

THE POPES SPEAKING TO

THE TEAMS

OF OUR LADY

1959 - 2024



Equipes Notre-Dame

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INTRODUCTION

Turin, July 15, 2024

Dear family and friends of the Teams of Our Lady: Together with the International Responsible Team, we would like to give you this book as a gift. It will be an everlasting memory of this XIII International Meeting of the Teams of Our Lady, held this week in this beautiful city of Turin. It gathers together the messages and speeches that the various pontiffs have addressed to us throughout the history of the movement.

In these pages, five successive popes have addressed their pastoral messages to us. These span from Pope John XXIII to Pope Francis, with the exception of John Paul I, whom the movement did not have the opportunity to contact due to his very short pontificate. Each pope has recognized the value of the charism of CONJUGAL SPIRITUALITY, which, lived in the fullness of the graces of the sacrament of marriage, is cultivated, embodied, cared for and spread in the TEAMS OF OUR LADY. We are encouraged to take it to the many couples who do not yet know this good news.

Each message in this previously unpublished compilation gives an insight into the character of each pontiff, but also enables us to take a glimpse at a particular period in the Church and the new post-Vatican Council II focus led by John XXIII and then following his death, by Paul VI. These Popes brought to life a message about the co-responsible role of the laity in the Church.

We have deliberately not succumbed to the temptation of adding our comments to each message, as the content needs nothing more. It is up to each reader to make his or her own comments



after digesting each message, in the context of the life of the movement and the Church at the time. Each person can then draw his or her own conclusions.

This book is timeless for members of teams. It will also help to reveal the spirit that has accompanied the discernment of the various International Responsible Teams when establishing the Orientations of the Movement. These Orientations have been supported by the depth of these messages, the journey of the Church and the changing realities of all kinds in the Church and the world.

We are grateful for the efforts of so many anonymous people who have collaborated in the research, compilation and translation of these texts, especially considering the limited time we have had to include the message from the recent audience granted to us by His Holiness Pope Francis on May 4th.

We hope you enjoy each of these enlightening and inspiring texts as much as we have.

We wish you good reading,

CLARITA Y EDGARDO BERNAL FANDIÑO
International Responsible Couple 2018-2024

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POPE JOHN XXIII

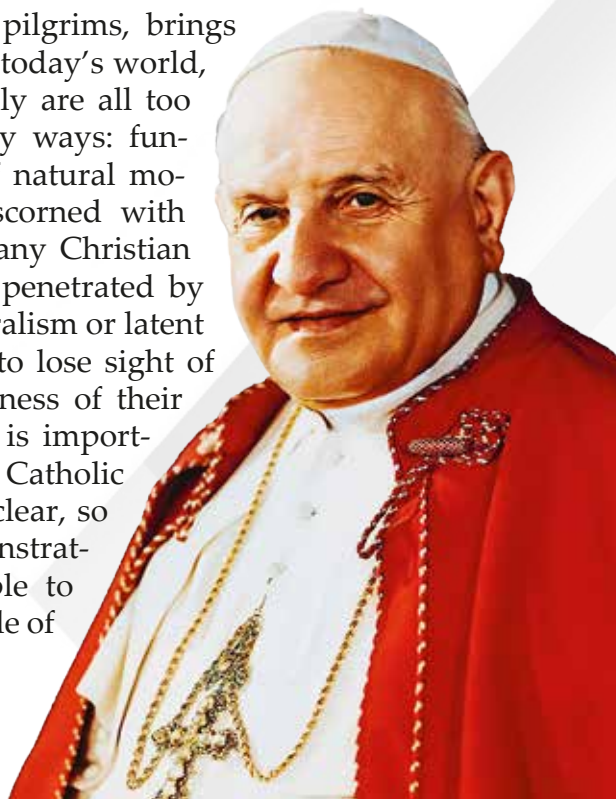
Address to the participants in the pilgrimage to Rome - May 3, 1959.

Dear sons and daughters,

What a joy it is for Us today to welcome your thousand Christian couples, who in Our eyes represent all members of the Teams of Our Lady, as well as the many others who aspire to a profound spiritual life!

After some twenty years of existence, your Movement has now reached an impressive number of couples in several countries. With God's help, the members have firmly resolved to be faithful to the graces of the sacrament of marriage; to their responsibilities as educators; and to their apostolic tasks in the Church and in the community.

Your coming, dear pilgrims, brings Us joy and comfort. In today's world, marriage and the family are all too often attacked in many ways: fundamental principles of natural morality are denied or scorned with impunity; and how many Christian couples are gradually penetrated by an atmosphere of naturalism or latent immorality and come to lose sight of the supernatural greatness of their vocation. Therefore, it is important that in this area, Catholic teaching – so firm, so clear, so rich – should be demonstrated and made accessible to everyone by the example of





fervent Catholics, who strive in their conduct as spouses, fathers and mothers, to be fully faithful to the ideal laid down by the Lord himself!

Like all couples, you are no doubt familiar with the temptations and trials of life. It is precisely to counter these risks and to support your efforts that you have set up your teams. With the advice of a priest, you find precious help in deepening the demands of spiritual life, and in resolving through the light of faith, the problems posed for spouses and parents throughout the different stages of life. You also find comfort in the fraternal friendships in your teams and, when necessary, in the security of mutual material assistance. In this way, you are carrying each other's burdens, and you are generously fulfilling the law of Christ.

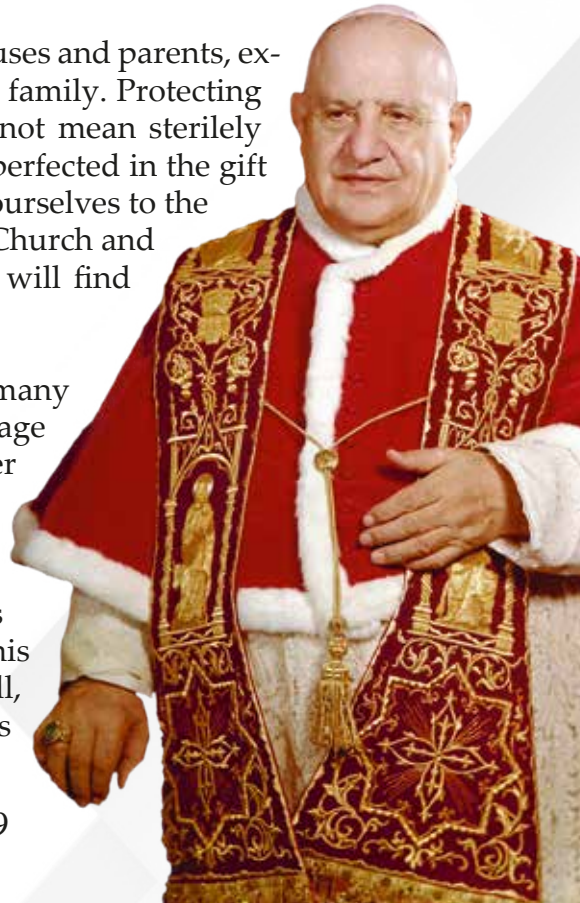
With confidence and humility, may you continue to strive for Christian perfection in your married and family life. While it is true that the state of virginity is, by its very nature, superior to the state of marriage, this statement in no way opposes, as you know, the invitation addressed to all the faithful to be "perfect as the heavenly Father is perfect" (*Mt 5:48*). The very honour paid by the Church to Christian virginity is precious to spouses, for the perfect chastity of consecrated souls is a constant reminder of God's ideal of love, which must, in marriage too, animate and sustain the practice of chastity proper to this state. What richness and what hope for the Church is demonstrated by the growth in the number of Christian couples where spouses want — in the words of your Charter of Life — their mutual love, sanctified by grace and purified by sacrifice, to be a praise to God, a witness before men to the sanctity of marriage and a reparation for the sins committed against it! Dear sons and daughters, this has long been your resolution. You wish to make of this unique and privileged union, the family, a true cell of the Church, where God is honoured, especially through praying together; where his holy law is observed, whatever the cost may sometimes be; where the most precious fruits of the human heart — conjugal love, paternal and maternal love, filial love and fraternal love — blossom harmoniously in charity.



In the mind of the Church, a truly Christian home is the nurturing environment where children's faith grows and flourishes, and where they learn to become not only adults but children of God. On the occasion of this pilgrimage, dear mothers and fathers of families gathered here, you have wanted to express to Us your determination to offer them generously to God, should He one day call them to his service. With absolute respect for the personal vocation of each of them, you attest that it would be an honour and a joy for you to give to the Church the priests and religious men and women it so desperately needs today to respond to the call of souls. We are deeply touched by your gesture, and We thank you from the bottom of Our heart, hoping that your attitude of faith will be an example for many Christian parents. Just as any undue pressure in this respect would be perilous, how precious, and sometimes irreplaceable, is the vigilant delicacy with which a father and mother collaborate, as it were, with God and the Church to encourage the blossoming and growth of this fragile flower of vocation in the child's soul.

Your mission as Christian spouses and parents, extends beyond the confines of the family. Protecting the intimacy of the home does not mean sterilely closing it in on itself. Charity is perfected in the gift of oneself, and it is by devoting ourselves to the tasks incumbent upon us in the Church and in the community, that couples will find their Christian fulfilment.

In the past, and still today in many countries, the population of a village was often counted by the number of homes or "fires", therefore recognising the family unit as the basic active cell of civil society. You owe it to yourselves to show by your attitude that this is also your conviction. Above all, your Movement must help its





members discover and embrace their apostolic responsibilities. By being welcoming, fraternal, and open to the needs of others, the couple is already an authentic apostolate, as shown by its example and by the radiance of its charity. But We also like to know that members of the Teams of Our Lady, animated by a missionary spirit, participate in large numbers in the life of Catholic Action and in the various works approved by the hierarchy. We wholeheartedly encourage this orientation of the Movement, without which it would not fully achieve the objective it has set itself: the formation of true Christian couples.

In conclusion, dear sons and daughters, We are pleased to note that you have placed yourselves under the patronage of Our Lady. It is through her that you wish to go to God. May she keep all your couples pure and charitable! May she lead you to imitate the divine Family of Nazareth, which Our Predecessor, Leo XIII, presented to Christian families as the perfect and complete model of all domestic virtues!

To all of you, dear Pilgrims of the Teams of Our Lady; to all the members of your Movement; to your chaplains; and above all to the one who was the promoter and remains the tireless animator of this Movement for the spiritual formation of couples: We impart with all Our heart, as a pledge of the most abundant divine graces, Our most paternal Apostolic Blessing.

