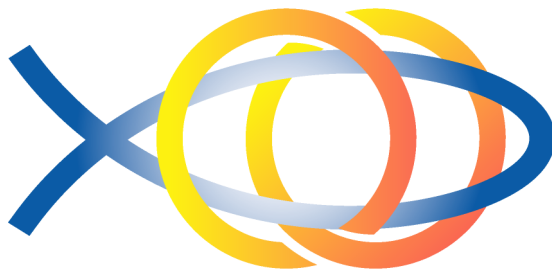


On The Road To Emmaus



Teams of Our Lady

Study Topic 2024-2025
ERI, APRIL 2024



Presentation

Dear Teams of Our Lady Family:

By the time this study theme reaches your hands and you start reading it during the year that will begin in some countries in September, our movement's XIIIth International Meeting will already have come to an end and the transfer of responsibility for the ERI International Leading Team and the International Leading Couple will have taken place, with our successors, our dear friends Mercedes Gómez-Ferrer and Alberto Pérez Bueno.

Preparing a study theme in the transition from two international leadership teams is a complex task, because as we begin to write the theme, the new life orientations that were communicated to the movement at the end of the Turin gathering have not yet been established, and the new international leadership team has not yet been formed, making it necessary for the theme to be developed under the responsibility of the outgoing ERI.

In regards to the development of this study theme, we have to tell you that, although it was a work supported by the whole ERI, which took part in its iterative revisions, the direction of its coordination was assured by Mercedes and Alberto with the help of the editorial team; editorial entrusted, on this occasion, to the RR Liban, and in particular to Georgina and Youssef Elias BOUTROS who were the liaisons between the editorial team and the ERI, in this challenge.. We would like to express our gratitude for the work they accomplished in such difficult circumstances.

We must pause here to share with you, as a family, the great difficulties we have encountered in bringing this theme to fruition, which has unfortunately been affected and slowed down by the death of Father Joseph Abdul Sater O.A.M., who headed the writing team and was able to participate in the drafting of the theme's introduction and the working drafts of the first chapters. We wish to express to Father Abdul, in the communion of souls, our feelings of affection and sorrow for his premature departure, certain that, from all eternity, he will continue to intercede and accompany the Team, and especially the RR Liban, on the path he helped to build with such love and dedication.



As with the 2018-2019 study theme, entitled "Reconciliation, Sign of Love", which echoed what was experienced at the Fatima International Meeting, which had this same motto, this ERI decided to conceive the 2024-2025 study theme, which bears the title, "On the Road to Emmaus", also as an extension and echo of what was experienced at the Turin International Meeting. Against the backdrop of the passage of the Emmaus disciples, we had an experience of encounter and reflection on the profound meaning of the Eucharist as the center and summit of Christian life.

From the very beginning of his public life, Jesus was concerned with creating a sense of community among those who accepted his teachings, and to create a spirit of communion with all those who decided to follow him unconditionally. In the story of the Disciples of Emmaus, Cleopas and his traveling companion represent, in a way, the life of my wife and I, who, with our hearts on fire, experience an encounter with another heart, full of mercy, willing to melt into that of these bewildered disciples. It is the heart of the risen Jesus Christ himself.

The "burning" hearts of the Emmaus disciples are transformed by their encounter with the risen Jesus Christ. At first, these "embers" have a sense of worry, concern, and alarm but similar to the solitary traveler who wanted to join the path of these disciples, our own path continues, and his real presence is revealed; they are transformed into ardor, hope, and inner fire. An uncontrollable emotion urges us not to lose communion with the community of disciples, but on the contrary to foster it by announcing that Jesus Christ is the conqueror of death, and that all our hopes and desires have and acquire their full meaning. For, as the apostle Paul says, "if Christ is not risen, our preaching is empty, and your faith is empty" 1 Corinthians 15:14.

For those of us who took part in the recent international meeting in Turin, and for those who accompanied us with their prayers from home, reading this theme will enable us to live in an incarnate way the experience of encounter that gives meaning to our faith, without escaping the pain of hearts wounded by harsh realities, in the midst of the joys that also accompany our lives, and which can be healed by acquiring another reading, provided we connect with the sacred presence of the Risen One.



At the end of the book, counting on the "complicity" and effort of the SRs who had to postpone the final edition of the study theme until after the meeting, we wanted to include the texts of the beautiful and profound daily reflections that Professor Marina Marcolini made at the start of each day of the Turin international meeting. We're sure they'll be a valuable complement to the theme, and a gift to help awaken and nourish the inner fire sparked by this experience of encounter and recognition.

As in the message and sending forth of the Turin meeting, we hope that, in the communion of your spouses, your couples, your team and the whole movement, the reading of this theme and its interiorization will enable your hearts to burn with the same love for the one who is the ultimate expression of love, Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Let us ask our heavenly Mother, as an example and guide to bring us closer to her Son, to accompany and enlighten us in this new stage of the journey we are about to embark on during this year 2024-2025. Your brothers and sisters in Christ,

*Clarita and Edgardo Bernal
Couple Responsible International 2018-2024*



Introduction

Dear Teams of Our Lady Members,

It is with deep joy that I invite you today to explore together the particularly inspiring theme of the Emmaus disciples. This biblical account from the New Testament (Luke 24:13-35) offers us a rich perspective on the transformative encounter with the Risen Christ that turns our lives upside down, and an invaluable source of reflection and teachings that resonate powerfully with the spiritual and marital aspirations that animate our journey within Teams of Our Lady.

As we reflect on this theme, we are called to meditate on the significance of this encounter on the road to Emmaus, and to explore the parallels between the journey of the Emmaus disciples and our own journey within Teams of Our Lady.

How did the disciples on the road to Emmaus recognize the Risen Christ in the sharing of the Word and the breaking of bread? How can we, like these disciples, open our hearts to Christ's presence in our lives, and in our conjugal relationships in particular? How can we recognize Christ in our moments of doubt and confusion? How can we recognize His presence in our sharing, our prayers and our moments of communion within our teams and our couples? How can we let ourselves be guided by the light of faith, even when darkness and torment threaten to envelop and suffocate us?

This encounter between the disciples and the Risen Christ invites us to reflect on how we perceive the presence of the divine in our lives and our conjugal relationships.

Together, let's delve into the depths of this biblical story and be inspired by the way the Emmaus disciples experienced the transforming encounter with Christ, the true companion on our journey through life.

The disciples of Emmaus, no doubt scarred by the crucifixion of Jesus and plunged into confusion, embark on a journey that will become one of the most edifying stories in the Gospel. They are accompanied, unknowingly, by the risen Christ himself. This journey symbolizes our own spiritual journey, often strewn with uncertainties, doubts and questions.

Although their story dates back to antiquity, it has an astonishingly topical resonance for our lives and our couples. Their journey, imbued with a profound quest for meaning and strewn with questions and fears, represents a powerful metaphor for our own spiritual journey.

In Teams of Our Lady, we are fellow travelers, pilgrims on the path of faith and love, seeking to Wrecognize the presence of the Risen Christ in our lives and relationships.

The disciples of Emmaus teach us that, even in moments when we might feel lost or discouraged, the presence of the Risen Christ remains constant and transforms our lives.

At the heart of our approach within the Teams of Our Lady lies the desire to strengthen our bonds with Christ and with our spouses, to journey together towards a deeper understanding of our faith and greater communion with Christ and with each other, thus strengthening the sacred mission that is ours.



This reflection on the disciples of Emmaus inspires us to welcome the Risen Christ into our daily lives, and to share His light with our spouses in our Teams. It teaches us to walk with confidence along the path traced by the Risen Christ, our guide and faithful companion.

May the Risen Christ accompany us on this spiritual journey, illuminating our path and strengthening our fraternal ties within Teams of Our Lady, so that through a better understanding of the essential role faith plays in our married and family life, we make our meetings, sharing and prayers moments that transform our lives, awaken our hearts and renew our commitment to the values that animate Teams of Our Lady and strengthen the foundations of our families.

May we, like the disciples of Emmaus wandering along life's path of disillusionment, doubt and confusion, witness this extraordinary encounter that transforms our confusion into an experience of profound intimacy with the Risen Christ, and feel the warmth of His presence in our common walk.

Finally, we pray to the Lord that our membership of the Teams family, while imitating the disciples of Emmaus in particular this year, will guide us towards the Ultimate goal of our journey together, culminating in a collective transformation into a "Church on the move", a Church that puts consecrated and lay people front and center, at the heart of the action, and that responds to Pope Francis' call to all Christians to move towards a new missionary impulse to identify new existential peripheries with a view to evangelization.

Prof. Joseph Abdul Sater



CHAPTERS AND OBJECTIVES

Chapter 1 (Luke 24:13-14)

Title: Broken Hearts

Objective: In this first chapter, we'll explore the meaning of disappointment on our journey of faith as Christians, explore the passage to hope and realize the importance of journeying together as a support.

Chapter 2 (Luke 24:15-16)

Title : At The Heart of History

Objective: In this chapter we discover a God who does not dwell in heaven, a God who became flesh, who takes our paths, who enters our history without imposing himself, but delicately reveals to us his loving face, his Fatherly face.

Chapter 3 (Luke 24:17-19)

Title : Hearts Challenged

Objective: In this chapter, we discover the tenderness of a God who stoops to challenge us and is passionate about listening to us. Our experiences of defeat, suffering...are so precious to Him that He is ready to empty Himself to receive them, contain them and transform them into experiences of life.

Chapter 4 (Luke 24, 19-24)

Title: Hearts in Confusion/Uncertain

Objective: In this chapter we explore uncertainty and confusion in our faith journey, in prayer, in our relationship with God, and discover a path of openness to his mysterious presence at the heart of our lives.



Chapter 5 (Luke 24:25-27)

Title: Hearts Open To The Word of God

Objective: In this chapter we discover a God who reveals Himself through the Scriptures. We are encouraged to engage in listening to His word, which helps us to know Him in His truth and essence, which is Love.

Chapter 6 (Luke 24:28-29)

Title : Flaming Hearts

Objective: In this chapter we journey together to encounter a God who awaits our invitation to enter and remain with us, during the night, in an incomparable intimacy.

Chapter 7 (Luke 24:30-31)

Title : Welcoming the Broken Bread

Objective: In this chapter, we discover that the pinnacle of our individual and couple spiritual journey is in the encounter with God and union with him in the mystery of the Eucharist.

Chapter 8 (Luke 24:32-35)

Title : At The Heart Of Our Teams, At The Heart Of The Church

Objective: In this chapter, we discover the joy of journeying together in our teams, as disciples, and seeing ourselves transformed into missionaries of Love at the heart of our Church.



WORD OF GOD

Lk 24:13-35

"That same day (i.e. the first day of the week), two disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus, two hours' walk from Jerusalem, and they were talking among themselves about all that had happened. While they were talking and asking questions, Jesus himself came up and walked with them. But their eyes were unable to recognize him. Jesus said to them, "What are you discussing as you walk along?" Then they stopped, all sad.

One of them, named Cleopas, replied, "You are the only foreigner living in Jerusalem who is unaware of the events of these days." He said to them, "What events?" They replied, "What happened to Jesus of Nazareth, the man who was a prophet powerful in deed and word before God and all the people: how the chief priests and our leaders handed him over, had him condemned to death and crucified him. We hoped that it was he who was going to deliver Israel (despite 3 years of teaching, they understood nothing: the presence of the Lord must transform, must leave traces). But with all that, it's already the third day since it happened. To tell the truth, some of the women in our group filled us with amazement.

When they went to the tomb at dawn, they didn't find his body; they came to tell us that they'd even had a vision: angels, who said he was alive. Some of our companions went to the tomb, and found things just as the women had said; but they did not see him." Then he said to them, "You foolish men! How slow is your heart to believe all that the prophets have said! Was it not necessary for Christ to suffer this in order to enter into his glory?" And, starting from Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them, in the whole of Scripture, what concerned him. As they approached the village they were going to, Jesus pretended to go further. But they tried to hold him back: "Stay with us, for it's getting close to evening and the day is already drawing to a close." So he went in to stay with them.

When he was at the table with them, he took the bread, pronounced the blessing, broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he vanished from their sight. They said to each other, "Were not our hearts burning within us, as he spoke to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" Immediately they got up and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven Apostles and their companions gathered together, who told them, "The Lord is truly risen: he has appeared to Simon Peter." In turn, they told what had happened on the road, and how the Lord had been recognized by them in the breaking of bread."



Chapter One:

BROKEN HEARTS

In this first chapter, we'll explore the meaning of disappointment on our journey of faith as Christians, explore the passage to hope and realize the importance of journeying together as couples to support each other.

"That same day, two disciples were on their way to a village called Emmaus, two hours' walk from Jerusalem, and they were talking among themselves about all that had happened." Luke 24:13-14. We are in the presence of two disciples walking together on the same path. We know that one of them is called Cleopas, but the other has no name. So it could be any one of us. To experience all the spiritual riches of these two verses from Luke, we invite you to follow the same path with these two disciples. Let's begin by briefly reminding ourselves of the context of this Gospel passage:

In the previous chapter, we have the trial of Jesus, his condemnation by Pilate, then the Passion, death and burial. Chapter 24 concludes Luke's Gospel, and opens the Book of Acts. This same chapter begins by stating that "on the first day of the week, at dawn, the women went to the tomb, carrying the spices they had prepared. They found the stone rolled to the side of the tomb. They entered, but did not find the body of the Lord Jesus."

You notice everything that points to death, to the end of a story. Nothing left to hope for. Next, the meeting of the women (Mary of Magdala, Joanna and Mary mother of James) with the two angels. According to Jewish tradition, they had to go to the tomb to heal a dead body they had seen with their own eyes on the cross. Little did they expect the question: *"Why do you seek the Living among the dead? He's not here, but He's risen..."*

They told the Apostles what they had seen and heard (or, more accurately, what they had not seen). But their words seemed like a delirium, an illusion. Nobody believed them. Peter himself went to the tomb, saw the linen cloths alone, and the empty tomb, but returned home amazed at what had happened.



So now we propose to stop, slow down the pace of our daily lives, and take some time with these two disciples. The road to Emmaus is first and foremost a geographical one, although it is difficult to say where the ancient village of Emmaus is located. But it is also, and above all, a spiritual journey for each and every one of us. Since our Lord's resurrection, all our paths in life can become roads to Emmaus, where the Risen Lord wants to meet us. Let's walk alongside the disciples of Emmaus, keeping these two pilgrims company on their journey, which becomes our own in faith. Let's try to make ourselves present to the event and make the place our own. Let's take the road from Jerusalem to Emmaus. Let's join these disciples in their thoughts and even their emotions.

What does this first day of the week mean to us? It is the 8th day, the day of the Resurrection. We are fully in a new time that breaks with all that has gone before. A new beginning, a new story, a new life.

Who are these two disciples? They were not newcomers. They had been following the Lord for a long time. For months, they had seen his miracles, heard his words and finally believed in him. They were among the Eleven when the women came to report what they had experienced. They heard them. But for them, it's all over now. They're going back to their old lives. Sad, discouraged and resigned, they had left the community of disciples. It was hard for them to understand, to believe, to hope again. It was easier to turn back and get as far away from Jerusalem as possible. They were even prepared to walk against their deepest desires.

What does Jerusalem mean to them? It's the city of God's presence, the place of the Temple containing "*The Holy of Holies*," but also Jerusalem is the center of power and success. What kind of God did they expect in this city? What were their expectations, their dreams? A victorious God, dominating through the exercise of his power. A liberating God who comes to deliver his people from Roman rule and give them back their freedom. They did not expect such a humiliating death. What a disappointment! What a defeat! What a disgrace!



What About Us Today?

Like these two disciples, we sometimes drift away from Christ. Even if we still claim to be believers, we cut our ties with faith and hope. For us, Jesus remains in the tomb. We become lukewarm. Our fervor, enthusiasm and passion are a distant memory.

If we examine our own conception of God, to our surprise, we may discover that we have constructed false images of this God:

- Some count on an Almighty God. Such a power that reduces him to an interventionist God who must spend his time short-circuiting the events that weave our history to make life joyful and easy for us. A God who protects us from all kinds of suffering.
- Others rebel against the image of a Spectator God, who abandons human beings to their fate, so slow to respond to the cries of his people to curb the power of evil. A God who is silent in the face of suffering, even profoundly absent.
- Others may look for a magician God who responds to his children's desires because he is a Good God, so affectionate and loving.
- Alternatively, some fear the image of a God who pursues us to evaluate our actions or even our thoughts, and subsequently capable of afflicting us with chastisements.

All these false images, and many more besides, are preconceived in our minds, the fruit of each person's personal history. They can prevent us from meeting the Lord and asking Him for the grace to reveal His true Face to us. It is only in the intimacy of a personal encounter that our God will show us His Face and His way of acting in our lives. If Christ hadn't come to meet the disciples himself, they would probably have gone on their way and disappeared into anonymity. But Christ, his heart burning with love, approached them, and this personal encounter with Him changed their lives. The great Jesuit theologian François Varillon wrote: *"God is not all-powerful, His Love is. We will discover His Love through all the wounds we cause Him and which He never ceases to forgive."*



What About Our Lives As Couples?

