing the piano. And like in all arts, we cannot just decide to only learn the theory, we also must learning how to apply it."

Father Henri Caffarel at Troussures

The Sitting-Down

"Suppose one of you wants to build a tower. Won't you first sit down and estimate the cost to see if you have enough money to complete it?"

Luke 14:28

The monthly Sitting-Down is Father Caffarel's great pedagogical intuition to help the vitality of Christian couples. Back in 1945, Father Caffarel had already been involved for a couple of years with groups of couples that would later become the Teams of Our Lady. He realised that husbands and wives found it difficult to communicate, especially about spiritual matters. How could this kind of communication so essential for couples be stimulated? One day when reading Saint Luke, he had a brainwave and wrote this note, entitled "A Little Known Duty."

"A 'blinding of the soul' exists that is fatal for love. We look at each other, but no longer see the exterior beauty that had conquered our heart. Love fades like a flame that has burnt all the oil in the lamp, because in fact, love is nourished on beauty. In order to revive love, it would be enough to rediscover the light of that face and the impressive goodness of that heart."

The Sitting-Down is a conversation in God's presence and is essential for the good health of every couple. It means looking at and listening to the spouse with God's gaze of love, a new gaze without prejudice, a look that allows us to look at each other just as we are and accept each other as different. The Sitting-Down gives couples in the Teams of Our Lady the opportunity to stop and evaluate their personal, conjugal and family progression. It is a very special moment that is marked by the mysterious presence of a third person, Jesus. Jesus was the very one who promised that He would be there every time two or three people are gathered in His name.

The Sitting-Down contributes to strengthening love, to helping the spouses grow, to elevating and stimulating them in their love of Christ. It also helps to orientate conjugal life. It is the fulfilment of the virtue of hope in the couple's life, because the couple grows in love and unity. The habit of the monthly Sitting-Down helps couples consolidate their marriage. It enables the youth and dynamism of love to be preserved, despite the couples' age and the amount of years they are married.

*"In Luke's Gospel, chapter 14, Christ invites his audience to do a Sitting-Down. Today, in a century of vertiginous speed, it is more suitable than ever to recommend and encourage this **little known duty**... Before undertaking the consolidation of your couple, you compared your points of view, weighed up your material and spiritual means and imagined projects together. But now that you are together, do you not find that you have forgotten to sit down and examine together the task you have accomplished, to find again the glimmering ideal, to consult the Project Manager? I know all the objections and*

difficulties facing you, but I also know that one day the house will collapse if the framework is not monitored."

Father Henri Caffarel

The Rule of Life

"Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labour in the Lord is not in vain."

1 Corinthians 15:58

There is a word that often appears in Father Caffarel's writings and speeches and it is **"demanding."** In many texts, he reminds us of his intimate conviction of God's love for man. Man is called to respond to Him with an equally demanding love. Christian life is demanding. It means going through the Cross. The Rule of Life is a concrete application of the general demand of asceticism inherent in Christian life. When talking to couples, Father Caffarel encouraged them thus, *"There is no such thing as a Christian life without it being demanding. For yourself and the couple you form, be demanding in your love and in your mission. You will never be disappointed."* Thus, we read in the Charter, *"Without a Rule of Life, the spouses' religious life may easily be governed by the whim of the moment and become chaotic. This rule of life... consists in nothing else than determining the efforts that one intends to impose on oneself in order to respond better to the will of God. It is not a question of multiplying one's obligations, but defining them in order to strengthen the will and avoid drifting."*

The notion of the Rule of Life has varied over the years. Today, we can say that it aims to help us structure our spiritual life as a couple so that we progress simultaneously on the spiritual and human levels. Indeed, the ideal for a Team member is to follow the path of truth that Christ taught us in the Gospel. It therefore means that each spouse **regularly takes on a resolution that obliges them either to develop a gift, or correct a fault so that in either case, they give more love to others**, just like Christ did. The Rule of Life indeed must not be understood to mean a moral rule. It is something else completely: we are invited to go deep into ourselves to realise what exactly is stopping us from living according to the Gospel. The Rule of Life is therefore "a set of concrete actions that set our daily lives on the path of love." Like the other Endeavours, the Rule of Life participates in the spiritual and human growth and progression that every couple aspires to. The value of the Rule of Life ought not to be underestimated. It opens up personal horizons that can enable each of us "to take a step forward" in order to respond to God's love and calling. We must not forget that the joy in the heavens is great when someone takes a small step in the right direction. Thus, far from being a "small" Endeavour that is limited and marginal, the Rule of Life directly questions our freedom "to love more."

The Annual Retreat

"...He said to them, 'Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place and get some rest.'"

Mark 6:31

The Teams of Our Lady's Charter asks couples to take time with the Lord and *"make a residential retreat every year of at least 48 hours, husband and wife together."*

The retreat is a time to stop, listen, pray and renew your spiritual life. It is a special time where you are able to reflect on your life, under the Lord's gaze. It is also a sort of 'general revision' of how our spiritual life is progressing. The success of our life as a couple depends largely on the quality of our encounters. If we do not meet up with each other, how can we know and love each other? Praying, doing a retreat together as a couple means accepting to be touched by God, who offers Himself to us. It is also about learning to meet the other person in a love that holds back nothing for itself.

For couples, the benefits of a retreat come from the two encounters that in fact are but one: with each other and both with God. The conversion operated by the retreat in each of us allows for a better understanding of God's desire for our life: more prayer, more respect for our spouse and for our children, a greater trust in God, a greater clarity in our commitments and services to others... The retreat produces a renewal of our life.

"I have spent more than 20 years preaching retreats to couples. And every time, these men and women, who are almost all anaemic when they enter this 'clinic' (house of retreat), for this 'counselling' (as the Protestants call it), which is in fact a retreat, acquire a new spiritual vitality by the time they leave. One or two years later, they are in need of another retreat because many will have let the anaemia gain on them. And once more they will experience the extraordinary effectiveness of such days passed with God.

So what is the secret of this effectiveness? Silence, daily mass, prayer... all these reasons no doubt. But the primary reason, the most decisive one, lies elsewhere. The faith of these men and women was weakened, sick, still, exhausted, moribund: with the breathe of the Word of God, it awoke, asserted itself and became alive. This is because the relationship between faith and the Word of God is close: only the Word of God has the power to bring forth and nourish faith, this faith that is the knowledge of God, of his inner life and his project for the world. Faith withers in those who do not open themselves up to the Word of God and who do not keep it. By the Word of God, I mean the inspired Books, and every word and every text that presents the Revelation contained in those Books. (...) On the other hand, the person who nourishes their faith, who seeks out the knowledge of God, (...) that person is protected from spiritual anaemia."

Father Henri Caffarel, Monthly Letter to the Teams of Our Lady, February 1960.

Sharing with the Team

The habit of looking for God's will by putting into practice the Endeavours during the month is completed during the moment entitled **Sharing with the Team** by the seeking, exchange, discernment and brotherly requirements of the whole team. Mutual help and demands can only emerge from a conduct of love.

Sharing is the moment in the Team meeting when, via the Endeavours, the Team members share the progress, changes and difficulties in their spiritual life, by questioning and stimulating each other. It is the moment of mutual undertaking of what each person possesses in their inner beings, of what each couple has that is most personal, namely their spiritual project in response to God's call and project for them. This is the moment when each Team member brings the most to the others and therefore it is often considered to be the most important moment of the meeting...