John Paul II

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POPE PAUL VI

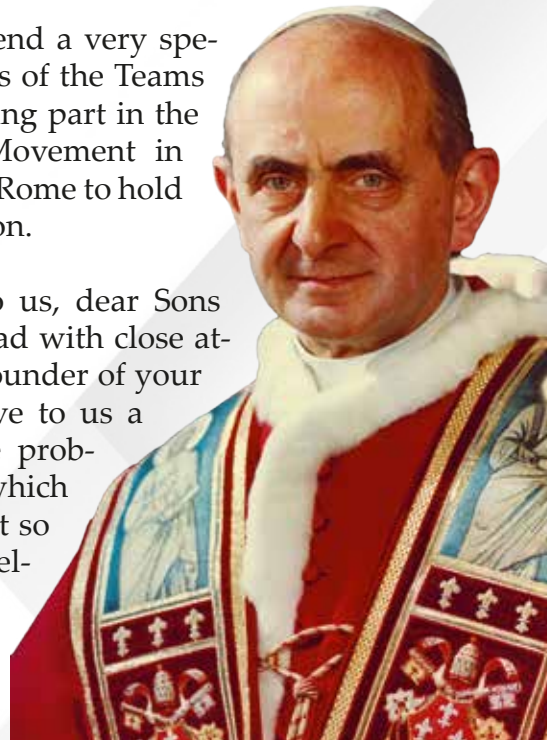
Address at the General Audience of June 9, 1959, in St. Peter's Basilica to the participants of the international formation sessions in Rome, following the meeting at Lourdes in 1965.

INTRODUCTION

After the great gathering of the Teams of Our Lady in Lourdes from 5-7 June 1965, an International Session was held in Rome from 8-12 June. Thirty-eight couples from sixteen countries took part. Paul VI addressed them at the general audience on 9 June in St Peter's Basilica. Referring to his predecessor's welcome, he renewed his encouragement. In addition, he added that this conjugal spirituality, lived by so many couples, was making an invaluable contribution to the renewal of the Church, which was one of the aims of the Council.

We would now like to send a very special greeting to the members of the Teams of Our Lady who, after taking part in the great gathering of their Movement in Lourdes, have now come to Rome to hold an international study session.

You are not strangers to us, dear Sons and Daughters. We have read with close attention a presentation the founder of your Teams, Canon Caffarel, gave to us a few months ago about the problems of family life, a topic which he knows so well. It was not so long ago that you were wel-





came here with particular cordiality by Our late predecessor, John XXIII. We wholeheartedly endorse the encouragement he gave to your Movement and add Our own.

For it is a joy for Us, and a joy for the Church, to see generous spouses (and more and more of them, thanks be to God) discovering and making the most of the treasures of the sacrament that has united them. Far from being frightened, like others, by the requirements of indissolubility and fruitfulness of Christian marriage, you have been able to discern its greatness and beauty. You have decided to be resolutely faithful to it, and as part of a Movement for Conjugal Spirituality, you are striving for the perfection of your state.

A magnificent programme, indeed, whose implementation in the already numerous countries where your Movement is widespread, can make an invaluable contribution to this renewal of the Church which is one of the main aims of the Ecumenical Council. So, dear Sons of the Teams of Our Lady, continue your beautiful work with zeal. Go back to your own countries and set a shining example of married life of the highest spiritual quality. Attract other couples to your noble ideal. Tell them that the Pope knows your Movement, that he encourages it, and that he paternally blesses its Founder, its leaders and all those who join it and work to spread it.

Paulus PP VI -

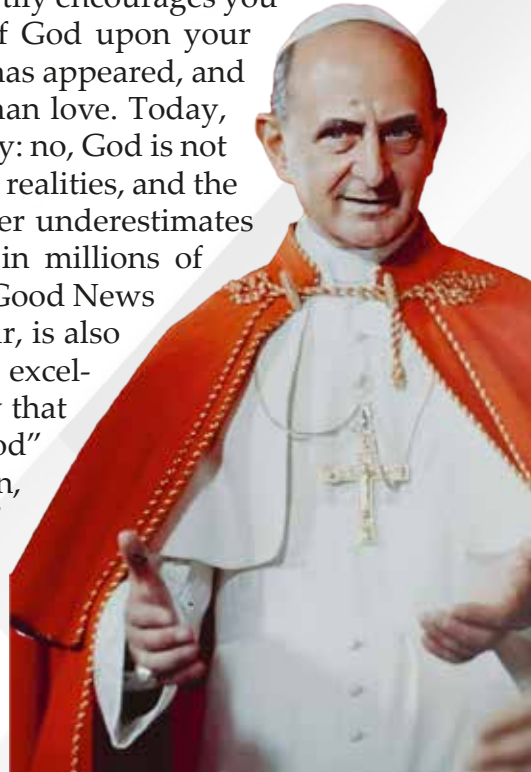
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POPE PAUL VI

Address of the Pope to the couples of the Teams of Our Lady Movement - May 4, 1970.

Dear Sons and daughters,

1. First of all, we thank you heartily for your words of faith, for your nightly prayer for our intentions, and also for your dedication in the service of vocations. We wish to tell you how happy we are to welcome you this morning, and to speak to you, and beyond you, to the 20,000 homes of the "Equipes Notre Dame". You were just telling us about their worldwide influence and deep concern to live with Christ and to weave with Him the daily web of their conjugal love. Among Christian couples, you comprise small teams cooperating spiritually and sustained by a priestly presence. How could we not rejoice over this? Dear sons and daughters, the Pope heartily encourages you and invokes the blessings of God upon your work. Too often the Church has appeared, and wrongly so, to question human love. Today, we wish to tell you this clearly: no, God is not an enemy of the great human realities, and the Church in no way whatsoever underestimates the values lived every day in millions of homes. On the contrary, the Good News brought by Christ the Saviour, is also good news for human love, excellent in its origins—"God saw that all he had made was very good" (*Gen. 1:31*) —corrupted by sin, but redeemed to the point of becoming a means to holiness, with the help of grace.





Marriage in the Lord, Vocation to Holiness

You are called to sanctity as are all the baptized, according to the Church's teaching solemnly reaffirmed by the Council (Cf. *Lumen Gentium*, n. 11). But you are expected to pursue your own proper path to holiness, in and by your family life (*Ibid.*, n. 41). It is the Church which teaches us that "with the help of grace, spouses can lead a holy life" (*Gaudium et Spes*, n. 49) and can make their family "the domestic sanctuary of the Church" (*Apostolicam actuositatem*, n. 11). These thoughts, the forgetting of which is so tragic for our times, are certainly familiar to you. We wish to meditate on these thoughts with you for a few moments in order to strengthen once again, if need be, your will to live generously your human and Christian vocation in marriage (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, n. 1, 47-52) and to collaborate together in God's great design of love for the world, which is to form a people "for the praise of his glory" (*Eph.* 1:14).

Male and Female He Created Them

2. As Holy Scripture teaches us, marriage, before being a sacrament, is a great earthly reality: "God created man in his image. In the image of God he created him. Male and female he created them." (*Gen.* 1:27). We must always return to this first page of the Bible if we wish to understand what a human couple, a family, is and should be. Psychological analyses, psychoanalytic studies, sociological surveys, philosophical reflections will certainly be able to throw light on sexuality and human love; they would blind us were they to neglect this fundamental teaching given to us from the very beginning: the duality of sexes was willed by God so that man and woman together might be the image of God and, like Him, a source of life: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it." (*Gen.* 1:28).

An attentive reading of the Prophets, the Books of Wisdom, and the New Testament, shows us the significance of this fundamental reality, and teaches us not to reduce it to physical desire and genital activity, but to discover therein the complementary values of man



and woman, the nobility and the weaknesses of conjugal love, its creativity and openness to the mysterious design of God's love.

Education in a Climate of Eroticism

3. This teaching retains to this day all its value and protects us against the temptations of a destructive eroticism. This phenomenon of abnormality should at least alert us to the danger from a materialistic civilization which presses imperceptibly into that mysterious realm standing as it were as the last refuge of a sacred value. Shall we know how to protect it from an engulfing sensuality?

In the face of an invasion cynically pursued by greedy industries, let us at least know how to throttle its harmful effects among the young. Without raising obstacles or having recourse to repression, it is a matter of encouraging an education that helps both the child and the adolescent to grow progressively aware of the force of the impulses which are awakening in them, to enlist them in the building up of their personality, to master these drives in order to realize a full maturity, affective as well as sexual, thereby preparing themselves for the gift of self in a love that will achieve its true dimension in an exclusive and definitive manner.

Marriage—One and Indissoluble

4. The union of man and woman differs radically in fact from any other human association and constitutes a singular reality that is the couple, founded on the mutual gift of the one to the other, "and they shall be one flesh." (*Gen. 2:24*). The union of man and woman possesses an irrevocable indissolubility as a seal set on the free and mutual commitment of two free persons, who, from that moment "are no longer two, but one body" (*Mt. 19:6*) —one flesh, one couple, one could almost say one being, its unity taking social and juridical form through marriage and manifesting itself by a community of life of which the carnal gift is the fruitful expression. This means that, when they marry, spouses express a desire

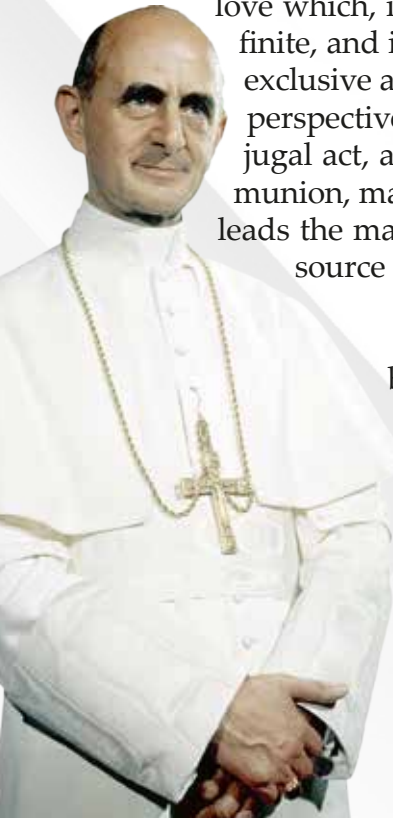


to belong to each other for life, and for this purpose contract an objective bond whose laws and requirements, far from being a servitude, are a guarantee and a protection, a real support, as you yourselves experience in your daily life.

Married Love

5. Thus, the gift is not a fusion, strictly speaking. Each personality remains distinct, and far from dissolving in the mutual gift of each other, affirms and refines itself, continues to grow throughout conjugal life, according to this great law of love: the mutual giving of each other in order to give together. Love is, in fact, the cement that gives solidity to this community life, and the driving spirit which leads it to ever more perfect fulfillment. The entire being participates, in the depths of its personal mystery, and of its affective, sensitive, carnal and spiritual components so as to form ever more perfectly that image of God which the married couple has the mission to incarnate day after day, by weaving it with its joys and sorrows, so true is it that love is more than love. There is no conjugal love which, in its exultation, is not a thrust towards the infinite, and in this thrust does not wish to be total, faithful, exclusive and creative (Cf. *Humanae vitae*, n. 9). It is in this perspective that desire finds its full significance. The conjugal act, as a means of expression, knowledge and communion, maintains and strengthens love, and its creativity leads the married couple to its full flowering: it becomes a source of life, in the image of God.