At some point in our lives, we started out as a couple with a preconceived idea of what our life together could be like. We had expectations, aspirations, dreams... And then, at some point, we come to a halt in the face of unexpected events, often unwanted, experiences of failure, difficulties in our relationships, even with our children, losses, bereavements, disappointments even in the relationship. The other person no longer lives up to my expectations, this event or that reality is far from what I wanted. This can surprise us at any point in our lives together. Moments of free-fall, painful times. One of us, or sometimes both of us, finds ourselves weak, fragile, discouraged, hopeless. The horizon no longer shines. We want to let go, give in, give up and sink into the death of a love that once united us. It's a time of crisis and defeat. Sometimes we can even throw stones at each other, saying *"it's his or her fault," "this isn't the life I wanted."*

There are many challenges that can undermine our identity as a couple (the image I've built up of the other person and of our life together as a couple that must meet my own needs, the image of the spouse-hero, the spouse-perfect, the image of a perfect life...).

Some experiences can also shake us up spiritually. And we question our vision of God and our mission. We're no longer sure of our vocation, of the call we received when we consecrated ourselves in the sacrament of marriage.

In our *"Jerusalem,"* in certain situations in our lives, we are tempted to crucify God, to eliminate him from our lives, from our cities, from our important decisions. We only think of him in times of great disaster, or to furnish our family celebrations. This is the drama that has just been revealed on the road to Emmaus. It is also what the disciples of Emmaus are talking about, as they flee Jerusalem, where they had believed, eight days earlier, that all their hopes would be fulfilled.

If Luke recounts this conversation and meeting on the road in such detail, it is perhaps to enable us to share in the disciples' despair. This blindness that is often ours, leaving us with the bitter taste of failure and gloom. We then have the impression that even if faith doesn't disappear, it's no longer of much use.



But let's notice one thing, one small detail: despite their defeat, their disappointment and the long duration of the walk, the two disciples stayed together. They continued to walk, in defeat and tiredness, in despair, but still together. In our life as a couple, as a family, do we agree to walk together in all circumstances? If one of us finds himself more in trial, can the other be a good support? To walk at his own pace, be patient, accompany, and hope?

And The World We Live In?

A world plunging ever deeper into darkness of all kinds: climate change and natural disasters, violence and war, indifference and injustice, abuse of power and exploitation...suffering and death, weapons and destruction...a never-ending list that generates nothing but anguish, fear, discouragement and disappointment. How should we react to these painful realities ? Indifference or compassion ?

Passiveness or contribution ? In the face of distress, we are called to intervene. Let us contemplate the examples of human figures who have believed in the power of love, not the kind that comes from our own efforts, but from the Love we draw from the source of all Love (St Vincent de Paul, Mother Teresa, Sister Emmanuelle, Father Pedro in the slums of Madagascar, Raoul Follereau...and many other unknowns who work discreetly on the paths of our Humanity. A soul that rises, lifts the world. A gesture made with love and tenderness contributes to a new creation. This is our hope. We are all interconnected. The image of the drops of water that, together, make the ocean... Let us be challenged by this image.

A glimmer of hope: Excerpt from a homily by Pope Francis (source: Holy See press office, July 28, 2022). *"The journey of the Emmaus disciples at the end of Luke's Gospel is an image of our personal journey and that of the Church. On the road of life, and of the life of faith, as we pursue the dreams, projects, expectations and hopes that dwell in our hearts, we also come up against our frailties and weaknesses, experience defeat and disillusionment, and sometimes remain prisoners of the sense of failure that paralyzes us. The Gospel tells us that, precisely at this moment, we are not alone: the Lord comes to meet us, joins us, walks the same road as us with the discretion of a kindly traveler who wants to re-open our eyes and re-fill our hearts. And when failure gives way to an encounter with the Lord, life is reborn with hope, and we can be reconciled: with ourselves, with our brothers and sisters, with God.*



So let's follow the itinerary of what we might call: from failure to hope.

It's an experience that also concerns our lives and our spiritual journey, on all those occasions when we are forced to resize our expectations and face up to the ambiguities of reality, the darkness of life, our weaknesses. This happens to us every time our ideals collide with the disillusionments of existence, and our intentions are ignored because of our frailties; when we cultivate good projects but lack the capacity to implement them (cf. Rm 7, 18); when in our activities or relationships, sooner or later, we experience a defeat, an error, a failure or a fall, when we see the collapse of what we had believed in or committed ourselves to, when we feel crushed by our sin and guilt.

Here, however, we need to be alert to the temptation to flee, present in the two disciples of the Gospel: to turn back, to run away from the place where the events took place, to try to take them away, to seek a 'quiet place' like Emmaus so as not to think about them any more. There's nothing worse in the face of life's failures than running away to avoid facing them. It's a temptation from the enemy, who threatens our spiritual journey and the Church's progress: he wants us to believe that this failure is now definitive, he wants to paralyze us in bitterness and sadness, to convince us that there's nothing more to be done and that it's therefore not worth finding a way to start again.

The Gospel reveals to us, on the contrary, that precisely in situations of disillusionment and pain, precisely when we experience with amazement the violence of evil and the shame of guilt, when the river of our life dries up in sin and failure, when stripped of everything, it seems we have nothing left, precisely there, the Lord comes to meet us and walks with us."



A Message Of Hope From Father Caffarel's Letter

To All Broken Homes

"To disunited couples, I have one thing to say: never resign yourselves to disunity. We mustn't forget, in fact, that contracting a Marriage is a commitment to never cease wanting and pursuing a total union. This commitment is made between two people, but afterwards, one is not released from it because the other neglects or denies it. The great fault of so many married Christians is to give up working towards union, to accept division. Those who work towards this union without believing in it, without really wanting it, are no less failing in their commitments.

*Marital harmony is not an object of luxury or comfort, which is why spouses have no right to renounce it. It is necessary, for themselves and for many others. Their disagreement would hurt these others as much as themselves. Instead of being the great means of self-improvement for both man and woman, a home where disunity sets in becomes a breeding ground for all the deadly sins, and often leads to the moral bankruptcy of one or both spouses. And while a climate of love is for children the primordial condition for their physical and moral development, the disunity of parents tears at the very core of their being. Society itself suffers from this failure of a home; for it is no longer a living cell, dispensing warmth and light, but a tumor that grows to the detriment of the social body. Finally, let's add that a disunited home, instead of being a praise to the glory of divine Love, is a false note in the concert of creation."*¹

¹ Henri Caffarel, Lettre aux Foyers désunis, *Revue de l'Anneau d'Or*, special issue on "love and suffering", n 15-16 May-August 1947



Testimonial

We are Berta Horta and Edgar Laura, members of the Teams of Our Lady in Pemba. Pemba is the capital of Cabo Delgado province, the northernmost province of Mozambique. We're going to share our experiences of the terrorist attacks in Cabo Delgado, in the Mocimboa da Praia district.

At 4 a.m. on March 23, 2020, the second attack began. This time much more aggressive and terrifying: countless people were decapitated. A very large number of people lost their lives during these new attacks. Many of these people were our friends. We lived through these confrontations in fear and disorientation, not knowing what to do. We were constantly full of fear, panicking and worrying that our homes would be burnt down. We seriously feared for our lives. In the midst of all these massacres and to protect ourselves, we were forced to leave our homes and hide in the vegetation, in the bushes and undergrowth surrounding our houses. Our neighborhood, located at the entrance to the city, was surrounded by a lot of vegetation and bushes, it was the 30 of July. We began to notice that many people were running, fleeing from all sides and from other neighborhoods, along with us and a few neighbors, who were also fleeing and running for their lives. Men, women, children, the elderly, people of all ages were fleeing in fear of being massacred and murdered.

The next day, still in hiding and aware of the great danger we were in, we had to make the decision of our lives: we had no choice but to try and escape from the village to safety. In the midst of all this distress, fear and terror, we give thanks to God that, despite all the fear and fright and everything we went through, nothing serious happened to our family or the people who were with us. Every day and all the time, we thank our good Lord. We had to leave everything behind us, everything we had acquired over many years of work in the north. We were only able to leave with a few personal documents and our clothes, as the few cars that existed didn't even have enough room to transport anything other than fugitives like us. So we had to leave all our belongings behind.

When we arrived in Pemba, thanks to God and the invaluable help of our very dear brothers and sisters of Teams of Our Lady, we were able to gradually resume our lives and overcome all the terror we had experienced. In Pemba, we were warmly welcomed and accommodated by my mother-in-law, my wife Berta's parents. We stayed in a very small space, but in complete safety. Thanks to the invaluable help of our dear brothers and sisters in the Teams of Our Lady, we gradually managed to overcome the difficulties and traumas we experienced. Their support has been unconditional and fundamental for us. In the team that welcomed us, the advice, sharing, fraternity and friendship we received were a great



strength in helping us overcome the difficulties we encountered and, little by little, we were able to rebuild and regain our lives. Once we'd lost everything, we had to start from scratch. It wasn't easy at all. We thank our good Lord, because we've already managed to get my job transferred to Pemba and I'm now officially and definitively in this town. Trying to move forward little by little, we are in the process of rebuilding our new little house so that we can return and have our own familiar space. We haven't been back to Cabo Delgado since we arrived in Pemba. We admit we're scared and don't even know if we'll ever go back. We don't even want to imagine what our possessions that we had to leave behind are like, in what condition they are now, or even if they still exist... Slowly, with God's grace, with the help of our family and our brothers in Teams of Our Lady, we are making our way and overcoming the traumas we have experienced, gradually rebuilding our new life.

Berta and Edgar

Let's Pray Together

Even today, Lord, you join us on our human journeys, which often resemble the road to Emmaus.

We, too, feel as if we're wandering along dark paths where we don't know what to hold on to. Like the disciples, we don't always feel your presence in our lives, in our suffering, our disappointments and our discouragements.

Our Father God, we often have trouble discerning the signs of your presence at the heart of the world and at the heart of our lives. Open our hearts to your Word. May your presence make us stronger in the face of doubt and discouragement. Let us discover that your Son walks with us on the roads of our lives. He who is Alive with You, and the Holy Spirit, now and for ever and ever. We pray Amen.



Questions To Share As A Couple.

1. In the difficult moments that can cross our lives as a couple, how do we relate to God? Like the disciples on the road to Emmaus, do we turn our backs on him and take a step backwards in our faith? Do we dare to express our disappointments and defeats in trust? What are the obstacles that can stifle this trust?
2. During our journey together, do we leave room for the expression of our emotions and the deep sharing of our personal experiences? To our children? How deeply do we welcome and listen to others, who are sacred creatures created in God's image and worthy of all value and appreciation?

Questions To Share

At The Meeting With Our Team.

1. What might be our own false images or perceptions of God? How can they be an obstacle to a true personal encounter with the Living Christ, working on the paths of our lives?
2. Walking together, as couples and families, can sometimes be a bit tricky. *"It takes two to tango"*. (Knowing that tango is a mystical dance that binds the dancers together between elegance and sensuality). What can our inner gestures and attitudes towards each other be, especially at difficult moments in our relationship, and reflect our deepest communion and inseparable union?



Chapter Two –

AT THE HEART OF THE STORY

In this chapter we discover a God who does not dwell in the heavens, but a God who became flesh, who enters into our history, delicately taking our paths without imposing, to reveal to us his Loving Face, his Fatherly Face.

"Now while they were talking and questioning, Jesus himself came near and walked with them. But their eyes were prevented from recognizing him." (Luke 24, 15-16)

We are God's creation, the fruit of his eternal Love. We are called not to spend our lives on earth dwelling in the superficial, in mediocrity, imprisoned by fear, the pursuit of worldly wealth, power...

We recognize on the other hand that we are also creatures limited in time, space, by our own senses... Whereas our God is the Infinite, the Immortal, he is outside time and space.

An Eternal God Makes Himself So Small To Meet Us.

And now, to our immense surprise, our God chooses to make himself small, embracing our humanity and becoming man. He never ceases to draw near and to walk our paths. His sole aim is to reveal his Image, unveil his Face, unveil his Love.

Let's return to our two disciples on their way home. We don't know exactly who they were. They were not of the group of twelve. Were they part of the group of seventy-two that Jesus had sent on mission? It's possible, but the Gospel doesn't confirm it. In any case, they were people who were attentive to our Lord's message, but who saw it in their own way. In chapter one, we discovered that they thought Jesus was the great prophet they had been waiting for to deliver Israel; they attributed to him a fundamentally political role. And now the Risen Jesus appeared to them in a way that made it hard for them to recognize him. Was it something external, an impediment in his physical appearance?

But the Gospel tells us that they were *"prevented"* from recognizing him. So it may have been an inner and probably divine action, a combination of the two. In any case, God didn't want them to recognize him, precisely because they lacked faith, or at least, because they had the wrong perception of the Messiah.



Faith Opens Our Eyes.

Recognizing the Risen Jesus is above all an act of faith. How can we recognize him, not as the man he was in his former biological condition, but as the Lord, exalted at the right hand of the Father and giver of Life? What allows their eyes to be opened?

In most of the texts following the resurrection, we are told that the disciples come to recognize our Lord in response to a word addressed to them that enables them to profoundly recognize who Jesus is.

During a retreat with her community, a young African nun recounts: *"the missionary who was leading the retreat placed a bouquet of flowers on a table, flowers that are very common in our region. What do you think? asked the priest. We told him that similar flowers are found everywhere. He then shows us how beautiful these flowers are. He taught us how to see them. We finally saw these flowers, we recognized them."*

Perhaps the same applies to faith in the Risen Christ. (We'll take a closer look at this in chapter 5.)

And Each Of Us Today?

In times of trial, faced with life's tragedies, dejected by events that run counter to our expectations, our aspirations. We too, like these two disciples, our eyes can be prevented from recognizing him, coming close to us, even more so, walking with us. We lose all confidence. This great day of the resurrection changed history, but it's hard for us to see how it can change ours.

In the light of His resurrection, how can we deeply believe in His Providence? God gives us enough light to make it possible to believe, and He leaves enough shadow so that believing remains a free act to be made, a choice to be lived. Some say that the act of faith is the condition for faith in action. For some, faith seems like a spontaneous, happy, radiant impulse... for others, it's more like a difficult, painful debate that has to be constantly reopened. The mistake is to think that the former have more faith. The experience of darkness is also part of the mystery of faith. In the Bible, evening tears alternate with morning cries of joy (Psalm 30:6). We see it too in the life of Jesus: the glory of Tabor and the annihilation of Gethsemane. And we find it in the testimony of mystics who experience the most fervent illuminations as well as the most overwhelming desolations.



Faith Is A Gift And A Response.

The beauty of faith, the miracle of faith, is that it is the encounter between the grace of God who gives faith, and the freedom of man who offers his faith. An earthly and incomplete encounter now, a heavenly one later, which will then give way to the vision of the Father. It is fully given to us in Jesus: through His incarnation, He comes to help us on earth, and through His resurrection, He opens heaven to us.

And Our Life As A Couple?

The two disciples on the road to Emmaus were talking to each other and asking questions: working through trials often means first of all shouting, weeping and rebelling.

The first step is to admit defeat. Going through the ordeal means first of all crying out, weeping, rebelling, and not immediately bouncing back. The psalms are full of these cries and tears: *"From the abyss I cried out against you."* And the Bible enables us to live out this revolt," notes Olivier Belleil (a married layman who, since his rediscovery of Christ, has been passionate about sharing the faith that sustains him). It's not a question of blasphemy, but of saying that it's intolerable. Job goes so far as to ask God: *"Why are You my adversary?"*

Denouncing the ordeal that strikes us, naming it, seeing its unbearable nature, is proof of realism. *"You have to come out of the ordeal, but to get through it, you have to start by living it. It's not by denying reality that we dodge its blow"* (Martin Steffens, Christian philosopher, winner of the Christian Humanist Prize and the Religious Literature Prize).

What Attitude Should We Adopt?

Resign Yourself Or Give In?

Consent does not mean morbid resignation or complacency. The challenge is to open up to the whole of life, to learn to improvise the melody of our happiness from dissonance, not in spite of it. Coming to terms with a child's disability, accepting to live with a thorn in one's flesh, can take a lifetime of ups and downs. The path is not linear. It requires inner change.



In a trial, the only thing that depends on you is how you take it on, how you deal with it. It will help us to realize that, in order to consent, we have to give up certain behaviors, give up the "why" about our husband's death, give up the "ifs", *"if my son/my husband were still here..."*. All these dead-end phrases are real poisons, since they can prevent us from moving forward. When we're going through a trial, the only thing that depends on us is how we deal with it, how we take it. Most often without understanding. What God asks of us first of all is precisely to put all our trust in him, to believe that this trial has a meaning, to accept that we don't know what it is, and to abandon ourselves totally into the Father's arms. This is a grace, the fruit of prayer, especially that of others.

Accepting doesn't mean you're up and about. We'll have to take the time to convalesce, and endure the grey days until the wound heals. Conventional wisdom says: give it time. This requires a great deal of patience and acts of hope, an openness to existence, to the work that life will accomplish within you. To be reborn is not to erase everything and start again from scratch, but to live a new beginning, with our scars remaining like the stigmata of Jesus. Some wounds just won't go away.

Our marriage is a journey for two. At difficult moments, we talk to each other and ask questions... sometimes our discussions become mutual accusations. The other is to blame, even if he or she is not totally at fault. We become strangers to each other. The pain is sometimes so painful that it sends each of us back into our own bubble, into cold isolation, into suffocating solitude.

Jesus himself approached the two disciples, not abruptly, not brutally, not forcibly. He approached respecting their will. He was ready to change his plans to meet them; he followed their steps, submitted to their will. Such is our God, always ready to humble himself. The only reckoning he makes is Love. A Love that stoops to put itself at our level, a Love that steps back to make room for us. A Love that trusts in us, that places us so high, we are creators with Him. We are so beautiful in His eyes that He can't wait to become One with us, to unite with us, and to unite us with Him in a profound communion.