6. The Christian knows that human love is good because of its origin, and if it is wounded and deformed by sin, as everything in man is, then it finds its salvation and redemption in Christ. Moreover, is not this the lesson of twenty centuries of Christian history? Many are the married couples who have found the path to holiness in their conjugal love, in this community life which is the only one based on a sacrament!





A New Creation

7. Baptismal regeneration, the work of the Holy Spirit (Cf. *Tit*,3:5), makes us new creatures (Cf. *Gal*. 6:15), “so we also may walk in newness of life” (*Rom*. 6:4). In this great renewal of all things in Christ, marriage, also purified and renewed, becomes a new reality, a sacrament of the New Covenant. And behold at the threshold of the New Testament, as at the entrance of the Old, a married couple stands. But whereas Adam and Eve were the source of evil unleashed on the world, Joseph and Mary are the summit whence holiness spreads all over the earth. The Saviour began the work of salvation by this virginal and holy union wherein is manifested His all-powerful will to purify and sanctify the family, this sanctuary of love and this cradle of life.

Union “in the Lord”

8. From then on, everything is transformed. Two Christians wish to marry; St. Paul forewarns them: “You are not your own” (*1 Cor*. 6:19). Both of them members of Christ “in the Lord,” their union is also made “in the Lord”, like that of the Church, and that is why it is a “great mystery” (*Eph*. 5:32), a sign which not only represents the mystery of the union of Christ with the Church, but also contains and radiates it by the grace of the Holy Spirit which is its vivifying soul. For the very love that is proper to God is the love which God communicates to us so that we might love Him and love one another with this divine love: “Love one another as I have loved you” (*Jn*. 13:34). The very expressions of their tenderness are, for Christian couples, imbued with that love which they draw from the heart of God. And should the human source happen to dry up, its divine source is as inexhaustible as the fathomless depths of the tenderness of God. This reveals to what an intimate, strong and rich communion conjugal love tends. As an interior and spiritual reality, it transforms the community life of the spouses into what we could call, according to the authorized teaching of the Council, “the domestic Church” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 11), truly a “cell of the Church” as our beloved predecessor John



XXIII told your pilgrimage on May 3, 1959. It is a basic cell, a germinal cell, the smallest one no doubt, but also the most fundamental of the ecclesial organism.

Fullness of Christian Love

9. Such is the mystery in which conjugal love takes root, and which enlightens all its manifestations. It is the Mystery of the Incarnation that ennobles our human potentialities, by penetrating them from within. Far from scorning them, Christian love brings them to their fullness with patience, generosity, strength and sweetness, as St. Francis de Sales emphasized when eulogizing the conjugal life of St. Louis (*Introduction to the Devout Life*, III, ch. 38, Advice to Married People). If the fascination of flesh is dangerous, the temptation of angelism is no less so, for a reality held in contempt will soon reassert itself. Also, aware of carrying their treasures in vessels of clay (Cf, 2 Cor. 4:7), Christian spouses strive, with humble fervor to express in their married life the recommendations of the Apostle St. Paul: “your bodies are members of Christ . . . your members are the temple of the Holy Spirit . . . Glorify God and bear him in your body” (1 Cor. 6:13-20). “Married in the Lord,” spouses from then on cannot be united except in the name of Christ to whom they belong and for whom they must work as His active members. Therefore, they cannot dispose of their bodies, particularly inasmuch as it is a principle of generation, save in Christ’s spirit and for His work, since they are members of Christ.

Creativeness of the Couple

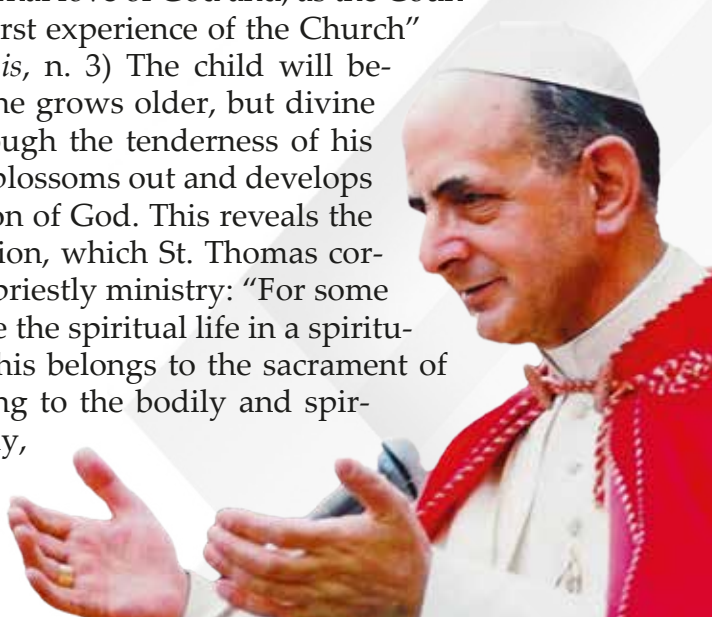
10. “Free and responsible collaborators with the Creator” (*Humanae vitae*, n. 1), Christian spouses see their carnal fruitfulness acquire a new nobility. The drive which prompts them to unite is the bearer of life, and allows God to give himself children. Having become father and mother, the spouses discover with wonder, at the baptismal font, that their child is henceforth a child of God “born again of water and the Spirit” (Jn. 3:5) and that he is entrusted to



them so that they might watch over his physical and moral growth, yes, but also over the budding and flowering in him of the “new man” (*Eph.* 4:24). This child is no longer just what they see, but especially what they believe, “an infinity of mystery and love which would dazzle us were we to see it face to face” (Emmanuel Mounier to his wife Paulette, March 20, 1940, *Oeuvres*, t. IV, Paris, Seuil, 1963, p. 662). Also, education becomes a real service to Christ, according to His very words: “As long as you did it for one of these, the least of my brethren, you did it for me” (*Mt.* 25:40). And if it should happen that the adolescent shuns the teaching of his parents, then they, in their own flesh, sorrowfully participate in Christ’s suffering as a victim of man’s rejection.

The Mystery of Parenthood

11. Dear parents, God has not entrusted you with so important a task (Cf. *Gravissimum Educationis*) without giving you an extraordinary gift, His fatherly love. In those parents who love their child in whom Christ lives, there is the love of the Father pouring itself out on his beloved Son (Cf. *Jn.* 4:7-11). Through the authority of parents, it is His authority that is exercised. Through the devotedness of parents, we see His providence as “Father, from whom all fatherhood in heaven and on earth receives its name” (*Eph.* 3:15). Moreover, the baptized child, through the love of his parents, discovers the paternal love of God and, as the Council tells us: “gains his first experience of the Church” (*Gravissimum Educationis*, n. 3) The child will become aware of this as he grows older, but divine love already now, through the tenderness of his father and his mother, blossoms out and develops in him his being as a son of God. This reveals the splendor of your vocation, which St. Thomas correctly compares to the priestly ministry: “For some propagate and conserve the spiritual life in a spiritual ministry only, and this belongs to the sacrament of orders; and some belong to the bodily and spiritual life simultaneously,





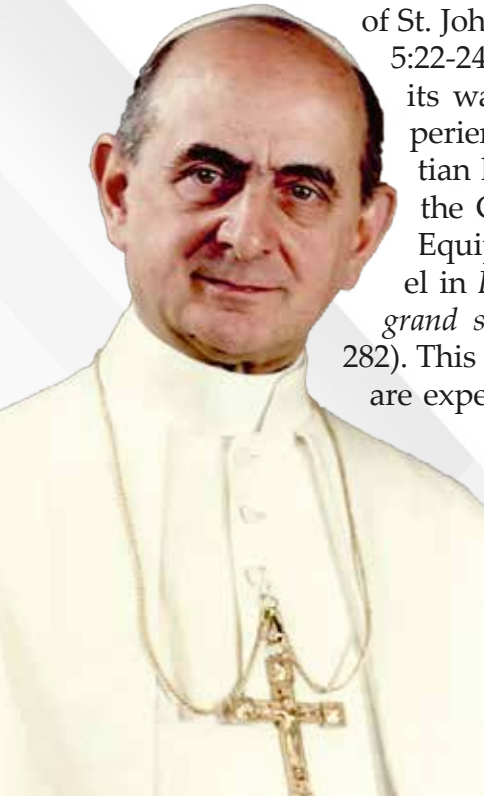
which takes place in the sacrament of matrimony where a man and a woman come together to beget offspring and to rear them in divine worship" (*Contra Gentiles* IV, 58, trad. Dr. Charles J. O'Neil, Image Books, Garden City, N. Y., 1957, p. 250, n. 6).

Concern for hospitality

12. Homes that experience the severe trial of not having children are also called to cooperate in many ways in the growth of the people of God. We also wish, this morning, to draw your attention to hospitality, which is an outstanding form of the apostolate of the home.

Is not St. Paul's recommendation to the Romans to practice hospitality (*Rom.* 12:13) addressed primarily to families and did he not have in mind the hospitality of Aquila and Priscilla's home where he had first been received and where later the Christian community was welcomed? (Cf. *Acts* 18:2-3; *Rom.* 16:3-4; *1 Cor.* 16:19). In our days, so hard on many people, what a blessing it is to be welcomed

"in this little Church," according to the expression of St. John Chrysostom (Homily 20 on Ephesians 5:22-24, N. 6; P.G. 62, 135-140), to enter into its warmth, to discover its maternity, to experience its mercy. It is so true that a Christian home is "the smiling and gentle face of the Church." (Description of a home of the Equipes Notre-Dame quoted by H. Caffarel in *L'Anneau d'Or*, n. 111-112; *Le mariage, ce grand sacrement*, Paris, Feu nouveau, 1963, p. 282). This is an irreplaceable apostolate which you are expected to fulfill generously, an apostolate of the home in which the formation of the engaged couple, assistance to newlyweds, and help to homes in distress, are privileged domains. Supporting one another, of what tasks are you not capable in the Church and in the





world? With great confidence and with great hope, we invite you to this task: “The Christian family loudly proclaims both the present virtues of the kingdom of God and the hope of a blessed life to come. Thus by its example and its witness it accuses the world of sin and enlightens those who seek the truth” (*Lumen Gentium*, n. 35).

Growth in Love

13. Dear sons and daughters, you are firmly convinced that by living the graces of the sacrament of marriage you advance with “unwearying and generous love” (*Ibid.*, n. 41) towards that sanctity to which we are all called by grace (Cf. *Mt.* 5:48; *1 Thes.* 4:3; *Eph.* 1:4), not at all by arbitrary demand, but by the love of a Father who wishes the full blossoming and complete happiness of His children. You are not left to yourselves to achieve this, since Christ and the Holy Spirit, “these two hands of God,” according to the expression of St. Irenaeus, are always working for you (Cf. *Adversus Haereses* IV, 28, 4; P.G. 7, 200). Therefore, do not allow yourselves to be led astray by temptations, difficulties and trials which arise along the way; and when necessary, do not fear to go against the current of what is said and thought in a world of paganized behavior. St. Paul warns us: “be not conformed to this world but be transformed in the newness of your mind” (*Rom.* 12:2). Nor should you become discouraged in times of failures: our God is a Father full of tenderness and goodness, filled with solicitude and overflowing with love for His children who struggle along their way. And the Church is a mother who wishes to help you live to the full this ideal of Christian marriage, reminding you of all its requirements as well as of its beauty.

To Think, Desire, and Act Correctly

14. Dear sons, chaplains of the Equipes Notre Dame, by a long and rich experience you know that your consecrated celibacy renders you particularly available to be, on behalf of families in their advance towards holiness, the active witnesses of the Lord’s love



in the Church. Day after day, you help them to “walk in the light” (Cf. 1 Jn. 1:7) to think correctly, that is, to appreciate their conduct in truth; to wish what is right, that is, to direct their will towards the good as responsible men; to act justly, that is, to gradually harmonize their life, through the uncertainties of existence, with the ideal of Christian marriage which they generously pursue. It is only little by little that the human being is able to order and integrate his multiple tendencies, to the point of arranging them harmoniously in that virtue of conjugal chastity, wherein the couple finds its full human and Christian development. This work of liberation, for that is what it is, is the fruit of the true liberty of the children of God. Their conscience demands to be respected, educated and formed in an atmosphere of confidence and not of anguish. The moral laws, far from being inhumanly cold in an abstract objectivity, are there to guide the spouses in their progress. When the spouses truly strive to live the profound demands of a holy love, patiently and humbly, without becoming discouraged by failures, then the moral laws, present there as a reminder, are no longer rejected as a hindrance, but recognized as a powerful help.

The Good News for Couples

15. The progress of the spouses, like all human life, has many stages. The difficult and sorrowful phases—you experience them year after year—also have their place. But this must be emphasized: never should anguish or fear be found in souls of good will, for finally, is not the Gospel good news also for families, and a message which, if it is demanding, is no less profoundly liberating? To realize that you have not yet conquered your interior liberty, that you are still subjected to the impulses of your tendencies, that you find yourself almost incapable of respecting, for the moment, the moral law in such a fundamental domain—all this naturally is distressing. But this is the decisive moment when the Christian, in his confusion, instead of giving way to a fruitless and destructive revolt, humbly accedes to the staggering discovery of man in the presence of God, a sinner in the presence of the love of Christ, the Saviour.



The Paschal Mystery

16. From this radical awareness begins the entire progress of moral life. The spouses find themselves thoroughly “evangelized,” discovering “with fear and trembling” (*Phil.* 2:12), but also with marvelous joy, that in their marriage, as in the union of Christ with the Church, the paschal mystery of death and resurrection is being accomplished. In the bosom of the great Church this little church then knows itself for what it truly is: a weak and at times sinful and repenting community, but forgiven and progressing toward sanctity “in the peace of God which surpasses all understanding” (*Phil.* 4:7). Far from being sheltered from every failing, “let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall” (*1 Cor.* 10:12), or dispensed from persevering effort, at times in cruel conditions which can be borne only with the thought of participating in the passion of Christ (*Cf. Col.* 1:24), the spouses at least know that the demands of conjugal morality, of which the Church reminds them, are neither intolerable nor impractical laws, but a gift of God to help them attain — through and beyond their weaknesses — the riches of a fully human and Christian love. From that moment, far from having the agonizing feeling that they are caught in an impasse, and in a given case, perhaps trapped in sensuality, to the point of abandoning all sacramental practice and rebelling against a Church that seems inhuman, or where they drive themselves in an impossible effort at the price of harmony and balance, even at the cost of the survival of the family, the spouses will open themselves to hope with the assurance that all the resources of grace in the Church are there to help them advance toward the perfection of their love.

Witness as an Apostolate

17. These are the perspectives in which Christian homes experience, in the midst of the world, the good tidings of salvation in Christ and progress toward sanctity in and through their marriage, with the light, the strength and the joy of the Saviour. At the same time, these are also the main directives of the apostolate of Equipes Notre Dame, starting from the testimony of their



own life, which has so great a force of persuasion. Worried and restless, our world wavers between fear and hope. Many young people vacillate along the road that opens up to them. Let this be for you a stimulus and an appeal. With the strength of Christ you can and should accomplish great things. Meditate on His word, receive His grace in prayer and in the sacraments of penance and the Eucharist, comfort one another by giving testimony of your joy, simply and discreetly. A man and a woman who love one another, the smile of a child, the peace of a home: here is the wordless but astoundingly persuasive sermon in which every man can already discern, as it were shining through, the reflection of another love and its infinite appeal.

Toward a New Springtime in the Church

18. Dear sons, the Church, whose living and active cells you are, gives through your homes a sort of experimental proof of the power of saving love, and brings forth its fruits of holiness. Homes that are tried, happy homes, faithful homes, you are preparing for the Church and for the world a new springtime whose first buds already make us thrill with joy. In seeing you, and joining in mind with the millions of Christian families throughout the world, we are filled with irrepressible hope, and in the name of the Lord we say to you with confidence: "Even so let your light shine before men, in order that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father in heaven" (Mt, 5:6). In His name, we invoke upon you and your beloved children, upon all the homes of the Equipes Notre Dame and their chaplains, especially dear Father Caffarel, an abundance of divine graces, as a pledge of which we impart to you Our Apostolic Blessing.

Paulus PP VI -

4

POPE PAUL VI

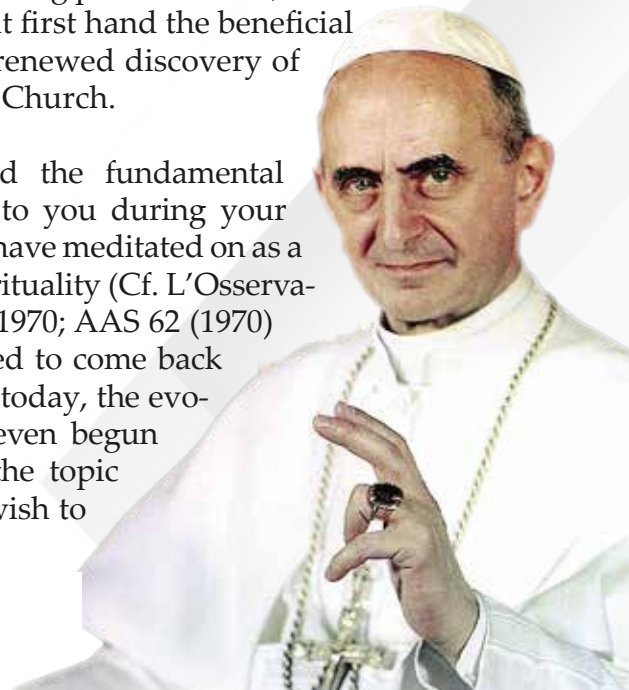
Audience to the participants in the International Meeting of the Teams of Our Lady in September 1976.

Your presence, dear Sons and Daughters, couples and chaplains of the Teams of Our Lady, brings profound joy to the one who, in the great ecclesial family, exercises the mission of Father.

What joy in seeing behind each couple the faces of their children and grandchildren, and in feeling that We are surrounded not just by couples, but by entire families. What joy in addressing Us, through you, to the thousands of Teams of Our Lady couples you represent in some way. And what joy in knowing that, through you, our voice is being heard by all Christians who are called to make marriage and family life an authentic human and Christian vocation.

This joy is made all the greater by the fact that your international gathering is taking place in Rome, where we can experience at first hand the beneficial grace that is the ever-renewed discovery of the universality of the Church.

Keep well in mind the fundamental words We addressed to you during your last visit, and that you have meditated on as a charter of conjugal spirituality (Cf. *L'Osservatore Romano*", 7 May 1970; AAS 62 (1970) 428-437). We don't need to come back to it this morning. But today, the evolution of society has even begun to call into question the topic of morality. We only wish to





add a few brief reflections to strengthen your convictions in the face of questions raised in recent times about the family, to strengthen your faith and consolidate your hope in this sacrament of marriage which is truly yours. In this way you may live in greater fullness “amid the tribulations of the world and the consolations of God” (S. AUGUSTIN De Civitate Dei). AUGUSTIN De Civitate Dei, XVIII, 51. 2: PL 41, 614, in Lumen Gentium, 8 relatum).

A few months ago, We reminded Christian families of the evangelising potential that lies within them (Pauli PP. VI Evangelii Nuntiandi, 71), by evoking the magnificent and compromising title of “domestic church”. We invited them to remember that the power of the Good News of Jesus Christ – the proclamation of salvation, the preaching of the law of love and the demands of the Gospel, and the call to join the community of believers – is present within each Christian family in the flow of affection, trust and intimacy that unites its members. However, we would add, this strength must also radiate from Christian families to other families.

We have already addressed this theme when We spoke to the Committee for the Family at its last Assembly (Cf. “L’Osservatore Romano” 14 March 1974; AAS 66, (1974) 232-234). More recently We have stressed that, in order to build up the universal Church and the local Churches, it is necessary to begin with the humble and indispensable building up of the domestic Church (Cf. “L’Osservatore Romano”, 12 August 1976).

Allow Us to remind you here: marriage is certainly a voluntarily chosen state of life, in which we seek the well-being and happiness of the couple and their children. It is lived – especially when we are Christians – in the light of faith and relying on God’s grace. But it is also about bearing witness and fulfilling a mission. In these latter dimensions, the institution of the family is turned outwards, towards others, and it is made for the good of others. The family must therefore seek to have an evangelising and missionary value in its own right. It fulfils this mission by striving to bear real witness to Christian life and thus become ever more a call to welcome the Good News of the Gospel.

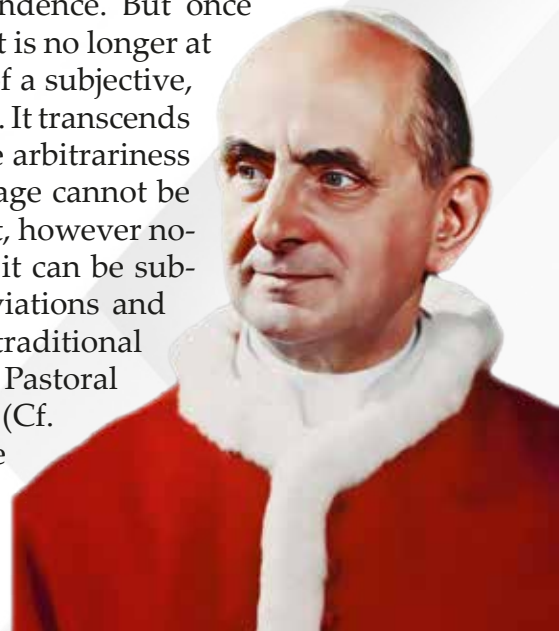


The fact that you are officially recognised by the Holy See as an International Catholic Organisation, is a sign and consecration of your desire to participate ever more fully in the life of the Church, and We are delighted about this.