The Image Of Our God

Teaches Us How To Walk Together.

Contemplating this image of such a God, may we, as partners, have this same look, this same attitude towards each other, on our life's journey together?

Could we have the same compassion for each other?

At a time when we are blinded by the cruelty of events, by fear and anxiety, can we light the fire of faith together? Can we help each other to make our faith a decision? A faith that cries out: Lord, you are present with us, even if our eyes are prevented from recognizing you, from recognizing your face, from recognizing your will, from recognizing the meaning of what is happening in our lives...we are confident that you accompany and guide our steps. What's more, You respect the direction we take, You change Your plans for us, and You are capable of transforming everything to lead us to the salvation of our souls. Even if our eyes are prevented from recognizing you, we trust that you carry us in your arms. It is especially in these moments of fragility that the strength of Your Love will shine forth.

And The World We Live In?

All around us, we hear talk of despair about the world we live in. At one point or another, we start crying out ourselves with the prophet Habakkuk: *"How long, O Lord, will I cry out to you for help and you will not hear, cry out against violence and you will not deliver...will you stand by and watch our misery?"* And then our Lord's answer comes in the form of a promise: *"Behold, the soul of him who is not upright shall fall, but the righteous shall live by his faithfulness."* An invitation for us to walk in faith.

After crying out with the prophet, we are invited to open our hearts. We are aware of our weakness, and we implore Christ the Savior: *"Lord, increase our faith"*. Help us not to despair, to see further and higher than appearances, to move forward into the light. Christ doesn't ask us to have a gigantic faith, but rather a simple, modest faith like a small seed. It's enough to provide an answer to our anxieties and those of our world. Yes, it's enough to move and transform our humanity, which is too often adrift. It's like a little light, enough to dispel the darkness and restore hope.



This is exactly what the Pope emphasized in his encyclical *"The Light of Faith,"* a magnificent text full of hope. Faith, teaches this Church document, centers us on Christ, who is the Light of the world, our light: *"The light of Jesus shines, as in a mirror, on the face of Christians, and so it spreads and reaches us, so that we too can participate in this vision and reflect on others this light, as in the Easter liturgy, the light of the candle kindles many other candles. Faith is transmitted, so to speak, by contact, from person to person, as one flame lights another. Christians, in their poverty, sow a seed so fertile that it becomes a great tree and is capable of filling the world with fruit."*

An Extract From Father Caffarel's Vocation Story

"It's because in March 1923, exactly fifty years ago, one day I became aware of the existence of Christ, the life of Christ, the love of Christ, the loving relationship between Christ and man in which the Christian life consists, that was the watershed for me."

There is a before this month of March 1923, and an after this month of March 1923.

It left an indelible impression on me, and since that day I've had only one desire: to enter more deeply into this intimacy with Christ myself, and this other desire to bring others to it, because it's been crucial in my life, it's given me the joy of living, the grace of living, the impetus to live.

So I can't help but wish for others this encounter with the living Christ, this discovery that *"God is love."*



Faith and Family

52. *"I'm thinking above all of the stable union of man and woman in marriage. This is born of their love, the sign and presence of God's love, of the recognition and acceptance of the good that is sexual difference, through which the spouses can unite in one flesh (cf. Gen 2:24) and are capable of engendering new life, a manifestation of the Creator's goodness, wisdom and loving purpose. Founded on this love, man and woman can promise each other mutual love in a gesture that engages their whole life and recalls so many aspects of faith. Promising a love that will last forever is possible when we discover a purpose greater than our own plans, one that sustains us and enables us to give the entire future to the person we love..."*

In the family, faith accompanies every stage of life, starting with childhood: children learn to entrust themselves to the love of their parents. That's why it's so important for parents to cultivate shared faith practices within the family, and to support their children's maturing faith. Going through a period of life that is so complex, rich and important for faith, young people in particular need to feel the closeness and attention of their family and the ecclesial community in their process of growth in faith... Faith is not a refuge for those who are without courage, but a fulfillment of life. It helps us discover a great call, a vocation to love, and assures us that this love is reliable, that it is worth giving ourselves over to it, because its foundation lies in God's fidelity, which is stronger than our fragility."

A consoling force in suffering

56... Talking about faith also means talking about painful trials, but Paul sees them as the most convincing proclamation of the Gospel, because it is in weakness and suffering that the power of God emerges and is discovered, surpassing our weakness and suffering... In the hour of trial, faith enlightens us, and in suffering and weakness it becomes clear to us that "(...) *we are not preaching ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord*" (2 Cor 4:5).... The Christian knows that suffering cannot be eliminated, but that it can be given meaning, become an act of love, trust in the hands of God who does not abandon us, and in this way be a stage of growth in faith and love. By contemplating Christ's union with the Father, even at the moment of greatest suffering on the cross (cf. Mk 15:34), the Christian learns to participate in the very gaze of Jesus. As a result, death is illuminated and can be experienced as the ultimate call of faith, the ultimate *"Come forth from the earth"*, the ultimate *"Come!"*



Testimonial

It was an ordinary day in August 2022 and we were attending, as usual, a social gathering with our team as a couple, where we usually pray a rosary, share food with our teammate friends and bond in light-hearted dialogue that fills our spirits with the knowledge of how our friends had fared well (and sometimes not so well) over the past month.

After noon, we arrived home and went through the night's routine. When we entered the bedroom of our granddaughter (who had lived with us since birth), we realized that her body was lifeless. She was a little princess, she was our little princess, and for 5 years she had lit up our lives, with so much light, as only supernatural love can do.

One year before...

We were invited by the couple in charge of the Super Region Hispno-America South to serve as the couple in charge of the Southern Region of Ecuador, without expecting or deserving it, we were called to a service for which we felt unprepared. After a quick discernment as a couple, we said YES, leaving everything in God's hands and hoping that He would guide our path in this new call to service.

We didn't understand why we had been chosen. We didn't know what God had in store for us.

This new responsibility was knocking at our door, after 12 years of walking in the Movement and having exercised some responsibilities. The Movement had succeeded in improving our relationship as a couple, and in making God the third part of our union; *"...a cord with three folds does not break..."*.

Shortly after the Movement entered our lives, we went to mass every Sunday, the Eucharist was our Sunday food for the whole week, we prayed alone and in pairs every day, we took part in annual retreats, we were always active in the services and apostolates of the Movement, we had succeeded in communicating to our family and friends how good it was to get closer to God, we felt we were succeeding, we felt we were achieving that attunement with God we hadn't deserved until then.



But that night, the night our little princess unexpectedly left this earthly life, we asked ourselves:

What happened, what did we do wrong, where did we fail?

We didn't understand anything, we had lots of questions and very few answers. Like the two Emmaus pilgrims, we were, as a couple, immensely sad and disoriented. We felt vulnerable and fragile.

The hours following the loss of our little princess were marked by an open, bleeding wound. We needed the love, care and compassion of our family and friends, but most of all the love, care and compassion of God.

Over the next few days, in confusion and hope, our routine continued. We walked hand in hand, waiting for the long-awaited comfort.

And he arrived... This pain, had we not participated in the Movement, would have been quite simply devastating. It would have destroyed us as individuals, as a couple and therefore as a family.

This pain, accompanied by God, was bearable and made us stronger as individuals, as a couple and as a family.

Could it be that, in God's indisputable plans, the temporary passage of our little princess on earth was one of the events? And if so, perhaps God has been preparing us for this for 12 years (the time we've spent in Teams?) Today, as a couple, we think so....

We believe he prepared us for such a difficult event, just as he prepared our brothers in Team 22 to bring us physical and spiritual comfort.

In conclusion, we would simply like to say that in God's mysterious ways, he has let us know that today our little princess enjoys his presence, and he has also wanted us to write this testimony of pain and sadness. Pain and sadness that have been transformed into compassion and comfort from God himself.

*Lorena and Pepe Luna
Southern Ecuador*



Let Us Pray Together With Pope Francis To Grow In The "Light Of Faith":

"O Mother, help our faith!

Open our ears to the Word, so that we recognize God's voice and his call. Awaken in us the desire to follow in his footsteps, by stepping out of our land and welcoming his promise.

Help us to let ourselves be touched by his love, so that we can touch him through faith.

Help us to entrust ourselves fully to Him, to believe in His love, especially in times of tribulation and cross, when our faith is called to mature. Sow in our faith the joy of the Risen One.

Remind us that he who believes is never alone.

Teach us to look with the eyes of Jesus, so that he may be the light of our path. And may this light of faith always grow within us, until that never-setting day arrives, which is Christ himself, your Son, our Lord!

Amen."

(Pope Francis' Marian Prayer given at the end of the said encyclical to turn us to the Blessed Virgin Mary, Mother of the Church and Mother of our Faith).



Questions To Share As A Couple

1. How can I let myself be inspired by the example of our Risen Lord to gently approach my partner's "*secret garden*"?
Welcome his innermost being with an attitude of respect and compassion.
Can I realize that his presence in my life is a gift from heaven to be explored again and again?
2. Do we make room for faith as grace?
How do we do this?
What concrete ways can we support each other to grow in trust?

Questions To Share

At The Meeting With Our Core Team.

1. What might be the obstacles that hinder or slow down our faith journey?
Can we identify and name them?
How can we support each other to better understand this aspect of our humanity, without letting it dominate or guide our lives?
2. How do we bear witness to our faith in our families, our relationships, our daily lives, our church?
Is it through our words?
Or by a way of life or lifestyle that may leave others wondering?
Can we share concrete examples of how we do this?



Chapter Three:

HEARTS CHALLENGED

In this chapter, we discover the tenderness of a God who stoops to challenge us and is passionate about listening to us. Our experiences of defeat, suffering...are so precious to Him that He is ready to empty Himself to receive them, contain them and transform them into experiences of life.

"Jesus said to them, 'What are you talking about as you walk along? Then they stopped, all sad. But one of them, named Cleopas, said to him, 'You are the only foreigner living in Jerusalem who is unaware of the events of these days.' He said to them: 'What events?'" (Luke 24: 17- 19).

He was right in the thick of things. He traveled all over Galilee with his disciples, teaching and preaching the Good News of the Kingdom. During the three years of his ministry, Jesus never ceased to reveal to us the Face of a merciful God. He was rejected by the Pharisees and the teachers of the law. His people could not understand His message, to the point that He was finally crucified on the cross. So, He who was at the center of all these events. He who knows the hearts of men, who knows the meaning of pain, of disappointment. He approaches the two disciples and asks them: *"What are you talking about as you walk along? What events are you discussing ?"*

Jesus gently intervenes, leaning towards them. Through His questions, He prompts them to reflect, perhaps to go further, to look beyond events. And when He approaches, when He intervenes, it happens in His own time, in His own way. He knows the right moment, He knows how.

He approaches them without imposing. He wants to listen to them, to enter their inner world, to see how they perceive things. He's patient, slows his pace, walks at their own pace.

This text, with all its details, invites us to join the disciples on their walk, to discover and contemplate the way of Jesus. Our lives as individuals and couples are a kind of walk. We walk along the paths of life, and through the eyes of faith, we try to see Jesus who accompanies us on our paths. He takes the initiative to reach out to us even in the most painful moments, and is there at the heart of our lives to comfort us.



A God Of Relationships

When our hearts are weakened, weighed down and confused, our God expects us to talk to him about everyday events, about what's worrying us, what's weighing on our hearts, what's troubling us personally, in our families, around us, in the world. Often, we say to ourselves: but God knows everything, why bother talking to Him? And we cut ourselves off from Him without knowing it. We don't realize that our God wants to be in a dynamic relationship with us. Our God is a God of relationship. He opens dialogue (he walks in the garden with a desire to talk with Adam and Eve, the stories about Abraham present us with encounters as a relationship constantly reactivated through multiple dialogues). A God of relationship who converses with us as a friend. He is quite different from the Almighty or the eternally wrathful, whose wrath must be appeased. He's the one who doesn't put out the wick that's still smoking, the one who goes out to meet the lost sheep, who approaches the Samaritan woman and starts a whole conversation with her.

And the relationship with our God includes a space for us. He offers us the space to express ourselves, to address him, without obstacles. We exist for Him. Our words, our cries... He wants to hear them. We are precious in his eyes.

Cleopas replied, *"You are the only foreigner."* This is one of the attitudes we can have to God's intervention in our lives. We see him as a *"stranger"* who doesn't know, who ignores the events of our lives. We push him away from us, we limit ourselves to our own perception of the world around us. It's hard for us to see events through his eyes (we'll look at this aspect of our relationship with God in chapter 5).



On The Path Of Trust

Our life is a journey towards the fullness of trust. And to say that keeping trust is easy, we'll be in the clouds. We all live a continuous spiritual battle to safeguard faith and trust. Our spiritual life has been, and always will be, a struggle, as evil surrounds us, lying in wait, sometimes even conquering us internally. But this should never frighten us, because we are never left to our own devices, we are not orphans. We are not here, in this random life, lost in nothingness. We are a creature loved, desired and saved by the blood of the Lamb. The Lamb of God, who gave himself up out of love to lift us up to holiness. So let's not be afraid of the spiritual battle of each day, which will end up being a source of growth and a path to conversion.

Perseverance, A Daily Struggle

"If God be with me, who shall be against me" (Rom 8:31). Whatever trials we face, if we give our hearts and lives to Jesus, we can rest assured that evil will eventually be discouraged. Our faith is above all an encounter with the Living Jesus who walks with us, not on a Judean road 2024 years ago, but here and now, today. When we trust in this Love already at work in our hearts and lives, we will be healed.

The Lord Is My Shepherd: I Shall Not Want.

The most famous of the psalms, called the Psalm of David (Psalm 23), gives us this beautiful image of the shepherd who looks after his sheep and makes them lie down in green pastures... Unlike other animals, sheep are fragile, they can't defend themselves with their teeth or claws... they don't run, they can't burrow to hide or climb trees to escape their predator. They can't find their food without a shepherd to look after them. Our Shepherd knows our human frailty; He knows each of His sheep by name. The beauty of this psalm is accentuated by a small detail. It doesn't say, the Lord is *"a"* or *"the"* shepherd, but *"my shepherd"*, he *"directs"* me by the still waters, he restores *"my soul"*, he *"leads"* me in the paths of righteous living, for his name's sake... This psalm is still relevant, it speaks to me, to you, to each of us, today.



And Each Of Us Today...Called To Humility.

Let us experience his closeness, let us be touched by his love. Let us learn to know him, to love him and to follow him ever more closely. We can be inspired by the experience of so many men and women who, one day, met Christ along the way. He crossed their lives. He illuminated and transformed them. They were conquered and carried away by him to unheard-of heights. They became living torches of love because they saw the gaze of infinite Love resting on them. Thousands and thousands of saints and martyrs, known and unknown, who sacrificed everything to him: money, power, human love...and this love continues to grow and invade humanity down the centuries.

Being a Christian doesn't mean following a sequence of laws and prohibitions. On the contrary, to be a Christian is to encounter the person of Jesus, who nourishes me with his living word. Our tragedy today is to miss this personal encounter with Jesus. We don't know him because we haven't contemplated him at length, in love. Let's follow the example of the Apostles. They contemplated Christ to the point of resembling him. They didn't take courses or exams. Called by him, they followed him, living with him in constant proximity.

God is available for encounters, and has his own ways of meeting everyone: prayer, contemplation, oraison, reading the Word, the sacraments, the Mass, nature, works of art, icons. Still in our team meetings, in the *"Sit Down"*...are we ready to meet him?

Saint Thérèse of Lisieux wrote to her sister who was struggling in her spiritual life: *"You try to climb the mountain of holiness, but God wants to meet you at the bottom, in the fertile valley of humility."* What I'm being called to understand is that the Lord doesn't want to meet me on the imaginary mountain, on the social networking self where I'm grinning from ear to ear, nor in my dreams, but in my real, everyday life (the real me). His love cannot be earned, but received. He doesn't love me because I'm good, but because He is Good and Merciful. On the other hand, I can lose my faith when I stop seeing him. My personal relationship, like any bond of friendship, needs to be nourished by times of encounter. Sometimes I realize that I can't rely on my own strength alone, but on a community that encourages and supports me. And each of us rediscovers our faith by making an appointment with God and opening our hearts to him.



And Our Life As A Couple?

Our relationship as a couple can be altered by "pollutions" that gradually and insidiously lead to misunderstandings, frustrations and suffering. In the end, they threaten and disrupt the harmony of our relationship. Exploring and reflecting on them together can guide us along a path of healing.

- An atmosphere of sadness or monotony in our relationship.
- Indifference to other people's problems, joys, interests or work.
- Rare compliments or a look of wonder at the other person.
- Silences between us, isolation, "cold" periods in our relationship.
- Less and less attention, kindness and tenderness between us.
- Jealousy, feelings of insecurity.
- Annoyances, reproaches, resentments in everyday life.
- No joint projects or activities.
- The impression of being better understood by others than by one's spouse.
- Criticism, harshness, irony, innuendo, insults.
- Continual escapism alone or together, such as: screens, alcohol, drugs, excesses in work, sport, commitments, etc.

But, if we allow ourselves to be inspired by this intimate relationship with God to build our relationship as a couple. Our relationship, founded on deep love, is woven and nurtured in the little attentions of everyday life. We can pause to reflect on the different attitudes that can expand love in our couple and our family.

Thanking my partner for a service rendered, even if it seems small and normal, forgiving and asking forgiveness even if it's a minor indelicacy... These are just a few examples, but our lives are rich with many more. In fact, gratitude, forgiveness, prayer as a couple, dialogue about our plans and each other's needs... all contribute to nourishing the relationship, making it tender and alive.