Countless couples will be grateful for the help you can give them. Most couples today need help. They are prey first to mistrust and doubt, then to fear and discouragement, and finally to the abandonment of the noblest values of marriage. They are often in this state because those who should be their teachers, have cast doubt on these values, have belittled their theological dimensions, and have considered the most fundamental requirements of marriage and the family to be utopian, outdated, inaccessible and useless.

These values and requirements must therefore be constantly reaffirmed through the witness of Christian couples, and also – and this is a necessity of our time – through the clear and courageous words of pastors and teachers, in unwavering adherence to the Magisterium of the Church.

As we keep reminding ourselves, marriage is a communion founded on love and made stable and definitive by an irrevocable covenant and commitment. True love is therefore the most important element of this communion: love that is about self-giving, self-denying, service and transcendence. But once this communion has been sealed, it is no longer at the mercy of the ups and downs of a subjective, changing and unstable human will. It transcends the fluctuations of passion and the arbitrariness of the spouses. This is why marriage cannot be left to the vicissitudes of sentiment, however noble they may be, because as such it can be subject to variations, weakening, deviations and decay. We wish to reaffirm this traditional doctrine, already recalled by the Pastoral Constitution “*Gaudium et Spes*” (Cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 48), against the





erroneous argument that marriage ends when love is extinguished – but what love? (Cf. PAULI PP. VI Allocutio ad Sacram Romanam Rotam, 9 February 1976: AAS 68 (1976) 2- 04-208)

For Christians, this commitment is made before God and the Church. The interpersonal relationship between spouses becomes a sacrament: it is guaranteed by the active and determining presence of Christ himself. This is the splendour of Christian marriage. This is the assurance that the demands of married love can be assumed by spouses without fear, even by the weak and sinful beings that they remain. In the passage of Saint John's Gospel, in reference to the wedding feast at Cana, it is said that Jesus himself was there (Cf. Jn 2:2). This passage must have a literal meaning in the lives of Christian couples. He must be a constant guest, capable of transforming the water of routine and complacency – which is always to be feared – into the wine of an ever-rejuvenated love, of a renewed ideal, and of a renewed strength to overcome obstacles. God's love takes root in your lives, the more you help each other to open up to Him.

Therefore, this interpersonal communion, enlarged by the birth of children, is a sign of God's love and goodness. Every Christian couple and every Christian home proclaim by their very existence that God is love and that He wants the good of humanity.

The cross is certainly not absent from this communion, just as it is not absent from any manifestation of love. It would therefore be futile and dangerous to want a marriage that does not bear the sign of the cross, whether through physical suffering or through moral or spiritual pain. You are there, however, to bear witness to the fact that God's grace, strength and faithfulness, give us all the strength to carry the cross. The sacrament is a permanent source of grace that accompanies spouses throughout their lives.

It is this fidelity of God that Saint Paul (Cf. 1 Cor 1:9; 2 Tim 2:13) and Saint John (1 John 1:9; Revelation 1:5; 3:14) insist on. This fidelity gives rise to the will to enable its fulfilment. It inspires, provokes and at the same time makes fidelity in marriage possible.



Generous and magnanimous fidelity of one spouse to the other, of both to their common mission and to the ideal that they will only achieve side by side – as marriage has found them – fidelity to their children, fidelity to the society in which they live and which they agree to serve. It is then possible, whatever people say these days, to maintain and develop this fidelity to the end, to the very end.

Your Teams movement was born at a critical time in history, when a terrible war had left many ruins, the most serious of which were moral and spiritual. Your movement has helped to maintain and deepen the ideal of the Christian family. Remain what you have wanted to be since the first day, by maintaining your vocation as a true school of spirituality for couples, profoundly faithful in all areas - doctrinal, liturgical and moral – to the Magisterium of the Church (Phil 2:13).

To the priests who are chaplains to the Teams, “I exhort them, as a priest like them, a witness to the sufferings of Christ and as one who must share in the glory that is about to be revealed” (1 Pet 5:1). Do not hesitate to give the best of your skills, your strength and your pastoral zeal to this privileged apostolic field. You will find there a portion of the Church of which you are pastors. Do not give in to the temptation to believe that your pastoral work is limited to a small group of Christians. Your work will be multiplied by the influence of so many couples. You help them to deepen their Christian life: may yours deepen in equal measure.

We hope this pilgrimage to Rome and Assisi will help you to establish the essential values of marriage in all countries and encourage families to live out these values. In this hope, dear Sons and Daughters, We assure you of our prayers and We impart to you a paternal Apostolic Blessing.

Paulus PP VI -

5

POPE JOHN PAUL II

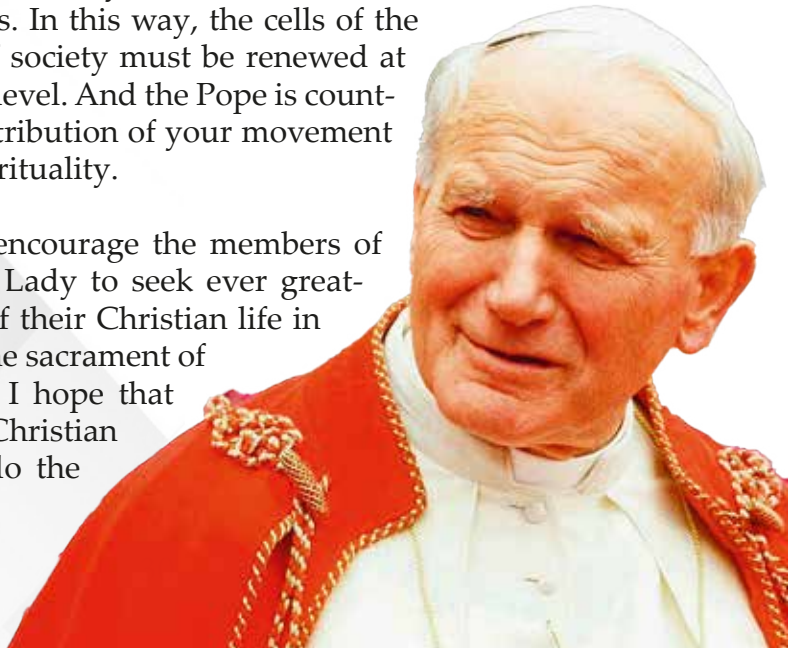
Address to the International Council of the "Teams of Our Lady" September 17, 1979.

Dear Brothers and Sisters

I am very pleased to meet the Regional (or "Super-Regional") Responsible Couples of the "Teams of Our Lady". Through this first contact, however brief, please understand the esteem, encouragement and confidence that I would like to express to your movement, in line with all that my venerated Predecessor, Paul VI, has already said to you. I am delighted by the vitality of the Teams and by its expansion into various countries, especially among young couples.

You want to live married love and parental love in the light of the Gospel and the teachings of the Church, in a climate that makes a great deal of prayer, sharing between couples, and deep exchanges between spouses, on all human and spiritual problems. The leaven of the Gospel must first permeate the daily and fundamental realities of family relationships. In this way, the cells of the Church and of society must be renewed at the grassroots level. And the Pope is counting on the contribution of your movement of conjugal spirituality.

I therefore encourage the members of Teams of Our Lady to seek ever greater perfection of their Christian life in and through the sacrament of marriage, and I hope that many other Christian spouses will do the





same. What richness, what demands, what dynamism emerge if this sacrament is lived day by day, in faith, in the image of the mutual gift of Christ and his Church! What strength when spouses have the simplicity to help each other, under the Lord's gaze, to grow in their faith, in their mutual love, if necessary in their forgiveness, in their shared commitment to serving their family, the church community and their social environment! What an example for the children who, together with their parents, experience the mystery of the Church for the first time!

You've already experienced for yourselves, especially those couples who have been attached to the movement for a long time, that all this is both very demanding and very comforting. Oh, I know, you too are not immune to the temptations and trials experienced by other families, or to the contradictions that the family ideal encounters in contemporary society. But you are humbly taking steps to overcome them. Make a point of nourishing your convictions, your meditations and your actions with the true sources. These are the Word of God read in the Church, Christian doctrine and ethics recalled by the Magisterium, the authentic spirituality of marriage and the other sacraments, with the help of the priests that the Church places at your disposal.

I hope you will share your convictions and your experience with the Church's pastoral care of families in your respective countries, by associating yourselves, as far as possible, with the immense efforts that are being made or should be made in this area. God's marvellous plan for married love, procreation and family education must be made to shine in the eyes of the younger generations, and this will only be credible through the witness of those who live it with all the resources of their faith.

The whole Church must commit itself to this effort. For my part, I am currently taking advantage of the Wednesday general audiences to offer some food for thought on the family. The forthcoming Synod of Bishops will deal with "the tasks of the Christian family". You are invited to not only take an interest and pay attention to it, but also to make your contribution to its prepara-



tion, by making known, within your diocesan communities, your reflections on the various points of the programme published by the Synod Secretariat. Family duties can only be carried out in a Christian way if the theology of marriage is deepened, with its wealth of graces and its ecclesial dimension, and if we live out this spirituality in practice within our homes.

It is with these sentiments that I express my confidence in you, and in all the men and women of Teams of Our Lady and their chaplains, encouraging you to continue to place your efforts firmly within the Church, according to the doctrine of the Church, in liaison with the Pastors of the Church and the other movements whose action is complementary to yours. With all my heart I bless you and all your loved ones, especially your children.

Joannes Paulus PP. II

6

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Address to the Pilgrim Couples of the Teams of Our Lady - September 23, 1982.

Dear Brothers and Sisters.

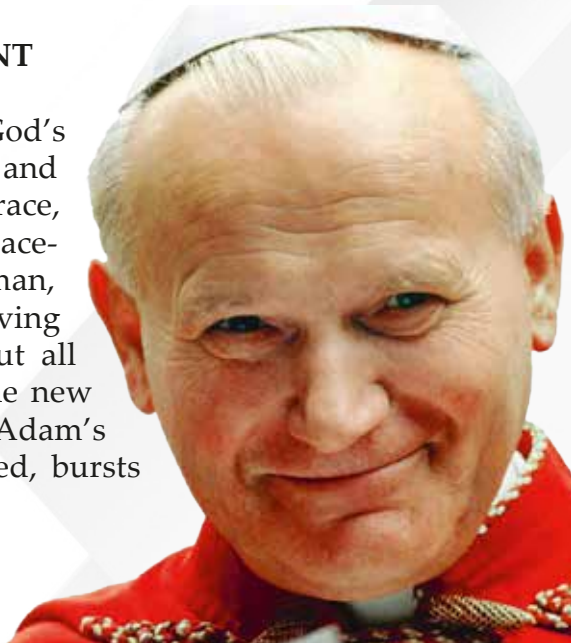
You have chosen as the light to enlighten your pilgrimage to Rome the Lord's word: "If you knew the gift of God".

You have been well inspired. This urgent and joyous question pervades the Bible and reaches us all: "If you knew the gift of God!". If you knew, you who are looking for water, propelled by an earthly thirst, if you knew the inexhaustible spring! It is near you, but will you recognize it?

Christian spouses, this question concerns you as well. You certainly know this, you who constantly work to go back to the source of your love and grace within your Equipes, under the patronage of Our Lady, the mother of fair love.

THE MYSTERY OF THE COVENANT

I. From the beginning, God's gift to man has been life and love. And this gift, this grace, expresses itself in the graceful countenance of a woman, Eve, the mother of the living — an imperfect image, but all the same the image of the new Eve, Mary, full of grace. Adam's joy, with his hope fulfilled, bursts





forth: “This at last is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23). Both are rapturous about life and love shared when their first son is born: “I have gotten a man with the help of the Lord!” (Gen 4:1). And yet they do not suspect the breadth or the depth of God’s gift (cf. Eph 3:18-19).

This grace, this gift of love and life, is only a first stage. The Lord wants to bind himself to humanity, “to be in harmony” with it. He makes a covenant with his Chosen People: “I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt... you shall have no other gods before me” (Ex 20:2-3). But this covenant is neither a simple contract nor a political alliance: as the Lord engages his word and his life in it, so it calls for love and tenderness. The covenant expresses itself through the sign of marriage. The prophets explore this mystery of the Covenant across the stormy history of the fidelity of the Lord and the infidelities of his People, at times even through their own conjugal life (cf. Hosea 2:21- 22), and Jeremiah goes so far as to foretell a new Covenant (31:31).

And in fact, “when the time had fully come, God sent forth his Son, born of woman...” (Gal 4:4). Christ espouses the human condition in the womb of the Virgin Mary. “The Word is made flesh”. An indestructible covenant, for nothing will ever again be able to separate man and God, united forever in Jesus Christ (cf. Rom 8:35-38). It is once more in terms of nuptials that the mystery is told: Jesus performs his first sign at the marriage at Cana (cf. Jn 2:11); then the Gospel gives us to understand that he is the true bridegroom (cf. In 3:29. Eph 5:31- 32). Jesus sees his love through to the end (cf. Jn 15:13. 13:1); he seals the Covenant in the blood of his cross and “gives up his spirit (Jn 19:30) to the Church, his Bride.

The Church appears thus as the completion of the Covenant: fulfilled by the gift of God, she is the loved and fertile wife who begets new children until the end of time. The “universal sacrament of salvation” (cf. *Gaudium et Spes*, 45:1 and 42: 3: cf. also *Lumen Gentium*, 1:1 and 48), she will lead humanity gradually, by the Word and by the sacraments, to live fully the gift of God in the Covenant which he offers us.



MARRIAGE AND THE EUCHARIST

2. The celebration and fulfilment of the Covenant thus take place in the sacraments. This is distinctively true when we speak of the Eucharist, (cf. *Presbyterorum Ordinis*, 5), yet marriage, “intimately bound” to the Eucharist (*Familiaris Consortio*, 57), is connected in a particular way to the Covenant. The old Covenant expressed itself in the sign of human marriage, but the reality of Christian marriage is inhabited, transfigured, by the New Covenant.

In the Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris Consortio*, dedicated to the family, following the Synod of 1980, I emphasized the necessity of “discovering and deepening this relationship” (no. 57). Your pilgrimage to Rome gives me the opportunity to open up some paths of investigation for you to explore.

COMMUNION

The Eucharist makes the Covenant accessible to us, as it makes accessible both the gift and him who gives himself: the perfect sacrament of the Covenant, the Eucharist is the mystery of communion, of unity, with respect for each individual: “He who eats my flesh and drinks by blood abides in me and I in him” (Jn 6:56). “As... I live because of the Father, so he who eats me will live because of me” (Jn 6:57). It reveals the communion of the Father and Son in the Holy Spirit, drawing in the faithful, who thus find themselves in communion with one another (1 Cor 10:17). For in the flesh of Christ the work of communion in the spirit is accomplished: “But whoever is joined to the Lord, becomes one spirit with him.” (1 Cor 6:17).

The fulfilment of the Covenant in the Eucharist is echoed in the conjugal alliance. Is not the sacrament of marriage also a communion in which unity in the flesh leads to the communion of the spirit? Like Christ’s Covenant, the conjugal covenant leads the spouses to live faithfully “in tenderness and mercy” and “in justice and in right” (Hosea 2:21). “Marriage of the baptised thus becomes the real symbol of the new and eternal Covenant, sealed in the blood of



Christ. The Spirit, which the Lord pours out, gives them a new heart and makes the man and the woman capable of loving one another as Christ has loved us" (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 13). "It is in this sacrifice of the new and eternal Covenant that the Christian couple finds the flowing spring which inwardly models and constantly vivifies their conjugal covenant" (*Familiaris Consortio*, no. 57). From the Lord, they learn to love "to the end", giving and pardoning. And as he himself lives out an indissoluble Covenant, they will learn from him to be flawlessly faithful to their word and to their chosen life.

Not only does the Covenant inspire the life of the couple, it fully partakes in that life, injecting its own energy in the lives of the spouses: it "models" their love from within: they love one another not only as Christ loved, but mysteriously, with the very love of Christ, as his Spirit is given to them... in the measure in which they let themselves be "modelled" by him (cf. Gal 2:25; Eph 4:23). At Mass, through the ministry of the priest, the Spirit of the Lord makes the body and blood of the Lord from bread and wine; in and through the sacrament of marriage, the Spirit can make the very love of the Lord from conjugal love: if the couple let themselves be transformed, they can love with the "new heart" promised by the New Covenant (cf. Jer 31:31; *Familiaris Consortio*, no. 20).

"Call of the body and of the instinct, strength of feeling and of affectivity, aspiration of the spirit and of the will" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 13), by the gift of the Lord man's love can be totally illuminated by the Source of love and can really show forth the new and eternal Covenant which shines in him.

We are certainly very far here from a simple instinctive impulse or a simple temporary accord tied to immediate interests to which many people today tend to reduce this gift of the Lord which is love!

SACRIFICE

3. I have said: "If the couple let themselves be transformed," because the gift proposed by God can only be realized by con-

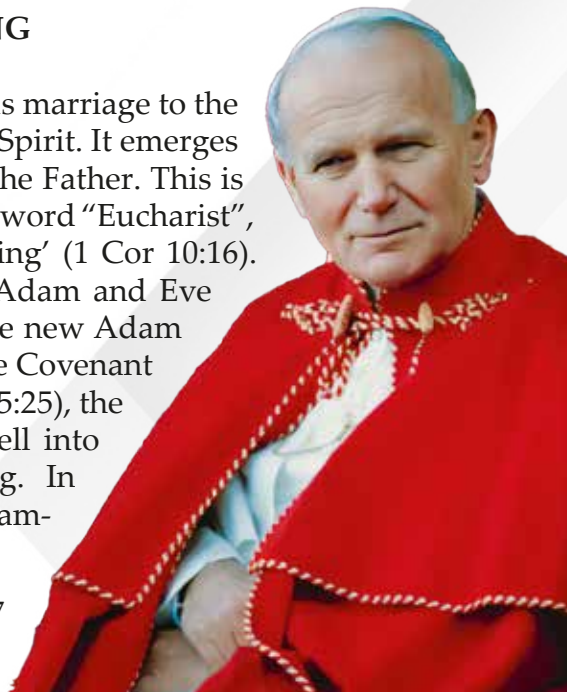


sent: since the beginning, it comes up against refusal and pride. The ever-reborn endeavours of a Christianity without sacrifice are destined for failure: they collide with the reality of sin. Christ's mission is man's fulfilment only in his death and resurrection. The Eucharist reminds us incessantly that the blood of the new Covenant is "poured out . . . for the forgiveness of sins" (Mt 26:28). The Covenant is sealed in the blood of the Lamb.

There is nothing astonishing then in the fact that the sacrament of marriage sets the couple on a path where they will encounter the cross. The cross within the couple, the sacrifice by each of his selfishness, refusals, weaknesses, deceptions call for pardon; it causes ruptures. There is the cross of children, of their limits, their failures, their disloyalties. There is the cross of barren homes. The cross of those whose faithfulness to the Covenant incites mockery, sarcasm, or even persecution. We do not live in an innocent world! Love, like every human reality, needs to be saved, ransomed. But the frequent participation in the Eucharist permits the couple to make of their trials a way of communion, a participation in the sacrifice of the Lord, a new way of living the Covenant, and, beyond the cross, beyond all of the forms of death which mark their existence, to find happiness: Christian marriage is a Passover.

THANKSGIVING

4. The sacrifice of the Lord leads marriage to the resurrection and to the gift of the Spirit. It emerges in thanksgiving and in praise of the Father. This is indeed the original meaning of the word "Eucharist", where we take the "cup of blessing" (1 Cor 10:16). The blessing of the covenant of Adam and Eve is concluded in the blessing of the new Adam and the new Eve. Immersed in the Covenant of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:25), the conjugal covenant emerges as well into joy, gratitude, and thanksgiving. In this sense equally each Christian fam-





ily is called to become a “little Church”, a place where praise and adoration resound (cf. Eph 5:19). There, the couple practice their Priesthood, the priesthood of the baptized. Families of the Equipes Notre-Dame, you have contributed to the regaining of the honour of Prayer in the home, and you have thus rendered an appreciable service. Recognition”, thanksgiving and joy ounded not on illusion, but on the truth of the gift of pardon, have a role to play in the world as well: crouched over what it conquers, the world risks losing the sense of gratuity. It closes itself off from gratitude, from thanksgiving, from the sources of joy, forgetting that to give thanks is not only “worthy and just” , it is also “salutary”!