"Please": saying it engenders delicacy, courtesy and avoids a dominant/dominated relationship.

"Thank you": gratitude soothes the relationship, values the spouse and calls for another gift.

"Forgiveness": asking for forgiveness prevents the relationship from being damaged by old grudges.

"Lord": praying together brings us closer together, clears away everyday clashes and harmonizes desires.

"Just the two of us": taking time out together is essential for finding yourself and catching your breath.

"What needs?" Everyone's needs are constantly being explored and readjusted to find the right balance.

"What projects?" These can be personal projects for one or other of us, or joint projects. Being able to discuss and plan for the future together is a source of mutual happiness and fulfillment.



What Father Caffarel Shares With Us

"How often does the love between spouses, the affection between parents falter, precisely because we neglect to nurture and deepen them? Our human loves require encounters, exchanges, heart-to-heart moments. It's vital. The same goes for the love of God, which withers in the soul of the Christian who doesn't spare himself daily moments of encounter with his Lord, moments of exchange, of intimacy, in other words, of prayer. It's no less vital. The question is whether it's vital to eat, the question is whether it's vital to pray."

We can listen to what Henri Nouwen has to say in his book, *Au coeur de ma vie. L'Eucharistie*. A meditation on the presence of Jesus who challenges us:

"On the road to Emmaus, Jesus became present through his word, and it was this presence that transformed sadness into joy, mourning into dancing. This is what happens at every Eucharist. The words that are read and proclaimed are meant to lead us into the divine presence and transform our hearts and minds. We often think of these words as exhortations to change our lives. But the primary power of these words lies not in the way we put them into practice after hearing them, but in the divine power of transformation that is exerted when we listen to them." ²

² Henri Nouwen, *At the heart of my life. L'Eucharistie. Meditation*, Novalis, 1995, p. 49.
Translation of *With Burning Hearts. A meditation on the Eucharistic Life*, Orbis Books, 1994



Testimonial

Father: *Five years after our marriage, we had our second child, a boy we named Jalal. We discovered that he had slow growth after reaching the age of six months. The pediatrician warned us at the periodic check-up that he was stunted and that apparently, he was a normal child, but his behavior and development were slower than that of a six-month-old and that we should wait to have an MRI after he was 12 months old.*

Mother: *The doctor has advised us to start specific therapies that he will need throughout his life, including psychomotricity, physiotherapy, occupational therapy and speech therapy...*

When Jalal was nine months old, we started psychomotricity sessions. At the age of one, we carried out the MRI brain scan as expected.

Following the result of this x-ray, we were both in a state of shock, the feelings I experienced were mixed, from sadness to anger, from anger against God, from anxiety to doubt... I had a lot of questions and personal reproaches: what did I do wrong to have a child in this state? I was in a state of frustration, a state of denial, for a long period of my life, and all I could do with Jalal was accompany him to the doctors and the centers for the various treatments. The doctor told us that there was nothing to do but subject him to these treatments. Moreover, it was difficult to find competent doctors and specialized centers close to our home. Over time, I began to feel a sense of concern for my eldest daughter Sophie, who was growing up. I had to be present in her life, at school, socially and in everything she liked to do. Sometimes I was both present and absent, and I tried as much as possible to be with her, at least mentally.

What also helped me through this stage of my life was our commitment to Teams of Our Lady. During the period when we discovered Jalal's condition, it was difficult for me to face the world. It was hard for me to accept it in front of the world, just because I was afraid of their look of pity, and I felt that pity would destroy me. So much so that at one of our team meetings, I didn't want to talk about the subject, but suddenly I felt at ease and opened my heart to the group and told them about Jalal and his condition.



The reaction of our base team members was indescribable. They carried us in their prayers and continued to pray for us always, and they accompanied us until we found a state of tranquility and a few serene days. It was a beautiful feeling, and one I'd like to bear witness to, so that everyone knows just how integral the Teams of Our Lady were, and still are, to our lives.

Father: When we found out about Jalal's condition, it was a very difficult time for us as a couple and as a family. As a father personally, I don't hide the fact that I went through the same questions and feelings as my wife: sadness, frustration, disappointment and anxiety... I asked myself: where did we go wrong for this to happen to us? How can we take care of Jalal? Will he be just another boy in the future? Who will help us? Will we be able to help him grow throughout his life? especially since the doctors told us he would be in this condition for a long time? I realized that life wasn't fair and we didn't know where we'd get the strength to go on from, and I always said to my wife: let's do what we have to do, let's accompany him for treatment, let's take care of him, let's love him to the full, let's create a balance between our care for him and our care for our daughter, and let's rely on God for the rest. God will certainly help us. We trusted in the Lord because He is always present by our side.

I had to help my wife overcome the crisis she was going through, we wanted to give birth to a third child, but the difficulty of the situation didn't allow my wife to think about it nor me to open it up. We discovered later that indeed the Lord was present and walking with us without feeling his presence. He was working in an extraordinary way, giving us sufficient support and strength to accept Jalal's state of health and medical care. Let's not forget the financial difficulties that accompanied this condition. The cost of treatment was high, but things resolved themselves in a magical way.

We also noticed that when one of us was going through a difficult emotional or spiritual state, the partner, with the help of the Lord, followed the path, so we always had peace and courage, so we were able to continue together to accompany Jalal, yesterday, we do it today, and we will do it tomorrow and until infinity. The whole family has been put to the test, but this ordeal has taught us to better live love in our family and made us realize that unconditional love is more important than the problem itself. Each time we love more, the gift and joy shine forever in our hearts .



Let's Pray Together With The Psalms (Psalm 23, Song of David)

The Lord is my shepherd: I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures, He leadeth me beside quiet waters.

He restoreth my soul, He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness, For his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for thou art with me: thy rod and thy staff, they comfort me.

You set a table before me in front of my adversaries; you anoint my head with oil, and my cup overflows.

Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord to the end of my days.

Questions To Share As A Couple

1. Are we aware of the importance of nurturing and caring for the quality of our relationship as a couple? What are the concrete steps we want to take towards greater harmony?
2. How can we help each other to deepen our relationship with God and give Him more space in our lives, our decisions and our directions?

Questions To Share At The Meeting With Our Core Team

1. Give a personal or couple testimony of a personal encounter with the Lord on our life's journey. Are we attentive to the signs of his presence and his visit to meet us?
2. To what change(s) are we called as a result of our encounter with Him? What are the fruits of our conversion that we are ready to share with others?



Chapter Four:

UNCERTAIN HEARTS

In this chapter we explore uncertainty and confusion in our faith journey, in prayer, in our relationship with God, and discover a path of openness to his mysterious presence at the heart of our lives.

"They answered him, 'What happened to Jesus of Nazareth. This man who was a powerful prophet by his deeds and words before God and all the people. How the chief priests and our leaders...But with all this, it's already the third day since it happened. To tell the truth...but they did not see him.'" (Luke 24: 19-24)

We return to the road to Emmaus to join the two disciples. Of course, our aim is to have a spiritual experience that will help us to grow in faith, as individuals and as couples. As we walk along the paths of our lives, we sometimes feel as if we're walking in chaos, or at the very least, walking in uncertainty. With all that we carry in our hearts, in our families, in our relationships...it's sometimes hard for us to understand the deeper meaning of what weaves our lives and that of the world.

Let's look at Jesus' way of teaching, which is not at all arbitrary. After taking the time to reach out to the disciples, to share the day-to-day of their lives - the walk - he is now interested in putting them into a story. He reopens the dialogue and asks them: what happened? He invites them to tell the story of what happened. It seems that it's one thing to experience events, and quite another to recount them. It's as if Jesus is urging them to gather their thoughts, choose their words, organize them... And that's exactly what they've done. They begin to answer him. What are they saying? What are they saying about Jesus? How are they involved in the story they're telling? We can pick out a few words:

Jesus of Nazareth: this is an identified, well-known person, well situated in history. A person with whom they probably lived for years.

A prophet powerful in deed and word before God and all the people: so he was not perceived as an ordinary man, like the others. They witnessed his teaching, the works of his hands that brought consolation and inner healing to souls and bodies weakened by infirmities and various illnesses.

The chief priests and our leaders... They are the leaders of their people... and they tell the whole sober story of the Passion and death, without detail, but telling it with horror. They had hoped that Jesus would



be the Liberator, the one who would break the yoke of occupation and restore Israel to its full supremacy. A fully human messiah. The disappointment is equal to the hope.

It's already the third day... Three days is the time it takes for death to do its work. Only after three days were people considered truly dead. This reference seems essential to understanding that, before the joy of Easter, there is the end that death signifies for us.

The two disciples did indeed tell their own story. Without realizing it, they had connected with this stranger, effectively because he had asked them a question and was willing to listen. Their words gave shape to their emotional experience, their frustration, their uncertainty, their deep-seated fear hidden behind a great disappointment. And Jesus, the One who knows the secrets of men's hearts (Psalm 44:21), needed to listen to their words, their own perception of things, their suffering, their bitterness... Isn't that a strange thing? Jesus knew everything! He who was at the heart of all these events, what was the point of asking them about past events?

A God Who Questions

When we explore the Scriptures, we notice that God himself often asks questions and interrogates. In the Garden of Eden, God asks Adam where he is and what he has done (Genesis 3:9-11). In the desert, God asks Moses what he holds in his hand (Exodus 4:2). The Gospels also show us Jesus in constant dialogue with men and women like us, mothers, men, the sick, widows, the blind... He's interested in what's bothering us, and asks us to speak up. His questions can lead us to a new discovery, perhaps even to the realization of our deepest desires, what we really want.

A God Who Offers Himself

Jesus asks us questions so that we can enter into a loving relationship with him. His aim is not to make moralistic speeches, to give us a law, principles. When he talks with us, he speaks little and never to say nothing. He knows the price of words and is sparing with them. It's not a question of long speeches, but of meaningful and profound words. By listening attentively, he undoubtedly wants to get to know us, but his desire is also to invite us to enter into deep communion with him. He wants to know us and make himself known. It's a two-way dynamic.



A God Who Sets Us Free

By asking his question, Jesus gives the Emmaus disciples the freedom to tell their own story, based on their own experience and reality. The words they tell become the expression of their inner habitat, their feelings, desires, fears, hopes and dreams. This expression of their inner being enables them to open up to the new, to the beyond, to the horizons of the Resurrection. Words have a liberating effect. Putting words to their experiences can ease anxiety, restore order to the mind and create a new space to welcome new light.

A God Who Calls

Jesus establishes a dialogue in order to enter into communication. He recognizes the value of his interlocutor as a partner in the relationship, in a climate of respect for his dignity as a person capable of receiving the gift of hope and assuming his role as co-actor. A call to share in the mystery of the Resurrection.

So, of course, the questions Jesus asks are not meant to elicit information. God is a Father who uses language to teach in the context of a relationship. He is like a teacher who uses questions to engage his students. Jesus asks us questions to invite us to reflect and point us toward the truth. When he asks a question, it's not because he doesn't know the answer, but because he wants us to.

And Each Of Us Today... Called To Communicate

At times I feel disoriented, my steps seem uncertain, not knowing exactly where to place my trust... I have the impression of going round in circles, stuck in a dead end, no longer understanding the meaning of events in my life. Indecision, uncertainty, frustration, fear of the future are unpleasant feelings, an inner storm that drives peace from my heart.

Where can I find refuge?

How can I rediscover the joy of living?

And the Lord knows my uncertain heart. He approaches me and asks me what's troubling me. Just as he did with the disciples on the road to Emmaus. Am I ready to listen when he asks me a question? Am I



ready to communicate with him, to express freely, in my own words, what's on my mind? Today, a new invitation comes to me: I stand beside these two disciples and tell my own story. I hand over my burden, trusting that he will walk beside me and listen. Today, may I address God with the words of David in Psalm 139: *"O Lord, you examine me and know me...you discern my thoughts from afar...You surround me from behind and from before, and you lay your hand upon me...Where can I go from your spirit, where can I flee from your presence?..."*

Those who believe in Jesus can be at peace despite life's uncertainties, for they have the assurance that their Father loves his children and cares for their needs (Mt 6:25-34). We can bring all our concerns to him with gratitude, knowing that he will meet our needs and give us peace (Phil 4:6,7). *"And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus,"* the apostle Paul tells us (v. 7). To say that God's peace surpasses all understanding reveals our inability to explain it, but also the possibility for us to experience it, since this peace guards our hearts and minds. Our peace comes from knowing that the Lord loves us and is in control of our lives. He alone provides us with the consolation we need to soothe us, fill us with hope and relax us even in the midst of change and challenge. Are we ready to embark on this adventure of love, to open ourselves to the heart of the One who has waited for us and loved us from eternity? Are we ready to renew every day our willingness to address Jesus as a friend?

And Our Married Life

Learning to communicate with God helps us to communicate better with our partner and family. True and sincere communication is an essential foundation in the life of a couple. It's an art that's acquired over time. To say that communicating is an easy task and comes naturally without any effort, seems for many of us a utopia, because tensions exist in every couple. Communicating is never without its challenges, but it's not an impossible task, since it's a learning process that takes place through love and conviction. Happiness for two is a constant work in progress, built on willpower and speaking the truth. Communicating as a couple is not just about talking facts, but about how you feel in a given situation. When a couple confides in each other, dialogue allows them to discover themselves and each other as they really are. And that strengthens married love. What's more, confiding one's weaknesses, fears and shortcomings, and knowing that they are accepted and loved in spite of everything, is a source of great joy for life together. Communication generates individual fulfillment for each partner, as well as the blossoming of the couple as an entity worth nurturing to move fully towards holiness. We all have a vital



need for harmony and fulfillment, and this need is all the more true in the realm of the couple and the family.

Prayer For Falling In Love Again

"He was my friend, my beloved. Today, he (she) is like my best enemy. It's not exactly war, but it's not peace either. He (she) is always there at close range, in the living room, at the table, in bed. His attitudes, his tics, his words reveal for the thousandth time how much he (she) annoys me. He doesn't understand that what he (she) finds insignificant exasperates me. How can I tell him?

You can, Lord, you who dwell in her heart.

Soothe mine too, for I can't wait for the situation to change. Show me how much responsibility I bear for my difficulties in loving my partner. What if, by overcoming the bitterness in my heart, my love for him grew and strengthened?

Knowing my spouse's expectations is necessary for us to remain united in marriage.

I need to look at him with trust rather than mistrust, with forgiveness rather than suspicion, with faith rather than dismay.

Change my heart and that of my spouse, so that we may taste the happiness you have promised us.

Transform my heart to welcome him back. Come and bless my spouse. Amen." (Source Aleteia)

And The World We Live In

At the time of writing this theme, the news never ceases to speak of the evil that persists in many forms: violence, terrorism, wars, murder, destruction, corruption, violations of human rights and disregard for legitimate aspirations: in Ukraine, in the Holy Land, in Lebanon, in Argentina, in Sudan, in Haiti, in Myanmar... and many other corners of the world that are experiencing the disappointment of the two disciples of Emmaus: a disappointment at seeing the force of evil reigning, the hand of death destroying life. If we're far away, it's easy to turn our eyes away and tell ourselves that it's none of our business, allowing ourselves to be dragged into the trap of indifference. Or, if we find ourselves affected by what's



going on around us, we can fall into the trap of pessimism and depression. Our world today is crying out in pain everywhere. How can we rekindle in our hearts that glimmer of hope that believes in the power of Life and Resurrection? Can we believe deeply in the mysterious power of Love to bring consolation, tenderness, empathy... May our hands, our eyes, our words, our gestures... however humble, be new seeds of life to participate in the creation of a new world? Do we dare to open ourselves to Hope?

What Father Caffarel Shares With Us About The Beauty Of The Christian Couple

God says: *"Christian couple, you are my pride and my hope:"*

God says: *"Christian couple, you are my pride and my hope. When I created heaven and earth, and in heaven the great luminaries, I saw in my creatures vestiges of my perfections, and I thought this was good. When I covered the earth with its great mantle of fields and forests, I saw that it was good. When I had created the innumerable animals according to their kind, I contemplated in these living and teeming beings a reflection of my overflowing life, and I found that this was good. From all my creation rose a great, solemn, jubilant hymn celebrating my glory and my perfections. And yet nowhere did I see the image of what is my most secret, most fervent life. So I felt the need to reveal the best of myself: and this was my most beautiful invention. So I created you, a human couple, "in my image and likeness," and I saw that it was very good. In the midst of this universe, where every creature spells out my glory and celebrates my perfections, love had at last arisen to reveal my Love. Human couple, my beloved creature, my privileged witness, do you understand why you are dear to me among all creatures, do you understand the immense hope I place in you? You are the bearer of my reputation, of my glory, you are for the universe the great reason to hope... because you are Love. So be it."*³

³ Father Caffarel, Extract from the Conference Les équipes Notre-Dame face à l'athéisme, Rome, May 5, 1970



Excerpt From The Book By H. Nouwen

Jesus who listens to us :

"As the two travelers return home, mourning their loss, Jesus goes to meet them and walks with them, but their eyes are unable to recognize him. Suddenly, not two but three people are walking, and everything becomes different. The two friends no longer walk with their heads bowed, but look straight into the eyes of the stranger who has just joined them and ask: "What are you talking about as you walk along? They are surprised, agitated even: "You're the only one who hasn't heard about what's happened"? Then they begin to recount this long tale of loss, of mysterious information about an empty tomb. Here at least is someone willing to listen, someone willing to hear them talk about their disillusionment, their sadness and their utter confusion. Nothing seems to make sense. But it's better to tell a stranger than to repeat to yourself what you already know." ⁴

Testimonial

Our relationship began with a strong faith in God and a desire to follow His will. Like any new relationship, we encountered difficulties and faced many challenges, especially when we moved to a new country, far from our families and friends. We tried to keep God in our lives through our daily individual prayers and by regularly attending mass each week, but we felt that God was far away and silent.