TO BUILD THE CHURCH

5. I have just told how the Equipes serve the Church in their prayer. I want to insist on the ecclesial dimension of your conjugal vocation. The new and eternal Covenant is offered to the “multitude” (Mt 26:27). As personal as is the Eucharistic encounter of each Christian, it concerns the entire Body. “The Church makes the Eucharist but the Eucharist makes the Church”. Beyond differences of race, of nation, of sex, of class, the Eucharist transcends boundaries; the Eucharistic Body of Christ builds his Mystical Body which is the Church. The celebration of the new and eternal Covenant gives solidity to the Christian assembly: it “becomes a body” in the Body of Christ (cf. 1 Cor 10:17). But far from closing it off in a high chamber, the Eucharist makes it burst forth to the four corners of the world. The Spirit of the risen Christ assures « the same time both the Communion and the Mission (cf. Acts 1:13, 2:4; Mt 28:18–20).

“In the Eucharistic gift of charity the Christian family finds the foundation and the soul of its ‘communion’ and its ‘mission’: the eucharistic bread makes of the different members of the family community a single body...” and at the same time feeds “missionary and apostolic dynamism” (Familiaris Consortio, 57). Sacrament of the Covenant, the domestic Church that is the family will live the communion intensely—a communion not at all turned in

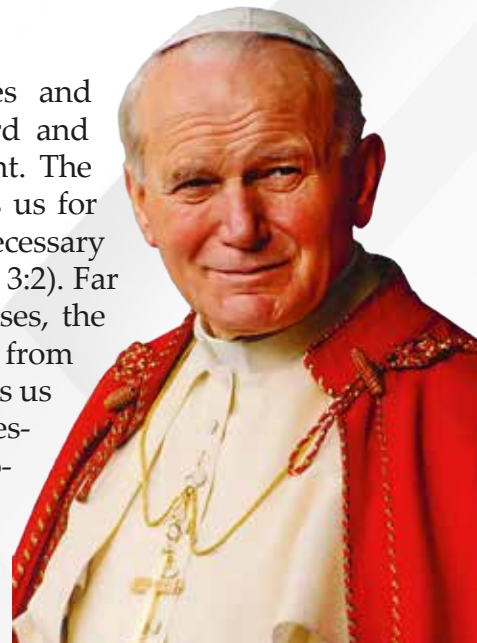


on itself, but rather entirely open to its mission. The Church's cell, open to other communities, the family is not a chapel, a cenacle. This is why you must take care to work closely with your bishops and the ministers of the Church, beginning with your parish priests.

Your vocation as builders of the Church begins with a generous gift of life (even in the Church, many families are no longer aware that "children are the greatest gift of marriage" (*Gaudium et Spes*, 50). The vocation continues in the multiple activities which each couple undertakes according to its own vocation, from catechism to liturgical animation to apostolic action in all its forms. Each family will learn to discern its own vocation adapting its tastes, talents, and its means to the needs and the appeals of the Church and the world. For indeed the most urgent missionary service goes beyond the boundaries of the Church. This old world (*Familiaris Consortio*, 6) no longer believes in life, in love, in faithfulness, in pardon; it needs signs of the new and eternal Covenant, which will show it authentic love, faithfulness all the way to the Cross, and the joy of life, and the strenght of pardon; we must teach it again the value of a word given and kept, in a life offered. Through the faithfulness of the couple, the world will be able to discern the faithfulness of the living God.

UNTIL HE COMES

6. The Eucharist, finally, announces and makes ready for the return of the Lord and the definitive fulfilment of the Covenant. The Eucharist is food for the way: it readies us for a time when it itself will no longer be necessary because "we shall see him as he is" (1 Jn 3:2). Far from leading us to scorn time as it passes, the Eucharist teaches us to make the eternal from the temporal, but at the same time it saves us from becoming weighed down by the present, reminding us of our condition as no-





mads on this earth (Heb 11:9-11; Phil 5:20; 1 Pet 2:11). The people of the Covenant, we are also the people of the Passover, of the Way. We are making our way towards the City of God, towards the heavenly Jerusalem, where we will be fulfilled by the gift of God.

This eschatological perspective of the Eucharist is reflected in marriage. Marriage bears the mark of the ephemeral: "For the form of this world is passing away" (1 Cor 7:51). Nevertheless, the body is more than the body, it is the sign of the spirit which inhabits it (see General Audience of 28 July 1982); Christian marriage is more than the flesh. "Love is more than love" (Paul VI, address to the Equipes Notre-Dame, 4 May 1970, no. 6). Transfigured by the Spirit, love builds on eternity because "love never ends" (1 Cor 15:8). But at the same time an authentic conjugal love, though filled with tenderness and faithfulness, stops short of fixing an unseemly adoration on the spouse: it moves from the conjugal covenant to the divine Covenant and from the image to its Source. This is why it is acknowledged as inseparable from another sign of the Covenant: celibacy "for the sake of the Kingdom of Heaven" (Mt 19: 12; cf. General Audience of 50 June 1982). This reminds us all that the perfect gift of God is not a creature, however beloved, but the Lord himself: "for your Maker is your husband" (Is 54:5). The true Bridegroom of the final wedding is Christ, and the Church is the Bride (cf Mt 22:1-14). Consecrated virginity, sign of the world to come (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 16), rings out as a call to the heart of all Christian families. It is neither fear nor repulsion but the call of a greater love (cf. General Audience of 21 April 1982). I have been anxious to recall that, in this sense "the Church... has always defended the superiority of celibacy in relation to marriage" (*Familiaris Consortio*, 16), even though this is misunderstood today. This is to tell you what importance the Church attaches to a certain climate in Christian families which fosters the blossoming, in freedom and in joy, of the call to leave everything for Christ.

PROGRESSION

7. "If you knew the gift of God!". You will not have enough time, brothers and sisters, in all of your married life, to explore the



immeasurable gift which God has given you in your sacrament of the Covenant. The Church will not have enough time on its earthly way to explore the gift of God, “the breadth and length, the height and depth... of the love of God which surpasses all knowledge” (Eph 3:18-19). All the more reason to begin right now, at home, in your Equipes, and as a Church.

Yet this reminder of God’s ambition for the marriage of his children could overwhelm you: how should you take up such a mission among today’s men and women?

You are right to recognize your limits: humility is the first step towards saintliness. But nonetheless, you must not belittle God’s ambitions for you; how could love subsist if it did not reflect the holiness of its source, faithfully and fruitfully? “If Christian marriage can be compared to a very high mountain which puts the couple in the immediate neighbourhood of God, we must recognize that to climb this mountain takes a great deal of time and effort. But would this be a reason to destroy or to lower the mountain?” (Homily at Kinshasa, 5 May 1980, no. 1).

The gap which you perceive between the Father’s expectation of you and your poor responses should not paralyze you; rather, it should make you more dynamic. You know from experience that a true mother does not become an accomplice to her children’s refusals to eat, to work, or to love! Without either weakness or severity, she urges them to advance on the road of life; she is demanding in a tender and merciful way. And you know also from experience that a loving father does not condemn his children because they grow slowly! In my apostolic exhortation I spoke not of the





“graduality of the law”, for the demands of the creation and the redemption concern us all from today forward, but rather of the graduality of the “pedagogical path of growth” (no. 9). Must we not think of our entire Christian life in terms of progression?

In each of the domains where you come up against obstacles—in love and its expressions, in its reluctances and renewal, in the difficult problems of the regulation of births—in order to arrive at conjugal relations which are “controlled and respectful of the ends of the matrimonial act” (my address to the members of CLER, 5 November 1979) and in order to maintain always an absolute respect for human life, and even for your role in the Church and in the world. I refer you to what Paul VI said to you in his famous address in 1970: “the progression of the couple, like all human life, has stages, and the difficult and painful phases... have their place as well. But it is necessary to say this clearly: never should fear or anguish invade souls of good will, for is the Gospel not good news for all families, and a message which, even if it is demanding, is nonetheless deeply liberating?” (no. 15).

Your spiritual battles, and even your regret of your sins, confided in the Lord in the Sacrament of Reconciliation (cf. *Familiaris Consortio*, 58), have still a role to play: they can make you more compassionate towards your brothers and your sisters who are afflicted by all sorts of trials, by the desertion of the spouse, by loneliness or uncertainties; your own battles can help you to assist these brothers, without renouncing whatsoever the vocation of couples to saintliness, and to help them get back on their path.

MAY YOUR LIGHT SHINE

8. These last reflections have not taken us away from the Eucharist, rather, they bring us back to it: is not the Eucharist sustenance for those who walk? Is it not the encounter with him who is the Truth and the Life, as well as the Way? (cf. Jn 14:6).

Then, dearly loved brothers and sisters, live in the heart of the sacrament of the Covenant, your marriage nourished by the Eu-



charist and the Eucharist illumined by your sacrament of marriage; the future of the world depends on it. At the same time, despite your limitations and weaknesses, may your light shine humbly and strongly before your fellow men. Men of our time crowd around so many polluted springs! May your entire life lead them to the well of Jacob; may your life as a couple and as a family inquire of them: "If you knew the gift of God!" May they, in seeing your lives, catch sight of the Lord's enthusiastic "yes" to authentic love! May your entire life make them hear Christ's call: "If anyone thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the Scripture has said, 'Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water'" (Jn 7:37-38).

May Our Lady help you to accept the gift of God and to give it to men as she has done!

And I, with all my heart, to each of your families, to all of the members of the Equipes Notre-Dame and especially to those who are undergoing trials, as well as to the priests and nuns who are accompanying you in your reflections, give my Apostolic Blessing.

Joannes Paulus II

7

POPE JOHN PAUL II

Message of the Pope read by his Secretary of State to the International Responsible Couple on the occasion of the International Meeting in Santiago de Compostela August 17, 2000.

Dear Madam, dear Sir,

You have informed the Holy Father of the forthcoming General Assembly of the Teams of Our Lady, which will take place in Santiago de Compostela from 18 to 23 September, and during which a new reflection for the coming years will begin, based on the theme of "Being a married Christian couple today in the Church and in the world".

The Pope has asked me to let you know that he willingly joins in prayer with the couples present in Compostela and that he encourages Christian families and spouses to be faithful to their mission, in their homes as well as in the Church and the world. In this year of the Great Jubilee, it is particularly important for couples to draw renewed grace from their relationship with Christ for the service they are called to render. The fractures that exist in today's society call for ever greater vigilance, so couples can strengthen their bonds in the long term and in fidelity, and so they can responsibly welcome and educate the children who will be the protagonists of tomorrow's society. Based on a definitive commitment, marital solidity and stability are both key to the maturing of children and young people, and to their ability to find their place in society. As a Christian movement, it is also your responsibility to propose conjugal and family spirituality deeply rooted in the sacrament of marriage.



This will provide a solid foundation for the relationships with God and between people.

Entrusting you to the intercession of the family of Nazareth, His Holiness grants you an affectionate Apostolic Blessing.

I am happy to convey this message to you, please accept my warmest regards in the Lord.