We also found it hard to communicate with each other. Our open discussions were rare as we were busy and pressed by our work and daily responsibilities. We felt we were drifting apart and losing the connection we once had. We felt that God was not present in our lives. Over time, we drifted apart. We tried different ways to improve our communication, but closure and a lack of listening got in the way. Uncertainty and confusion in our faith journey made our relationship with God cold and distant.

⁴ Henri Nouwen, *At the heart of my life. L'Eucharistie. Meditation*, Novalis, 1995, p.39



Our Meeting With Teams.

The Lord, in his mercy and providence, placed Teams in our path. We joined these teams, hoping to find support and guidance for our marriage and our spiritual life. We didn't expect the positive change God had prepared for us. Through these teams, we learned to practice the "*sit down*", a monthly time when we share our thoughts, feelings, joys, sorrows and problems with each other. We also learned to pray together, to read God's word and to seek his will. It took us a while to open up and allow our partner into our thoughts. At first we were hesitant, but as soon as we remembered that Jesus was among us, we were more willing to listen, share and understand each other better. Following the steps of the "*sit down*", we noticed a positive change in our relationship. We became more attentive to listening, understanding and appreciating the other. We realized that love was not just a feeling, but a choice and a behavior. We discovered the beauty and power of the secret of reconciliation, the grace and peace it brings to our relationship. We couldn't wait to sit down and talk and find out more. The love was still there, but not enough. The "*sit down*" was necessary to transform love from a feeling to a behavior.

We Grew Up In Love And Faith

Above all, we really felt God's ongoing presence in our lives. We understood that he was still holding our hand throughout our journey, but we were so preoccupied with many things that we couldn't hear or recognize him. We were so scattered and deaf that we couldn't hear his voice between us and recognize him, just like the disciples on Emmaus. God was always speaking to us in different ways, but we didn't recognize him. He was the one who helped and guided us in our decisions and our life's journey. The Lord is always waiting for us at the door, and we have to open it for him to enter and reign over our lives.

We learned to trust and rely more on God, to hand over our problems and worries. We experienced his love and grace in tangible ways, and felt close to him and to each other. We discovered how to be open to his mysterious presence at the heart of our lives. We are now convinced that God is always with us and that he has a plan and purpose for our marriage.



Let's Pray Together With Saint Charles De Foucauld (The Prayer Of Abandonment)

Father, I surrender myself to you, do with me whatever you please.

Whatever you do with me, I thank you.

I'm ready for anything, I accept anything.

Provided your will is done in me, and in all your creatures, I desire nothing else, my God.

I place my soul in your hands.

I give it to you, my God, with all the love in my heart, because I love you, and it is a need of love for me to give myself, to place myself in your hands, without measure,

With infinite confidence, for you are my Father.

Questions To Share As A Couple

1. How do we cultivate communication in our daily lives? Are we aware of its benefits? To the consequences of its absence?
2. When I communicate with my partner, I reveal myself and make myself known. Can we share experiences in this area? What role has listening with care played in these experiences?

Questions To Share

At The Meeting With Our Core Team

1. How well do we communicate with each other as team members? Do we give enough space to listening and mutual respect?
2. Each of us can experience uncertainty in our lives (as individuals or as a couple). In what ways can we support each other? To live in depth the spirit of family and fraternity?



Chapter Five:

HEARTS OPEN TO GOD'S WORD

In this chapter we discover a God who reveals Himself through the Scriptures. We are encouraged to commit ourselves to listening to His Word, which helps us to know Him in His Truth and Essence, which are Love.

"He said to them, 'You foolish men! How slow is your heart to believe all that the prophets have spoken! Was it not necessary for Christ to suffer this in order to enter into his glory? And beginning with Moses and all the prophets, he interpreted to them in all Scripture what concerned him.'" (Luke 24:25-27)

For years, Jesus was confronted by people who didn't understand who He was. But this never discouraged Him. He continued his efforts, his heart burning with love for everyone, for everyone's salvation. His words were not complicated theology, but simple language, sometimes with images and examples taken from everyday life. He wanted his message to go straight to the heart. Yet here he is again, confronted by these two disciples who seem to have heard nothing, understood nothing of what he had shared, announced... limited to the scandal of the announcement of his inescapable Passion.

For Jesus, it's like Moses confronting the hard-hearted Egyptians. Jesus himself puts it well in Matthew 13:10-17: *"If I speak to them in parables, it is because they look without looking, and listen without hearing or understanding." So Isaiah's prophecy is fulfilled for them: "You may listen, but you will not understand. You may look, but you will not see. The hearts of this people have grown heavy: they have become hard of hearing, they have closed their eyes, lest their eyes should see, their ears should hear, their hearts should understand, they should be converted - and I will heal them."*

But happy are your eyes, for they see, and your ears, for they hear!

"Amen, I say to you: many prophets and righteous men have desired to see what you see, and have not seen it, to hear what you hear, and have not heard it."



Foolish men: are Jesus' words a reproach, a criticism? Or rather an invitation to recognize our human limitations, our short-sightedness and our inability to perceive and understand God's plan on our own, through our purely human logic. An invitation to recognize that it is not through our thoughts and reasoning that we will understand the Wisdom of our Father and Creator, but through an openness of heart to Jesus' explanations.

He interpreted to them... It is the Risen Jesus, who has conquered the darkness of death, who explains the Scriptures to them. And this time, they will receive the gift of understanding.

A little later, in Luke, Jesus appears to his disciples, showing them his hands and feet as they could not yet believe... *"He eats before them"*, then explains to them all that has been written about him, revealing to them the meaning of the paschal mystery. And Luke adds: *"Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures."* And the Gospel according to Luke ends with a promise to the disciples: *"...you must remain in the city until the power from on high descends upon you."*

A time to welcome the gift of the Holy Spirit

Without the gift of the Holy Spirit, it's almost impossible for us to enter into God's logic and understand Sacred Scripture in depth. This Spirit was given to us by the Resurrection of our Lord, and he alone is capable of opening up the treasures of the Word to us, so that we can be proclaimers of this inexhaustible wealth in the world. *"Who then is capable of understanding all the richness of a single word of yours, Lord? What we understand is far less than what we leave behind, like thirsty people drinking from a spring. The perspectives of your word are many, as are the orientations of those who study it. The Lord has colored his word with many beauties, so that each of those who scrutinize it can contemplate what he loves. And in his word he has hidden every treasure, so that each of us may find richness in what we meditate."* (Saint Ephrem)



The role of the Holy Spirit in deepening our understanding of the Word

Without the action of the Holy Spirit, we run the risk of becoming locked into the text itself. We are called to discover the inspired, dynamic and spiritual aspect of every sacred text. As the Apostle reminds us, *"the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life."* (2 Cor 3:6) So the Holy Spirit transforms scripture into a living word of God, lived and transmitted in the faith of his holy people.

The Holy Spirit works in those who listen to God's word. It's all the more true that with Jesus Christ, God's revelation reaches its fulfillment and plenitude, but what's even more marvelous is that the Holy Spirit continues his action through the life of each and every one of us. Remember, before becoming a written text, the Word of God was transmitted orally and kept alive by the faith of a people who recognized it as their own history. So our faith is based on a living Word, not just a story or a book.

And Each Of Us Today...

The story of God with his people continues. From the Old Testament, which recounts the journey of God's people...to the New Testament, which reveals the person of Jesus as a Brother, the only Son of the Father and a Savior, how can I be part of this story? How do I personally receive the Word of God into my life? We mustn't forget the teaching that comes from the book of Revelation, where it says that the Lord is at the door, knocking. If anyone hears His voice and opens the door, He comes in to dine with him (cf. 3:20). Christ Jesus, through Sacred Scripture, is knocking at our door; if we listen and open the door of our mind and heart, then He will enter our lives and dwell with us.

Saint Charles de Foucauld is renowned for his passion for his beloved Jesus of Nazareth. He would spend hours in Bible reading and meditation. In one of his letters to his friend Louis Massignon, he said:

"The reading and rereading of the Gospel should be like the drop that falls on a slab day after day, eventually leaving its mark. Regular and repeated rereading of the Gospel marks us with the spirit of the Gospel."



A word for the future... but also for today

As we know, sacred texts have a prophetic function: they speak of the future, for example, by evoking the Kingdom to come in the fullness of time, but not only that. God's word is addressed to us now, in the present. It concerns the today of those who feed on it.

The word of God is sweet: it brings us inner joy and consolation. Taste the tenderness and love of a Father-God who is passionate about joining us in a unique friendship and intimacy. This is the profound source of our joy. And in times of trial, to realize that we are not forsaken but carried, supported, strengthened... mysteriously saved.

The Word of God is also bitter: when we realize how difficult it is to live the Word consistently. And sometimes we even reject it when we don't think it's worth living by.

The Word of God is a challenge: it provokes us especially when it concerns charity. The Word of God constantly reminds us of the merciful love of the Father, who asks his children to live in charity. Imitate Jesus in his compassion, in his loving gaze, in his whole life, which is a full and perfect expression of a divine love that offers itself to ALL without reserve. One of the great challenges for our lives today is to listen to the Holy Scriptures and let them transform us to practice mercy. To receive this Word as a continual call for everyone to move away from individualism (which leads to sterility) towards sharing and solidarity.

And Our Life As A Couple... From Intimacy For Two To Intimacy Together With God

Getting to know Jesus better is the fruit of the desire to familiarize ourselves with his word, to listen to him again and again. It's like wanting to satiate oneself with an infinite and abundant source. In the intimacy of our relationship with him, through prayer and meditation on Sacred Scripture, Jesus makes himself known and reveals the face of his Father, our Father. Reading, deepening and praying the Word, taking inspiration from spiritual readings and the testimonies of the saints, learning meditative prayer, Lectio Divina... these are just some of the ways in which we can experience the sweetness and inspiration of the Word. Spend time, as a lover does with his beloved, resting with the word so that it can be welcomed *"for what it really is, not the word of men, but the word of God."* (1 Th2:13)



As couples, we realize the importance of spending time together. It's being together that brings us closer together. Living together is different from being together. Doing things together is different from taking on duties and obligations separately. We give a lot of importance to cultivating our intimacy as a couple, to preserving sexual intimacy, to playing and laughing together... things that are extremely beautiful and a source of joy for both of us. But have we ever thought about how to consolidate our spiritual intimacy?

Our commitment to the Teams of Our Lady invites us to adopt a concrete point of effort which is *"listening to the Word of God,"* which consists of reading a passage in the Bible every day, especially from the Gospels, in an atmosphere of calm and silence, welcoming this word as coming from God.

Opening the Bible as a couple is a wonderful tool for dialogue, reflection and spiritual enrichment. It could be an adventure, an opportunity, an experience to grow together and renew ourselves even more in our love for each other and for God. Deepening our spiritual intimacy brings us closer together, and will have an extraordinary impact on our sense of unity as a couple and on intra-marital satisfaction.

Reading God's Word together might even give us a space to talk, reflect and learn to pray together. We'll even be surprised to discover that we can rediscover ourselves in the light of God's Word. It's amazing how God's Word can come at just the right moment, even when we're following a reading plan. The Holy Spirit always ensures that we read the right passage at the right time.

"For couples, reading the Word of God together is a necessity", assures Pope Francis in his exhortation *"Amoris Laetitia"* (*"The Joy of Love"*). *"The Word of God is not only good news for people's private lives, but it is also a criterion of judgment and a light for discerning the various challenges facing spouses and families"* (Amoris Laetitia, 227).

Let's remember that reading the Bible together is not a race against time (perhaps reading together once or twice a week if it's difficult to do so every day), nor is it a competition (to see who knows or understands this or that passage better). It's just a question of sharing our thoughts/feelings/questions... and putting ourselves together under the gaze of the One who will bless our efforts and respond to the aspirations of our souls.



And The World We Live In

If we look at the world around us, and open our ears to his words, what do we see? What do we hear? Certainly, we find ourselves submerged in its noise, in its chaos. What is the world saying to us today?

- You must be a big star...or no one will look at you.
- You have to accumulate wealth, money in your bank account... otherwise you won't have the guarantees to survive.
- You have to crush the others to get there... or they'll crush you.
- Stock up as much as you can on everything... or you'll run out.
- Beware of others...or they'll betray you.

And many other words that sow nothing but fear, anxiety, hatred and mistrust in our hearts.

Words that silently penetrate and disturb us. Words that become so entrenched in our subconscious that they take away our inner peace, our joy of heart, our peace of mind, leaving us with a profound emptiness, in chaos.

The harsh words of the world are countered by the gentle Word of God.

- You are my beloved... to you I have offered my life.
- You are my son, so precious to me... I open my arms wide to welcome you.
- I trust you...will change the world.
- Don't be afraid of anything... I'll protect you.
- I love you... and all I want is to receive your love.

Which word(s) do you want to listen to?

The world's or your God's?



What Father Caffarel Shares With Us About Listening To The Word Of God

"Listening to the Word of God is the second general orientation I propose. Asceticism, in the sense of walking towards holiness, requires an active and persevering search for God, particularly through the study of the Scriptures. Yet this study has far too little place in the personal lives of spouses, in the life of the home, in the life of the team. From now on, we must embark on it much more deliberately. Then we'll see the miracles wrought by the Word of God, for it is creative: it gives life to those who open themselves to its virtue, and brings joy into the home. (Father Caffarel, from his book: Les Équipes Notre-Dame. Essor et mission des couples chrétiens)

In his letters on prayer, Father Caffarel places great emphasis on listening to the Word of God. He tells us: *"Yes, God speaks. But you have to know how to listen...God speaks to men in many ways."*

He defines listening as follows: *"Listening is not just a matter of intelligence. It is our whole being, soul and heart, intelligence and heart, imagination, memory and will, that must be attentive to the word of Christ, opening up to it, giving way to it, letting it invest, invade, seize us, giving it unreserved adherence"* (Cahiers sur l'oraison).

He goes on to say: *"To hear, you might have to start by listening."*

What Pope Francis Shares With Us About The Place Of The Bible In Our Lives

(Excerpts from the Pope's homily at the Mass for "Word of God Sunday," January 21, 2024, in St Peter's Basilica)

"...The Word draws us to God and sends us out to others. It draws us to God and sends us out to others - that's its dynamism! It doesn't leave us closed in on ourselves, but expands our hearts, reverses trends, overturns habits, opens up new scenarios, unlocks unsuspected horizons...

We can't do without the Word of God, its gentle force that, as in a dialogue, touches the heart, imprints itself on the soul and renews it with the peace of Jesus that makes us anxious for others. If we look at the



friends of God, the witnesses to the Gospel in history, the saints, we see that, for each of them, the Word has been decisive. Think of the first monk, St. Anthony... St. Augustine... St. Theresa of the Child Jesus... St. Francis of Assisi.... These are lives changed by the Word of life, by the Word of the Lord...

But I ask myself: why doesn't the same thing happen to many of us? Very often we listen to the Word of God, it goes in one ear and out the other. Why is this? Perhaps because, as these witnesses show us, we mustn't be "deaf" to the Word. That's our risk: overwhelmed by a thousand words, we let God's Word slip past us. We hear it, but we don't listen to it; we listen to it, but we don't keep it; we keep it, but we don't let ourselves be provoked to change.

Above all, we read it, but we don't pray it, whereas "prayer must go hand in hand with the reading of Sacred Scripture, so that a dialogue between God and man may be established."

Let's go back to the sources to offer the world the living water it can't find; and, while society and social networks accentuate the violence of words, let's tighten up the gentleness of God's Word, which saves, which is gentle, which makes no noise, which enters the heart.

And let's ask ourselves a few questions. What place do I reserve for the Word of God where I live? There are books, newspapers, televisions and telephones, but where is the Bible? In my bedroom, do I have the Gospel close at hand? Do I read it every day for direction in life? Do I carry a small copy of the Gospel in my bag to read? I've often advised people to always have the Gospel with them, in their pocket, in their bag, in their cell phone: if Christ is dearer to me than anything else, how can I leave him at home and not take his Word with me? And one last question: have I read at least one of the four Gospels in its entirety? The Gospel is the book of life, it's simple and it's brief, and yet many believers have never read it cover to cover."



Testimonial

When we received the news of my unexpected pregnancy at the age of forty-four, as with all previous pregnancies, we were overjoyed. Our family consisted of five people: my husband and I, our two young daughters ages eighteen and seventeen, and a darling eight-year-old boy. As a couple who had been part of Teams of Our Lady for many years, our conjugal prayer consisted above all in consecrating our family to the Sacred Heart of Jesus and the Immaculate Heart of the Blessed Virgin, asking only for the sanctity of our family so that we might one day find ourselves united in our eternal heavenly home.

On the day of my ultrasound scan, at nine weeks' of gestation, we experienced our first shock: the announcement that the fetus had a fairly thick neck, which was not to be diagnosed until twelve weeks' gestation but was obvious enough to be overlooked. Being a midwife, I understood the seriousness of the situation: our baby would probably have Down's syndrome. It was the beginning of a conflict. It was a mixture of disappointment and guilt, since getting pregnant at such an advanced age was not without risk.

The conflict was in the difference of opinion between my husband and me. For me, life is a gift from God and my baby needed me to protect him. And as I'd already had five miscarriages, I knew that this pregnancy was risky, but my baby was strong enough to survive it. For my husband, the situation was catastrophic; he was in a state of denial. He refused the truth, refused to accept the pregnancy and, above all, refused to face up to his family and social environment and what people would say. He dreaded the repercussions on our family and was afraid of the future.

At fourteen weeks, an amniocentesis for karyotyping was carried out, certifying the diagnosis that our baby was a boy with trisomy 21. An ultrasound scan also showed a significant heart defect. And the gynecologist told us that he has a very large hole in his heart. My response was: my God is the greatest! And for the second time, our strong baby faced up to the complications of this puncture, with the risk of termination of the pregnancy, and kept on living. Georges, my husband, started consulting priests and bishops in search of support, explanations and someone to back up his point of view, but obviously none of them took up his cause. Especially as the three gynecologists we consulted were in favor of terminating the pregnancy. So this child won't live, and if he does, he'll be an extra burden on the family and he'll have a lot to suffer. My husband remained undecided until one day I was adamant and told him that we're just passing through this world and these few years that we're going to live, we'll live them according to God's will, according to God's plans. And as the mother of this child and as long as he's inside me, I'm going to protect him until the last moment, even if he's going to be born to live for a few minutes.



My pregnancy was not without complications, I suffered from quite severe gestational diabetes and was able to carry the pregnancy to 36 weeks of gestation. Charbel, our little boy, was born prematurely, but once again this strong, life-affirming baby is here, yet in labor, while waiting for my turn to undergo a C-section, Charbel's heartbeat stopped completely. The alarm went off and I was rushed to the operating room. In the meantime, I was carrying blessed oil from the monastery of our great Saint Charbel - called the doctor of heaven - my little Charbel was named after him. I made a large cross on my belly with this miraculous oil and asked Saint Charbel's intercession to save my child. The gynecologist asked to listen to my heart sounds for the last time before starting the operation, and lo and behold, the miracle! Charbel was alive! His heartbeat resumed.

Charbel remained in neonatal intensive care for twenty-five days. Suffering from jaundice, blood clotting problems and nutritional difficulties. Thanks to family prayers and the prayers from our Team, Charbel was able to overcome all these obstacles. At the age of four months Charbel underwent open-heart surgery. According to the doctors, he was to remain in intensive care for four to five days, but once again things didn't go according to plan, and our baby champion faced several complications and infections that meant he remained in intensive care for twenty-one days. Throughout the period of his hospitalization, the ladies of the rosary group, of which I was a member, came to pray the rosary every day at the hospital for the healing of Charbel, who was between life and death. The result: Charbel survived a high-risk operation. How can we fail to see that Charbel was sent by our Lord and God? He was there to live. He survived through prayer, perseverance and love.

Charbel is now five years old and his father's favorite, and his love for him is infinite. And the father's shame at facing an unknown future with a Down's syndrome child has been transformed into pride in Charbel, the intelligent, cute child full of life and joy. Charbel is the source of love in our family. He is the pillar of the union of all its members who unite to care for and serve him, and above all a way to grow in holiness. Jesus has his own ways of answering our prayers. Charbel is the miracle of our lives.

"Today, bring me the gentle and humble souls, as well as those of little children, and immerse them in my Mercy. They are the ones who most resemble my Heart. They comforted me in my bitter agony. I saw them as earthly angels watching over my altars. Over them I pour torrents of grace. Only a humble soul is capable of receiving my grace. In such souls I place my trust."

(Words of the Lord Jesus to Saint Faustina).

Rita and Georges Khalil



Let's Pray Together With Saint John Chrysostom

"O Lord Jesus Christ, open the eyes of my heart, that I may hear Thy word and understand and do Thy will, for I am a stranger on earth. Do not hide Your commandments from me, but open my eyes, that I may perceive the wonders of Your law. Tell me the hidden and secret things of Your wisdom.

In You I place my hope, O my God, that You may enlighten my mind and understanding with the light of Your knowledge, not only to cherish these things that are written, but to fulfill them; that by reading the lives and words of the saints, I may not sin, but that it may serve for my restoration, illumination and sanctification, for the salvation of my soul, and the inheritance of eternal life. For You are the illumination of those who are in darkness, and from You come every good deed and every gift."

Questions To Share As A Couple

1. Concretely, what place do we give to the Word of God in our daily lives? Are there any new decisions we can embark on together to consolidate our spiritual intimacy with God?
2. What change(s) are we called to in our relationship as a couple, in the light of listening to God's Word?

Questions To Share At The Meeting With Our Core Team

1. Can we share a spiritual experience where God's word must have touched or transformed our hearts, our thoughts, our attitudes, our actions?
2. What impact do the words of *"the world"* have on our lives? How can we remain rooted in trust in God's Word?



Chapter Six:

HEARTS ON FIRE

In this chapter, we journey together to encounter a God who awaits our invitation to enter and remain with us, during the night, in an incomparable intimacy.

"When they approached the village they were going to, he pretended to go further. But they tried to keep him back: 'Stay with us, for it's getting close to evening and the day is already fading. So he went in to stay with them.'" (Luke 24, 28-29)

Now our two travelers seem to have reached their destination. It has been a long journey from Jerusalem to Emmaus. They had decided to leave the place of their great disappointment, the place where death seems to have reigned. They had decided to flee, to get away from the reality that saddens them. Isn't this a familiar experience for each and every one of us? The feeling that we need to flee, to get away when life is hard, weighing on us and we can't bear it any longer? That our disappointment is so great, our dreams shattered, our world turned upside down, then we become so lost not knowing who we are anymore, where we're going, what we're going to do next, what future awaits us... The reaction we might have then would be to run away too, to isolate ourselves, to turn back. Why hasn't Jesus answered this prayer yet? Why am I still in this difficult situation?

On this return journey, Luke the evangelist reminds us that, in Jesus, God is close to mankind and takes part in their history. On our journey through life, the Risen Jesus becomes a fellow traveler. Although he teaches the two disciples at length on the journey to Emmaus, their eyes are still not opened. They're still stuck on the story of the empty tomb and don't believe. In their minds, struggling but unable to understand, it's pitch black. And this night becomes the ideal pretext for holding Jesus back: *"Stay with us, for evening is drawing near and the day is already waning."*

The two disciples urge Jesus to stay at home, perhaps because it's dangerous to travel alone at night - you might run into robbers or be attacked by wild beasts. But when their eyes are opened and they recognize Jesus, they set off for Jerusalem again in the middle of the night! It's clear then that Jesus has reached the disciples, not in the night that falls at the end of the day, but in their night, in the night of their doubts and their reluctance to believe what Scripture announced.



In the night of their doubt and incomprehension, they beg Jesus to stay. Jesus immediately accepts their invitation. He has joined them in what they did not understand, and already something is beginning to change in their hearts. And now he enters to stay with them, he wants to stay with them. And from the moment the disciples are enlightened in their night, night is no longer a problem, and they return to Jerusalem without fear. When Christ comes to enlighten us in our spiritual night, he dispels the fears, the deep-seated fears that dwell in us, and this enables us to tackle the night of life, the night of trials, with the faith that the Lord is with us.

Our spiritual journey can cross "*the night of faith.*"

In the life of every believer, including mystics and saints, a rather special spiritual experience can occur at certain moments in life. The Spanish Carmelite John of the Cross was the first to use the expression "*the dark night of the soul*," also known as the "*night of faith*." A spiritual trial in which God's presence is no longer felt for a certain period of one's life.

It's a paradoxical experience that can happen to all believers, for it's at the very height of faith that the absence of God is experienced. Many mystics and saints have experienced this, such as Thérèse de Lisieux, Marie Noël and Mother Teresa. Their example shows us how "*the Christian life is a struggle*," and also how little we suspect the love of which we are capable and the creative power that is ours and which we must not renounce.

Marie Noël wondered how to cope with the goodness of a Creator God and the existence of evil. She wondered if there wasn't a second God. And she cried out her revolt in her poems.

For Mother Teresa, even the desire to love seemed to disappear. Since leaving her convent to devote her life to the poorest of the poor, she had entered "*the night of presence*." She felt nothing: no feelings, no satisfactions, no sensitivity, no fervor, no desire to pray. All that remained was suffering, "*which she offered as the only possible prayer*."

For Thérèse of Lisieux, it was a profound purification that led to a whole new intimacy with Jesus and the discovery of her "little way" to love Jesus and make him loved.



Jesus' promise:

"I am with you always, to the end of the Age."

Jesus promised us. He will be with us...and this promise was not only addressed to the disciples, but is also valid for us today. What does this promise mean? Is it the assurance of Jesus' presence to comfort and strengthen us in difficult times? Is Jesus promising that we will feel or see his presence, perhaps through answers to prayer or miracles?

In the Old Testament, it's God who makes the promise: *"I will be with you"* to Isaac, Jacob and Moses. And each time, God undertakes to fulfill his promise. His promise to us, through his beloved Son, is to deliver us from the forces of evil and offer us eternal life in the joy of the Father's children. Our path of faith is but a path towards Him in Love. And nothing can separate us from Him or deprive us of the fulfillment of this promise. All we are asked to do is open ourselves to his presence.

And Each Of Us Today...

Called To Urge Jesus To Stay.

When we go through the night of trials, doubts and spiritual lukewarmness...faced with questions that are too painful, and the path of faith becomes a long, uncertain road where we see nothing and understand nothing, we are tempted to withdraw into ourselves and abandon everything.

When we don't understand, when we are blocked in our faith by a situation, the Gospel exhorts us to call upon the presence of the Risen Lord. It is the Savior's presence that is able to nourish our faith and put an end to our night. To let ourselves be accompanied by the Lord, to ask for his presence, *"Stay with us,"* so that his presence and his word can burn our hearts and illuminate our minds.

Our doubts and sadness can prevent us from understanding God's promises. But even with that, even with our lack of understanding, can we let ourselves be carried away by his simple presence? The two disciples felt something change inside them; they hadn't yet grasped anything, but they had a desire, a heartfelt longing to keep Jesus with them, like someone we're beginning to discover and appreciate and want to get to know better. Jesus agreed to stay and spend the evening with them.



Faith is nourished not just by words, but by presence.

Do I take the initiative in inviting the Lord to stay with me? In moments of prayer, oraison, meditation, adoration of the Blessed Sacrament... I let my heart desire and claim his presence. I learn with the disciples of Emmaus to invite him, to express my desire not to isolate myself, but to open myself to his mysterious presence, even in the night of trials, even in the night of faith. If I'm so incapable of understanding, of feeling his presence and intervention in my life...that doesn't stop me from saying to him *"Stay Lord..."*

Fill my emptiness with your presence, my darkness with your light.

Stay with us...this is the prayer of the Emmaus disciples

The itinerary of the two disciples offers us a model and a consolation to help us discover the presence of God who walks and stays with us. A great-grandmother used to say to her priest grandson: *"When you love someone, all you have to do is repeat simple words to them...all you have to do is ask God and his saints to stay with us."* Such was a grandmother's wisdom in prayer.

This text from Emmaus reassures us with the discovery of the first prayer uttered by these two disciples: Stay with us, Lord. We can make it our own. We are called to repeat this biblical prayer, so simple and profound, which became a prayer of the early Church.

And Our Married Life

In our teams, we receive the grace of being together to recharge our batteries and affirm that marriage, if we give ourselves the means, is a path to happiness and growth in faith. Called to daily prayer, to closeness to the Lord through regular Bible reading, if possible together, we ask the Lord to stay with us.

His presence with us does not exclude problems, moments of weariness and discouragement. Holiness is not permanent success, nor is it free from temptation. The confidences of revered couples such as Louis and Zélie Martin (the parents of Thérèse of Lisieux), Charles and Zita of Habsburg, Frédéric and Amélie Ozanam ...reveal three things to cultivate: learning to love, to serve and to welcome. Pope Francis describes it as *"a path of maturation, where each spouse is an instrument of God to help the other grow. Change, growth, the development of the good potential that each carries within, become possible."*



In "Amoris Laetitia 221," the Pope affirms that every marriage is a story of salvation, and that this presupposes that we start from a fragility which, thanks to God's gift and a creative and generous response, gradually gives way to an ever more solid and beautiful reality. We are called to live an ordinary life in an extraordinary way, drawing on God's word and making room for it between us.

Here are some inspiring words from these couples about married love:

"Our feelings were always in unison" (Saint Zélie Martin)

"Now we have to help each other get to heaven" (Blessed Charles of Austria)

"Earthly life, lived with the constant thought, inspired by God himself, of making the person you love happy. This is what marriage is" (Blessed Maria Quattrocchi).

"Love is the desire to bring relief, consolation, pleasure to the beloved and the constant concern to satisfy their most secret and unimaginable desires" (Blessed Maria Quattrocchi).

"You know, my beloved, that life is a school where God educates Christians: in this school there are laborious, difficult years...but you also know that the Master is good, that the lessons tend only to make us better and more perfect" (Blessed Frédéric Ozanam).

We can reflect personally and as a couple on this excerpt from the book of the Nouwen:

"Jesus is a very interesting person - his words are full of wisdom. His Presence is comforting. His kindness and goodness touch us deeply. His message is full of challenges. But do we invite him into our home? Do we want him to get to know us as we really are, behind the walls of our privacy? Do we want to introduce him to all our loved ones? Do we want him to see us in our everyday lives? Do we want him to touch us in our most vulnerable places? Do we want him to visit the back of our house, the rooms we'd rather keep locked? Do we really want him in our homes when it's getting dark, when the day is drawing to a close?" p. 60



And The World We Live In

Our daily life, in the midst of this world, can seem humble and hidden. Even the love we bear for each other, for our family, can be lived discreetly, silently... While the life of the world seeks propaganda, success, applause, lights, narcissistic affirmations on social networks...

Our Risen Lord calls us to dwell with him, in him, in love, in peace...while the world calls us to hatred and division, to war and destruction, to take sides with some against others.

While our Lord calls us to live charity, the world pushes us towards indifference and individualism.

Where do we stand in the face of what the world has to offer? Do we believe in the value of small gestures that can change the world, change its face, like leaven in the dough?

What Father Caffarel shares with us about prayer, which is an intimacy with God who is always waiting for us.

When we arrive in an unfamiliar city (at the port, station or airport), there's no one there to greet us. On the other hand, if a cheerful face greets us, if hands reach out towards us, we are immediately wonderfully comforted, delivered from the cruel impression of being lost. What does it matter, then, these customs, this language, this whole big, bewildering city? We're fine with being a stranger to everyone, as long as we're a friend to someone.

It was also comforting to discover that our hosts were expecting us. Parents and children don't have to say much for us to guess: their welcome and a certain quality of eagerness are enough. And in our room, these few flowers and this art book (because we know our tastes) complete the picture.

I would like you, dear friend, to always have the strong conviction that you are awaited in prayer: awaited by the Father, by the Son and by the Holy Spirit, awaited in the Trinitarian Family. Remember what Christ said: *"I'm going to prepare a place for you."* You may object that he was talking about heaven. He was. But prayer is heaven, or at least its essential reality: the presence of God, the love of God, God's acceptance of his child.



The Lord is always waiting for us

Better still, no sooner have we taken a few steps than he's already coming to meet us. Remember the parable: *"While he was still a long way off, his father saw him, was moved with compassion, ran to embrace him and kissed him for a long time."* And yet this son had gravely offended his father. Nevertheless, he was eagerly awaited.⁵

What Pope Francis Shares With Us

Indeed, if the God of heaven is near, we are not alone on earth, and even in difficulties, we do not lose confidence. Here's the first thing to tell people: God is not distant, he is Father. God is not far away, he is Father, he knows you and loves you; he wants to hold you by the hand, even when you take steep and uneven paths, even when you fall and find it hard to get up and get back on your feet; He, the Lord, is there with you. What's more, when you're weaker, you can often feel his presence more strongly. He knows the way, He is with you, He is your Father! He is my Father! He is our Father!

Let's stay with this image, because to announce that God is near is to invite us to think of ourselves as a child who walks holding his father's hand: everything appears different. The world, large and mysterious, becomes familiar and safe, because the child knows he is protected. He's not afraid, and he learns to open up.

Announcing that God is near. But how do we do it? In the Gospel, Jesus recommends not saying many words, but making many gestures of love and hope in the name of the Lord; not saying many words, but making gestures...

So let's ask ourselves a few questions: do we who believe in a God who is close to us have confidence in Him? Do we know how to look to the future with confidence, like a child who knows he's being carried in his father's arms? Do we know how to sit on the Father's lap through prayer, by listening to the Word, by approaching the sacraments? And finally, closely united to Him, do we know how to breathe courage into others, how to draw closer to those who suffer and feel alone, to those who are far away and even to those who are hostile to us? This is the concrete aspect of faith, and this is what counts.

⁵ Henri Caffarel, *In the presence of God. A hundred letters on prayer*, n°1 Vous êtes attendu



Testimony of Father Louis de Raynal, CS France:

"For 5 years, and until last year, I carried out a wonderful mission within Teams of Our Lady: spiritual advisor to the team responsible for the France-Luxembourg-Switzerland Super Region. At all our monthly meetings in Paris, we began the morning with prayer: half an hour of oraison and shared prayer. I can sincerely testify that this was the source of our unity and joy. Prayer put us in the fundamental attitude of listening to God and his Word, the basis of all discernment. Praying together was a great way to meet in depth, to forge a common soul, to become aware of Christ's presence in our midst. And by celebrating the Eucharist, we became the Body of Christ. In our team, we also took the time to get to know each other. We took advantage of certain meals to share the past month's events, joys and sorrows, family, professional and ecclesial concerns. We also experienced moments of celebration and gratitude. At the national gatherings we organized, participants were able to perceive the fraternal communion and enthusiasm that animated us. But sometimes, the joy and peace were more hidden... because we were a little stressed, relying too much on ourselves and not enough on the Lord."

Slowing Down

Pope Francis has several times repeated this parable-like phrase: *"The shepherd walks in front of the flock to give direction; he walks behind the flock to encourage the weaker ones, and to watch over the sheep that might stray; and he walks in the midst of the flock because he is one with it and it is good for the shepherd to have the scent of the flock."* Synodality means learning to walk in step with the weakest. On several occasions, I've taken part in the diocesan pilgrimage to Lourdes. The Eucharistic procession held every afternoon at the shrine left a deep impression on me. Pilgrims of all nationalities, young and old, rich and poor, we all walk at the same pace. But who sets the pace? It's our sick brothers and sisters carried on stretchers or pushed in wheelchairs. And in the midst of all these gathered people, the Lord is present in the Sacred Host. A beautiful image of communion in the Church!

Learning to *"slow down"* comes naturally to families. In our world, which claims to be strong and efficient, I'm always touched when I meet families: parents who adapt to the rhythm of their young children, mothers who take the time to stop and feed their babies, elders who take care of the youngest, families who, when welcoming a disabled child, know how to take slow steps and free time. A whole rhythm to be taken up in a myriad of small daily gestures... By giving priority to love for the little one and unconditionally welcoming the unexpected, the family is a model of the care that society as a whole should provide for



fragile people. In the ninth chapter of *Amoris Laetitia*, dedicated to the spirituality of marriage and the family, Pope Francis calls it a *"spirituality of care, consolation and encouragement"*. The family, he says, *"has always been the closest 'hospital'"* (AL 321). According to Father Henri Caffarel, the practice of hospitality is the specific apostolate of the couple and the family. Through their hospitality and witness, *"Christian couples paint the gray of public space, filling it with the color of fraternity, social sensitivity, defense of the fragile, luminous faith and active hope"* (AL 184).

Spiritual Guidance

In Teams of Our Lady, we have the grace of experiencing true communion between couples united by the sacrament of marriage and priests who are spiritual advisors. Father Caffarel constantly reminded us of the complementarity of the sacraments of Holy Orders and Marriage, *"the two sacraments on which the growth of the Body of Christ rests"*. This complementarity translates into human and fraternal bonds. Everyone finds joy in sharing successes, encouragement to persevere, compassion and comfort in difficulties. It's a two-way street. We are guardians of each other's treasures. As couples share with me the riches and difficulties of their spiritual journey, I also share with them the wonders and trials of my priesthood. In sharing the life of the team, I am with them, a father by the grace of the sacrament of Holy Orders, and at the same time a brother among brothers. For me, the team is an important place of sharing, support, balance and humanization.

The charism of Teams of Our Lady is a pedagogy of spiritual growth, helping couples to draw on the treasure of grace of their sacrament of marriage. In 1981, Father Henri Caffarel wrote: *"For years, I've struggled to better understand the sacrament of marriage. I said, and I repeat now more than ever: it's the covenant of Christ and the home. This treasure can be defined as a covenant, that is, a journey with Christ to love, personally and as a couple, and to bear much fruit. The desire to grow is essential. At the service of this growth are priests, spiritual advisors and spiritual guides. Father Ricardo, who is completing his term as spiritual advisor to the international leadership team, said to the priests spiritual advisors and spiritual guides of the teams 6 years ago at the start of his mission: "We have been invited to accompany, animate and serve the couples in our teams, and the Lord's grace strengthens our availability. May we be true witnesses of God's love, and walkers who share the demands of a Movement of which we are a part, and which offers us the means to sanctify ourselves and live out our ministry." "*



Married couples, priests, deacons, religious or lay people, each with our strengths and weaknesses, we're all part of one big family. As Pope Francis invites us, let's learn to walk together towards holiness: *"Let's keep walking, families, let's keep walking! What is promised to us is always more. Let us not despair because of our limitations, but neither let us give up seeking the fullness of love and communion that has been promised to us."* (AL 325). Isn't this what synodality is all about: bearing witness, all together and each with his or her own grace, that *"God is Love"* (1 Jn 4:8)?

Father Louis de Raynal

Prayer

Stay with us, Lord! Like the two disciples in the Gospel, we implore you, Lord Jesus: stay with us! You, divine Traveler, expert of our roads and connoisseur of our hearts, do not leave us prisoners of the evening shadows.

Sustain us in our weariness, forgive our sins, guide our steps on the path of goodness.

Bless children, young people, the elderly, families, especially the sick. Bless priests and consecrated persons. Bless all humanity.

In the Eucharist, you made yourself the "remedy of immortality": give us the taste of a life lived to the full, enabling us to walk this earth as confident and joyful pilgrims, always aiming for the life that has no end.

Stay with us, Lord! Stay with us!

(Opening Mass for the Year of the Eucharist, St Peter's Basilica, Rome, October 17, 2004)



Questions To Share As A Couple

1. "*Stay with us, Lord,*" in what circumstances in our married life can we say this prayer today?
2. In what ways can we be inspired by the words quoted from revered couples (mentioned in the text). In what ways do we cultivate our married love?

Questions To Share

At The Meeting With Our Core Team

1. Can we share an experience where we called on the Lord to stay with us? What relief or consolation did we receive?
2. What aspect of prayer does Father Caffarel evoke in me today? Is there a change in the way I live prayer? Which change?



Chapter Seven:

WELCOMING THE BROKEN BREAD

In this chapter, we discover that the pinnacle of our individual and couple spiritual journey is in the encounter with God and union with him in the mystery of the Eucharist.

"When he was at table with them, he took the bread, pronounced the blessing, broke it and gave it to them. Then their eyes were opened and they recognized him, but he disappeared from their sight. And they said to each other, Were not our hearts burning within us as he spoke to us on the road and opened the Scriptures to us?" (Luke 24, 30-32)

We hope that what happened to the disciples on the road to Emmaus can happen to each and every one of us. This passage from *"fugitives"* to *"pilgrims"* where God has become a fellow traveler (perceived as a stranger or unknown at first) who, through his words, gives them back the Spirit to understand and opens their hearts to welcome. "Stay with us" they tell him, they have trusted him enough to let him into their intimacy. And Jesus enters their home. But there, he who is supposed to be the guest, becomes the host himself, and they are led into the inner life of their host.

Breaking bread: the origin of the gesture

Breaking bread is not a gesture invented by Jesus, but a ritual that was part of Jewish tradition. This gesture was performed by the father of the family at all religious meals on Sabbaths and feast days, and especially at Passover, when the bread cake is unleavened.

Another Jewish ritual also contains a gesture of sharing: the communion sacrifices, of which the Passover sacrifice is a part. This is a religious act in two stages: the first in the Temple, where the lamb is sacrificed and shared, and the second at home, where the family's share of the lamb is eaten (the blood being God's share and the right thigh the priest's share). This is communion between the three: God, the priest and the family, eating the same meal as guests at the same table. Jesus then takes up this gesture at the Last Supper, and gives it a Christian meaning, a Christ-like meaning, saying "You shall do this in memory of me."



It happens every day in our homes too

Without the bread that is taken, blessed, broken and shared, there is no table fellowship, no bonds of friendship, no peace, no love, no hope. And yet, with Him, this simple, ordinary gesture becomes so different. Because with Him, everything can become new, everything is renewed.

We're all familiar with the desire to bring our best to the table. We say, *"Eat and drink, I have prepared this meal for you. Have some more, it's here for you to feast on, to give you strength, so you can feel how much I love you."* Deep down, what we want is much more than to give food, it's to give a little of ourselves.

In the Eucharist, Jesus gives all he possesses, he gives himself.

The bread is not only a sign of his desire to become our food, the cup is not only a sign of his will to become our drink. The bread and wine become his body and blood through the gift. The bread is truly his body given up for us; the wine is his blood poured out for us. As God becomes fully present to us in Jesus, so Jesus becomes fully present to us in the bread and wine of the Eucharist. The Incarnation and the Eucharist are two expressions of the immense, gratuitous love of a God who holds nothing back for himself, but gives everything, gives himself completely.

The mystery of communion with God

The word that best describes this mystery of God's total self-giving out of love is *"communion."* The sacrifice of the cross and the sacrifice at the table are one and the same, God's complete gift of himself, reaching out to all humanity in time and space.

In and through Jesus, God wants not only to teach, instruct or inspire us, but to become one with us. God wants to unite Himself completely with us, so that His whole being and ours can be bound together in eternal love. The long history of God's relationship with humanity is one of ever-closer communion. A history in which God is constantly seeking new ways to commune intimately with those he has created in his image.



And Each Of Us Today

God seeks communion with each and every one of us: a vital, living unity, a fully shared intimacy, a truly mutual bond. Nothing forced or imposed, but a communion freely offered and freely accepted. God will stop at nothing to make this communion possible.

Communion is what God wants...but also what we want. It's a call that comes from the depths of God's heart and our own, for our hearts can only be satisfied by the one who created them. God has deposited in each and every one of us a longing for communion that no one else can or wants to satisfy. God knows this, but we rarely realize it.

St. Augustine says: *"My soul finds no rest until it rests in you, O Lord."* But as I study the meandering story of our own salvation, I realize not only that we desire to belong to God, but that God also desires to belong to us. It's as if God were calling us, saying, *"My heart will not rest until I can rest in you, my beloved creation."* From Adam and Eve to Abraham and Sarah, from Abraham and Sarah to David and Bathsheba, and from David and Bathsheba to Jesus And to us, God implores us to welcome Him into our homes. *"I created you, I gave you all my love, I guided you, I offered you my support, I promised to fulfill all the desires of your hearts: where are you, I am waiting for your answer, where is your love? What more must I do to make you love me? I'll try again, I won't give up. One day you'll discover how much I desire your love!"*

To what extent am I drawn to this divine love? Am I ready to enter into this communion of love?

And Our Married Life

In his apostolic exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, John Paul II explains how love within a couple is strengthened by the Eucharist. After the first years of marriage and the initial excitement that gradually fades, the love between spouses evolves into something deeper. This can be a difficult time for many couples, and it can be tempting to look elsewhere for love. It is precisely at these delicate moments that couples need to nourish their love with the help of the Eucharist. John Paul II writes in this letter:



"The Eucharist is the very source of Christian marriage. The Eucharistic sacrifice represents the covenant of love between Christ and the Church, sealed by the blood of his cross. It is in this sacrifice of the new and eternal Covenant that Christian spouses find the gushing source that inwardly shapes and constantly vivifies their marriage covenant."

Jesus becomes food for us in the Eucharist; this example of sacrifice and desire for intimate communion becomes a model for us to follow. Far from reaching the heights of such love, we are invited to try to reflect it in our own way within our couple.

The Eucharist becomes a source of charity

John Paul II also explains how receiving Jesus in communion can nourish the life of charity in our homes:

"As a representation of Christ's sacrifice of love for the Church, the Eucharist is a source of charity. And in the Eucharistic gift of charity, the Christian family finds the foundation and soul of its 'communion' and 'mission': the Eucharistic Bread makes the various members of the family community one body, a manifestation of and participation in the vast unity of the Church; on the other hand, participation in the 'delivered' Body and 'shed' Blood of Christ becomes for the Christian family an inexhaustible source of missionary and apostolic dynamism."

If Jesus is the source of all love, why not turn to Him to renew love within the couple and the family? Saint Paul had already made a perfect link between married love and the love incarnated by Jesus. In his letter to the Ephesians, his words remind us that we must love one another as Christ loves us, with the love so clearly manifested by Him in the Eucharist: *"You men, love your wives after the example of Christ: he loved the Church, and gave himself up for her."* (Eph 5:25)

Blessed Pier Giorgio Frassati wrote in his letter of July 29, 1923: *"I urge you with all the strength of my soul to approach the Eucharistic Table as often as possible. Because Jesus Christ promised eternal life and the graces necessary to obtain it to those who feed on it."* Let us be carried away by these words and dare to approach the living source that will rekindle our love at every moment. Let us be confident that if we offer our married love with humble hearts, with all our imperfections and limitations, this source will be able to give us new life and dynamism.

Let's dare to kneel before the Blessed Sacrament together. Let us dare to place before it our whole life as a couple, as a family, with all its joys and sorrows. That's where we'll receive all the graces. Let us come



together for communion, where we will be united in a single body. *"What do those who receive communion become? The body of Christ: they are not many bodies, but one. Thus are we united with one another and with Chris."* (Homily 21 on 1 Cor 10:16-17)

And The World We Live In

"They recognized him...then he became invisible to them." At the very moment they recognize him in the breaking of the bread, he is no longer in their midst; they no longer see him seated at table. When he becomes most present to them, precisely because they have recognized him, he becomes absent. Here we touch on one of the most sacred aspects of the Eucharist: the mystery by which the most intimate communion with Jesus takes place in his absence.

Previously, they had been with him for a long time in his preaching, and he had become their guide and teacher. They had stayed with him, sat at his feet, witnessed his works and teachings, believed they knew him... But they had not yet fully entered into communion with him. His body and blood had not yet united with theirs. In many ways, he remained the other, outside them, the one who walks before them to show them the way.

Now, as they eat the bread he offers them and recognize him, this recognition becomes a spiritual awareness that he now resides deep within their being, that he breathes within them, that he speaks through their mouths, that he lives within them. When they eat the bread he offers them, their lives are transformed into his. It is no longer they who live, but Jesus, the Risen Christ, who lives in them. And it is at this most sacred moment of communion that he disappears from their sight.

This is what we experience in the celebration of the Eucharist. It's also what we experience when our lives become Eucharistic in the midst of the world. And our presence in the world becomes his presence, through us. His hands can work in the world through ours. Our words will reflect his words, our gestures of love and solidarity, justice and fraternity will speak of Him.

Being in communion with Jesus means becoming like him. He is our model, the only one in whom we can place our trust and hope in the face of the examples set before us by the world. With him we are nailed to the cross, with him we are buried, with him we are resurrected. Being in communion, becoming like Christ, leads us to a new way of being. New witnesses, builders of a new world.



What Father Caffarel shares with us about marriage and the Eucharist.

"Whoever eats my flesh and drinks my blood abides in me and I in him. As I, who am sent by the living Father, live because of the Father, so he who eats me will also live because of me." (John 6:57)

When we read this extraordinary page, how can we fail to sense the exceptional greatness of the marriage of two Christians? Husband and wife, you who eat the flesh of Christ, who dwell in him, and he in you, how can you not love one another with a love quite different from that of other men, a love that has risen from the dead? Can you look at each other, share your sorrows and joys, give yourselves to each other with all your heart, with all your body, help each other all the way, without feeling that you are living a great mystery?

(Père Caffarel, "Mariage et Eucharistie", L'anneau d'or, n°117-118, "Le mariage, route vers Dieu", May-August 1964)

What Pope Francis shares with us about the transformative effect of the Eucharist

(In his prayer intention for July 2023, Pope Francis invites believers to let themselves be transformed by the Eucharist, the source and summit of all Christian life).

"If you leave Mass the same way you came in, something is wrong... the Eucharist is the presence of Jesus. It is profoundly transformative..."

Every time we take part in a Eucharist, Jesus comes and Jesus gives us the strength to love as He has loved. The celebration of the Eucharist is an encounter with the risen Jesus and, at the same time, a way of opening up to the world as He taught us...It gives us the courage to go out and meet others, to step outside ourselves and open up with love to others... Let the Eucharist transform you. Let us pray that Catholics will place at the center of their lives the celebration of the Eucharist, which transforms human relationships and opens the way to an encounter with God and with our brothers and sisters."



Testimonial

We met and our relationship developed in the shadow of commitments to the human - all human, such as Red Cross first-aid teams and scouting. Our bond was consolidated around a belief in sublime principles and values such as good, clean, unselfish friendships, altruistic devotion, unconditional support for family, and God's gratuitousness in nature and people of good will. We married rather young, and so founded our family on a three-way marriage with Jesus as rock and integral partner in our marriage. We dreamed big.

We had read many guide books on the subject, consulted wise friends, scout sponsors and chaplain advisors, and decided from the outset that this journey, this love, which seemed enormously impressive to us, could never be realized without His presence at the heart of our couple and our family. We were aware that marriage was heavy on our novice shoulders. So, little by little, we surrounded ourselves with good, solid, reliable support, our activities converging to be above all useful, constructive and enjoyable in close accord with our values. We've lightened the load of toxicity and futility. *"If you miss the road, make it,"* this Scout expression from the Road Departure Ceremony became our watchword for going from walkers on a road to pilgrims on the road that leads to God, our ideal.

The Lord's graces were abundant. Our children, our greatest joy, grew in health, wisdom and faith. Our home became a house of welcome for Jesus through the guest. Our hexagonal kitchen table became the privileged place for cordial encounters, intense exchanges and warm friendships. In keeping with local custom, as old as the Canaanite man in this part of the world, as long as there is no *"bread and salt"* shared, there is no true friendship, sealed around a generous and hospitable family meal. In fact, the Lebanese tradition of sharing bread is a symbol of openness, conviviality and trust - just as much as the embrace and the three kisses (the Trinity!) on the cheeks, symbolizing that it's Christ we're receiving. Finally, as a habit inherited from our parents, we often keep an extra place setting for the *"impromptu"* guest who will join us and bless our bread.

However, not everything turned out as we had hoped. As with the graces, life's upheavals and devastating trials and sufferings were not uncommon. The members of our Team and the solid friendships forged ahead of the upheavals were a vital support. Meditation on Padre Pio's prayer *"Stay with me, Lord Jesus"* and the vision of St. Veronica clinging to Christ's habit (Mat 9:20-22; Mk 5:25-34; Lk 8:43-49) always gave us the faith and courage to get up and keep going. Even in the many *"without"* moments: without love, without joy... Where to go? To whom to turn, our hearts were not in it. We sought



His presence in the midst of our periods of discouragement, uncertainty and loss of meaning. In the evenings, curled up, we would visualize ourselves snuggled up against Mary, wrapped in her reassuring, protective garment, and she would introduce us to her Son, and only then would we feel His presence. Together, with Mary and thanks to the Lord, we held on.

Now, as we approach our golden years, though still very active, we hope that at the end of our journey here, we can present to Him our unshaken faith in His promise, and the faithfulness of our beginnings.

Rita and Youssef Zgheib



Prayer (Saint John Chrysostom)

"Deign, O Son of God, to admit me this day to Thy Holy Supper!" :

"I believe Lord and confess that You are truly Jesus Christ, the Son of the living God come into the world to save the guilty, of whom I am the first. I still believe that this is Your Most Pure Body and Your Most Venerated Blood, so I beg You, have mercy on me and forgive my voluntary or involuntary sins, which I have committed in word and deed, thoughtfully or thoughtlessly, and grant me the Grace to receive Your Blessed Sacrament worthily, for the remission of my sins and for Eternal Life. Deign, O Son of God, to admit me this day to Your Holy Supper! I will not betray You before Your enemies, nor give You the kiss of Judas, but I say to You like the thief on the cross: Lord, remember me in Your eternal Kingdom!"

Questions To Share As A Couple

1. What place do we give to the Eucharist (mass, adoration) in our lives as a couple, as a family?
2. What understanding do we now have, after reading this chapter, of the mystery of communion?

Questions To Share

At The Meeting With Our Core Team

1. Saint Charles de Foucauld often meditates on the presence of Christ in the Eucharist, but also in every person I meet...
2. Are we able to see, through the eyes of faith, the Christ who dwells in my spouse?
How does this change my behavior and attitude toward him/her?
What are our needs, our proposals for growing together and supporting each other in deepening our relationship with the Eucharist?
(At the level of each couple and at the level of the whole team as a small community)



Chapter Eight:

AT THE HEART OF OUR TEAMS, AT THE HEART OF THE CHURCH

In this chapter, we discover the joy of journeying together in our teams, as disciples, and seeing ourselves transformed into missionaries of Love at the heart of our Church.

"Immediately they arose and returned to Jerusalem. There they found the eleven apostles and their companions gathered together, who told them: the Lord is truly risen; he has appeared to Simon Peter. They in turn told what had happened on the road, and how the Lord had been recognized by them in the breaking of bread." (Luke 24: 33- 35)

We've come to the final theme of our journey with the disciples of Emmaus. Each theme has marked out a stage in our own journey of faith. A journey of personal and couple deepening to help us live out our faith today, illuminated by the wonderful experience of these two disciples that has inspired the faithful for generations.

Just now... There's no time to lose. We can imagine them. They quickly put on their sandals, put on their cloaks, take their staffs and return to the other disciples. They need to know that there's more to come. That the women who recounted the words of the angels spoke the truth.

Everything has changed: losses no longer feel like failures. The two travelers who began their journey with downcast faces now look at each other with eyes full of new light. The stranger who has become their friend has given them his spirit, a divine spirit of joy, peace, courage, hope and love. There's no longer any doubt in their minds: He's alive! Not alive as before, like the fascinating preacher and healer from Nazareth, but alive as a new breath within them. Cleopas and his friend are renewed. They have received a new heart, a new spirit. Their friendship itself has been transformed. They are no longer friends who can console and comfort each other while mourning their losses, but people charged with a new mission. Together, they have something to say, something important, something urgent, something that cannot remain secret, something that must be proclaimed.



What's the difference between returning home... and returning to Jerusalem?

It's the difference between doubt and faith, between despair and hope, between fear and love. It's the difference between two downcast human beings shuffling along the road and two friends striding, sometimes running, excited to share the news. The former was done during the day, but in inner darkness, whereas the latter is done at night, despite bodily fatigue, but enlightened by the power of the grace that has been bestowed upon them. What's more, this return is not without danger. After Jesus is put to death, his disciples are afraid. They wondered what fate awaited them, but now they were freed to bear witness to the resurrection, despite the costs involved. They realize that the same people who hated Jesus may hate them back, that the same people who killed Jesus may kill them. Their return may indeed cost them their lives. They may be asked to bear witness, not just with their words, but with their own blood. But they are no longer afraid, not even of martyrdom. The Risen Lord, alive and present in them, has filled them with a love stronger than death.

Between the Eucharistic celebration and a Eucharistic life

In the previous chapter, we meditated on the broken bread and the profound meaning of communion: that sacred intimacy with Jesus and, through him, with God himself. But recognizing Jesus in the Sacred Host is not just a moment to be savored or kept secret. The Eucharist ends with a missionary call. *"Go and bear witness now."* Like Mary of Magdala, these two friends have also heard this call in the depths of their being. Go and bear witness: it's the Eucharistic conclusion, it's also the final call of a Eucharistic life: *"Go and bear witness to what you have seen and heard, don't keep it to yourselves. This message is for your brothers and sisters and for all those who are ready to hear it. Go, don't stop, don't wait, don't hesitate, but take action..."*



And Each Of Us Today ...

Called To A Eucharistic Life

This is where the story of Cleopas and his friend ends, as they recount their testimony to the Eleven and their companions. But the mission continues. The story of what happened on the road and around the table marks the beginning of a missionary life lived every day of our lives until the day we see the Living Christ face to face.

It's a movement that flows from the Eucharist, from communion to community to ministry. Our experience of communion first sends us out to our brothers and sisters to share our stories and build a relationship of love. Then, as a community, we can go out in all directions to reach people.

On a mission first and foremost to those closest to us

It's important to realize that this mission is, first and foremost, directed towards those who are not strangers to us: our loved ones, our family, our friends...those who are part of our lives. In one way or another, the authenticity of our witness is put to the test by the people who know us. They may know our impatience, our resentments, our jealousies, our shortcomings, all our pettiness...

On a mission, it's not just about me

Jesus chooses many ways to appear and let us know that he is alive. He touches everyone's heart in a different way, so unique and mysterious. When the two disciples arrived in Jerusalem and told their story, they had to listen to the stories of many others. We have our stories to tell, and it's important to tell them, but our testimony is not unique. We have our mission to fulfill, but we must also listen to what others have to say. This brings us back to community.

The two disciples were able to speak together from their burning hearts, and in so doing, they entered into a new kind of relationship with each other, based on the communion they had just experienced. Their communion with Jesus was indeed the beginning of community. But it was only the beginning. They



needed to meet other people who also believed that Jesus had risen...they needed to listen to their stories, each one different from the next, to discover the many ways in which Jesus and his Spirit acted in the midst of his people.

It's so easy to bring Jesus back to "our Jesus," to our experience of his love, to our way of knowing him. But Jesus left us to send us his Spirit, and it blows where it will. The believing community is the place where many stories are told about how Jesus is present. All these testimonies can be very different from one another. They may even seem to contradict each other at times...and yet we can gradually discover that we belong to the same community, members of a single body united by the spirit of Jesus.

And Our Married Life

"I call couples to mission. They are often in the best position to announce Jesus Christ. I invite couples to become more involved, in concrete and creative ways," says Pope Francis (10/9/2015).

Charles de Foucauld, a missionary in the Algerian Sahara, writes in one of his letters to a friend (Assekrem, May 3, 1912):

"Surely, alongside priests, we need Priscillas and Aquillas, seeing those whom the priest does not see, penetrating where he cannot penetrate, going to those who shun him, evangelizing by a beneficent touch, a kindness overflowing on all, an affection always ready to give itself, a good example attracting those who turn their backs on the priest and are hostile to him from bias." Are we fully aware that Our Lord is counting on us to be missionaries of his Love within this world?

Our conjugal love, nourished by the inexhaustible source of His Love, offers love for our children, our families, our loved ones ... and spreads its wings to reach all those we cross on our paths.

A tendency to move from communion to ministry without going through the community.



We have this tendency to isolate ourselves in a certain form of self-sufficiency where our individualism and desire for personal success lead us to act alone and claim for ourselves alone the task of exercising our ministry. Yet even Jesus was not alone in preaching and healing. The evangelist Luke tells us how he spent his nights in communion with God, his mornings forming community with the twelve apostles and his afternoons going with them to preach to the crowds. Jesus calls us to do the same: to move, in order, from communion to community to ministry. He doesn't want us to act alone. So we can bear witness as members of the believing community. We are called to mission to bear witness, to serve, to offer hope to the world, not as the fruit of our own talents, but as the expression of our faith in the one who has brought us together, from whom comes all we can give.

And The World We Live In

The mystery of God's love is that our burning hearts, our attentive ears and eyes will be able to discover that the one we have met in the intimacy of our homes continues to reveal himself to us among the poor, the sick, the hungry, the prisoners, the refugees and all those who live in fear. Our hope is founded and God is alive.

We are led to realize that our mission is not only to spread the Good News of the Risen Lord, but also to receive the witness of those to whom we are sent. Mission is not just about giving, but about receiving. If it's true that the Spirit of Jesus blows where it wills, each person can share it with others. We receive as much as we give. We care for others as others care for us. It's the Spirit of God, the Spirit of Love, who hides in the poor, the desperate, the suffering. *"Blessed are the poor, the persecuted and those who mourn,"* Jesus says. Every time we take care of them, in turn, consciously or unconsciously, they will bless us with the Spirit of Jesus and thus become our pastors.

This is the reciprocity of giving and receiving, without which mission and ministry can easily become manipulative or violent: When only one gives and the other receives, the giver is quickly transformed into an oppressor and the receiver into a victim. This reciprocity is what people living a Eucharistic life experience. Choosing gratitude over resentment, hope over despair. Statistics in terms of the number of changes brought about are irrelevant. Jesus and his disciples were never very successful. What matters is that there are souls, people who gather around the table, repeating the gestures of our Lord, in memory of him, and who never stop sharing stories of hope... Such is a Eucharistic life, so small, so unspectacular, so hidden, but it is like leaven, like a mustard seed ... that will sanctify the world.



What Father Caffarel shares with us about

"The apostolate outside the home"

"...This charity, this "communion in charity" that Christ brings about in the home, must be radiated by the home, so that it becomes a worker for unity where it lives, and establishes this communion in the environments where it is providentially placed. Very often their efforts to bring about unity will be on a merely human level; but let them be well aware that this human unity is already the beginning of a higher unity... But the apostolate is not only a witness and a radiance, it is also a task. There are apostolic activities that husband and wife can undertake and pursue together. Some even require the dedication of both: training fiancés, welcoming catechumens, helping young couples, assisting broken homes...I'd be remiss if I didn't mention those couples who go off to the new Christendom, alongside missionaries. There, more than anywhere else, it is necessary, in the words of John XXIII to the pilgrims of the Teams of Our Lady, that Christian homes, by their lives, proclaim, illustrate and make accessible to all what priests teach by their words, and in particular the greatness and demands of Christian marriage.

It goes without saying that not every home has such a vocation, and that in many cases, husband and wife are unable to work together in the apostolate. For the very good reason that they don't spend their days in the same environment. No matter! The essential thing is not that they are always physically, but morally together... What Saint Paul said of Aquila and Priscilla's home: *"my helpers in the apostolate,"* Christ must be able to say of every Christian couple.

(Extracts from a lecture by Father Caffarel which appeared in a special edition of "L'Anneau d'Or", May-August 1962)



What Pope Francis shares with us about the mission of families

(Excerpt from his letter to spouses on the occasion of the "Amoris Laetitia" family year, January 2021)

"... awareness of the identity and mission of lay people in the Church and in society has grown. Your mission is to transform society through your presence in the world of work, and to ensure that the needs of families are taken into account. Spouses must also take the initiative - within the parish and diocesan community with their proposals and creativity, seeking the complementarity of charisms and vocations as an expression of ecclesial communion; in particular, the communion of 'spouses alongside pastors, to walk with other families, to help the weakest, to announce that, even in difficulties, Christ makes himself present' [3].

This is why I urge you, dear spouses, to take part in the life of the Church, particularly in family ministry. Indeed, 'co-responsibility for mission calls spouses and ordained ministers, especially bishops, to cooperate fruitfully in caring for and safeguarding the domestic Churches' [4]. Remember that the family is 'the fundamental cell of society' (Apostolic Exhortation Evangelii Gaudium, n. 66). Marriage is truly a project for building the "culture of encounter" (Enc. Fratelli tutti, n. 216). This is why families are called upon to build bridges between generations, to pass on the values that build humanity. In the face of today's challenges, a new creativity is needed to express the values that constitute us as a people in our societies and in the Church, the People of God.

The vocation to marriage is a call to steer an unstable boat - but a safe one, thanks to the reality of the sacrament - on a sometimes turbulent sea. How many times, like the apostles, have you felt like saying, or rather, crying out: "Master, we are lost; do you mind?" (Mk 4:38).

Let's not forget that, through the sacrament of marriage, Jesus is present in this boat. He takes care of you, he stays with you at all times, through the ups and downs when the boat is tossed by the waters. In another Gospel passage, in the midst of difficulties, the disciples see Jesus approaching in the storm, and they welcome him into their boat. So you too, when the storm rages, let Jesus into your boat, for when "he went up with them, the wind fell away" (Mk 6:51). I



It's important that together you keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. Only in this way will you find peace, overcome conflicts and find solutions to many of your problems. They won't disappear, but you'll be able to see them in a different light.

Only by surrendering yourself into the Lord's hands can you live what seems impossible. It's about recognizing your fragility and the powerlessness you feel in the face of the situations around you, in the certainty that Christ's strength is manifested in your weakness (cf. 2 Cor 12:9). It was in the midst of a storm that the apostles were able to discover Jesus' kingship and divinity, and learned to trust him."

Testimonial

We've been married for 36 years, and have been involved in church and parish work for 24 years.

We were responsible for family committees, and were very active in various parish activities such as preparing children for First Communion and preparing engaged couples for marriage at diocesan level...

In 2019-2020, during the Covid pandemic, a new priest for our parish has been appointed with a new team at his side.

We were surprised by the decision to change the priest with whom we got on well, as well as by the end of all our responsibilities in the parish. A feeling of injustice, incomprehension and sadness overcame us, affecting our motivation and commitment to the church.

After a number of difficulties and trials, a priest friend introduced us to Teams of Our Lady movement and its missions. He explained that they could help us find a family and parish activities that would meet our expectations.

We researched the movement, and after three months were able to attend a public information meeting about Teams in a parish far from our home.

In 2021, we finally succeeded in joining a team that had been involved in the movement for 30 years, following a rapid steering approach on the part of the Teams Information Couple.

On a personal level, we were still affected by what happened in our parish.

Since we became members of Teams and during our meetings with this team, we have shared our difficulties and our lack of understanding of the subject of our parish problem.



Our Team members reminded us of the importance of forgiveness and love, and motivated us to be messengers of peace by building our own personal journey.

The Team's Spiritual Advisor reminded us that it might be time to take care of our family, our married life, and to work and devote ourselves to conjugal spirituality instead of serving in the parish.

Day after day, we were able to find a sense of inner peace that we had lost for some time.

In November 2023, as we prepared for the Christmas season, we shared at our monthly Team meeting that we were ready to put this difficult stage behind us, and focus on the blessing of the present moment and move towards the grace of self-abandonment in order to find inner peace.

Our team was very helpful and supportive in our decision to return to our parish, where we belong. For us, Christmas 2023 was a time of grace and a precious moment to return to the home of our Father God.

Today we feel freer and more at peace, thanks to the support of our blessed and wise teammates.

Since we joined Teams of Our Lady, our teammates have constantly encouraged us to forgive and accept our weakness. We had a better understanding of our Christian faith and came back into the arms of the church, which gives us security and peace.

Like the disciples of Emmaus, our closed eyes were opened and we returned to "Jerusalem" through the community in search of prayer and spiritual support.

Today, we feel a deeper faith based on the love of our risen Lord JESUS.

Hélène and Roukoz



Prayer

(With which we address the parents of Saint Thérèse of Lisieux, Louis and Zélie Martin, who lived in full mission in their couple, their family and the church)

"Louis and Zélie Martin, you who in your life as a couple and as parents, gave witness to an exemplary Christian life, through the exercise of your state duty and the practice of the evangelical virtues, we turn to you today.

May the example of your unshakeable trust in God and your constant abandonment to His will, through the joys but also the trials, the bereavements and the suffering that have marked your life, encourage us to persevere in our daily difficulties and to remain in Christian joy and hope.

Intercede for us with the Father, so that we may obtain the graces we need so much today in our earthly life, and that we may attain, like you, eternal bliss. Amen." (Source: Site- Catholique.fr)

Questions To Share As A Couple

1. Are we ready to leave our comfort zones and reach out to others with missionary zeal?
Like Priscilla and Aquila?
2. What new convictions have we received from reading this chapter?

Questions To Share

At The Meeting With Our Core Team

1. As couples, are we aware of the dangers of isolation and self-sufficiency?
Are we ready to open up to a dynamic of deep sharing with the other members of our core team? What are our fears in this respect?
2. We can share with each other experiences, even the most humble ones, where we have been able to live a "Eucharistic life," a missionary experience in reciprocity.
(In the family, in the parish, in our surroundings...)



On The Road To Emmaus