**+G.B RE
Substitut**

*Mr and Mrs Igar FEHR
Responsible Couple for the ERI
Teams of Our Lady
PARIS*

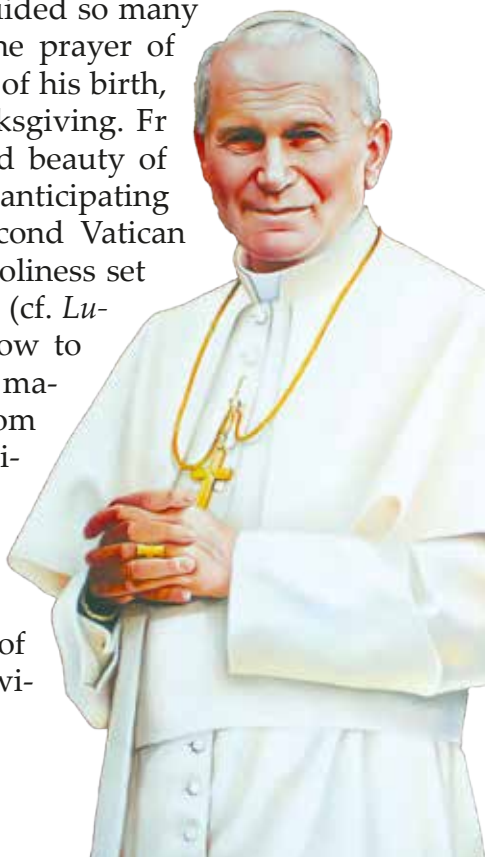
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POPE JOHN PAUL II

Address to the Regional Responsible couples of the Teams of Our Lady - January 20, 2003.

Dear Friends,

1. On the occasion of your international meeting in Rome, I am happy to welcome you, the regional leaders of the Teams of Our Lady (Équipes Notre Dame), your international spiritual advisor Mons. Fleischmann and the other priests who have come with you. I thank the international leaders of the movement, Mr and Mrs de Roberty, for their cordial greeting.
2. First of all, how could I not recall the person of Fr Henri Caffarel, your founder, who guided so many couples and initiated them to the prayer of contemplation. On the centenary of his birth, I am happy to join in your thanksgiving. Fr Caffarel taught the greatness and beauty of the vocation to marriage, and, anticipating the fruitful directions of the Second Vatican Council, he set forth the call to holiness set integral to marital and family life (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 11). He knew how to proclaim the major traits of the marital spirituality that derives from Baptism and underlines the dignity of human love in the plan of God. The attention he gave to the persons who were involved in the sacrament of marriage led him to put his gifts at the service of the “spiritual movement for war wi-





dows” that became the “Hope and Life” movement and gave him the impetus to create the first *Centres for the Preparation for Marriage* present everywhere today. Later on the “Teams of Our Lady for Young People” were created out of his concern to support young people in their faith journey.

3. In the face of the threats that weigh upon the family and the factors that weaken it, you have chosen a pertinent topic for your meeting: “Couples Called by Christ to a New Covenant”. In fact, for the Christian people, marriage, that was elevated to the dignity of a sacrament, is by nature a sign of the covenant, of the communion between God and the human person, and between Christ and the Church. So, for the duration of their lives, Christian spouses receive the mission to manifest in a visible way the indissoluble covenant of God with the human race. Christian faith presents marriage as Good News: the total, reciprocal, unique and indissoluble relationship between man and woman, called to give life. The Spirit of the Lord gives to spouses a new heart and makes them capable of loving each other as Christ has loved them, and of serving life by living out the Christian mystery, for in their union “the Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection is being accomplished” (Paul VI, *Address to the Teams of Our Lady*, 4 May 1970, n. 16).
4. Mystery of covenant and communion, the responsibility of the spouses invites them to draw their strength from the Eucharist, “source of Christian marriage” (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 57) and model for their love. In fact, the different phases of the Eucharistic liturgy invite married couples to live their marital and family life after the example of that of Christ who gives himself to human beings out of love. They will find in the sacrament the necessary courage for acceptance, pardon, dialogue and communion of hearts. It will also be a valuable aid for facing the inevitable difficulties of family life. May the members of the Teams be able to be the first witnesses of the grace that one can find in a regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church and of Sunday Mass, “celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his own people”



(Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini*, 31 May 1998, n. 31; cf. also n. 81) and “antidote for confronting and overcoming obstacles and tensions” (*Discourse to the Members of the 15th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family*, 18 October 2002, n. 2).

5. Nourished by the Bread of Life and called to enlighten “those who seek the truth” (*Lumen gentium*, n. 35), notably, their children, the spouses will be able to release fully the grace of their baptism through their own mission within the family, in society and in the Church. This was the intuition of Fr Caffarel, who did not want anyone to join “a team to become isolated ... but to learn how to give him/herself to others” (*Monthly Letter*, February 1948, p. 9). Rejoicing in all that you have undertaken, I exhort all the team members to participate more fully in the life of the Church, especially with young people, who want to receive the exacting and exalting Christian message of human love. In this perspective, the team members can aid them to live the period of their youth and engagement in fidelity to the commandments of Christ and of the Church, allowing them to find true happiness in the maturing of their affective life.
6. Your movement has developed its own pedagogy, based on the “concrete points of effort” which help you as a couple to grow together in holiness. I encourage you to live them carefully and perseveringly in order to love in truth. I invite you especially to develop personal, marital and family prayer, without which a Christian risks being lost, as Fr Caffarel used to say (cf. *L’Anneau d’Or*, March-April 1953, p. 136). Far from turning them away from their action in the world, genuine prayer sanctifies the couple and their family, opens the heart to the love of God and of the brothers. It also makes them capable of building history according to the plan of God (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter on Aspects of Christian Meditation, *Orationis formas*, 15 October 1989).
7. Dear friends, I thank God for the fruitfulness of your movement throughout the world, encouraging you to witness untiringly and explicitly to the beauty of human love, marriage and the fa-



mily. At the end of this audience, my prayer goes out to couples in difficulty. May they find on their path witnesses of the tenderness and mercy of God. I wish to repeat my spiritual closeness to separated persons, divorced persons, and the divorced and remarried, who, like the baptized, are called, in respect for the laws of the Church, to participate in Christian life (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 84). Finally, I express my gratitude to the spiritual counselors who make themselves available for you. They bring their competence and experience to your lay movement. By means of their collaboration, priests and couples learn to understand, appreciate and help one another. You who experience the grace of a priestly presence, pray for vocations and fearlessly hand on to your children the call of the Lord.

Entrusting you, your teams and their families to the intercession of *Our Lady of the Magnificat*, invoked each day by the members, and also to the Blessed Spouses Luigi and Maria Quattrocchi, I impart to all an affectionate apostolic blessing.

Joannes Paulus PP. II

9

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Message of the Pope read by his Under-Secretary of State to the International Responsible couple on the occasion of the International Meeting of Lourdes 2006. July 2006.

Vatican, July 13th, 2006
STATE SECRETARIAT

SECTION FOR GENERAL BUSINESS
N.27.157

Madam, Sir,

Having been informed about the 10th international Gathering of *Teams* which will be held in Lourdes from the 16th to the 21st of next September, the Holy Father joins with all the members in thought and in prayer.

The chosen Theme for this Gathering: «*Teams, living communities of couples, reflecting the love of Christ*», invites the members of your movement to be fully aware of their religious and missionary responsibilities in today's world. The Pope encourages them therefore to continually become witnesses of the risen Christ, by allowing the grace to be signs of Christ's love, that they have received in the Sacrament of Marriage, to shine through their life as a couple. May they contribute in that way to spread to today's society the truth of the christian message on the family: this is an invitation to fully discover the dignity of the human being, created in the image of God, by living the joy of truly human relationships, because they were established on mutual love in the image of divine love! The Holy Father also invites Teams Members to become closer



to people experiencing difficulties in their conjugal life or being confronted by its obvious failure, so that they can help them regain strength thanks to a friendly mutual help and rediscover the hope that does not disappoint us (*Romans 5,5*). May the example of the Virgin Mary who welcomed the gift of God unhesitatingly and gave herself wholly to her Lord, be for the members of *Teams*, a support and a guide through the joys as well as the difficulties of their daily endeavours!

Invoking the maternal protection of Our Lady of Lourdes upon the organizers and all the participants of this international Gathering, His Holiness grants them wholeheartedly a special apostolic Blessing, as well as to all the members of *Teams*, spread throughout the world.

Pleased to pass on to you, this message on behalf of the Holy Father, I remain yours faithfully, devoted in our Lord.

+Angelo Card. Sodano
(*State Secretary for His Holiness*)

Mr & Mrs de ROBERTY
International Team Responsible Couple
PARIS

POPE BENEDICT XVI

Message to the participants in the XI International Meeting of the Teams of Our Lady, held in Brasilia - July 2012.

Most Reverend Eminence

The Supreme Pontiff, advised of the event in Brasilia of the XIth International Gathering of the Equipes Notre-Dame, has asked me to convey to you this message of paternal greeting to the participants and to all couples from the Movement, which was born of the farsighted pastoral intuition of the servant of God, Henri Caffarel, priest, whose mission has continued to grow over time, through its relevance and urgency. On the other hand, in some ways, it has increasingly confronted the problems and difficulties that marriage and the family are experiencing today in an atmosphere of increasing secularisation.

In this context, couples of the Equipes Notre-Dame proclaim, not only in words, but also through their lives, the fundamental truths about human love and its deeper significance. "A man and a woman in love, a child's smile, peace in the home: this is a sermon without words, but extraordinarily persuasive, in which each person can already sense, transparently, the reflection of another love and its infinite appeal." (Paul VI, to the couples of the Equipes Notre-Dame, May 4, 1970)

Of course, this ideal may seem rather high. This is why the movement encourages its members to constantly drink from the fountains of grace of the sacrament of marriage, and participation at Sunday Mass; beyond the resource of grace from the sacraments, it provides them with great wisdom, a "method" rich in commitments and simple and practical ideas to daily live an embodied spirituality for



Christian spouses. Among these, we can highlight “the Sit Down”, that is to say, a commitment to maintain a regular time for personal dialogue between the spouses, in which each presents to the other, with all sincerity and in a climate of mutual listening, the issues and topics most important to life as a couple. In our world, so marked by individualism, activism, eagerness and distraction, sincere and constant dialogue between the spouses is essential to avoid the emergence of misunderstandings that grow and harden and that, unfortunately, often end up with insoluble fractures that no one can help to repair. So, cultivate this precious habit of sitting down one beside the other to talk and listen so that you understand each other, constantly, coping with the surprises and difficulties along the way.

In three months, we will commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of the opening of the Second Vatican Council, that in many of its documents offered the Church of our time a renewed face of the value of human love, of married and family life; on this occasion we will begin the Year of Faith, to rediscover all the strength and joy to proclaim the faith in our world and in our time. His Holiness Benedict XVI invites Christian couples to be “the gentle and smiling face of the Church”, the best and most convincing heralds of the beauty of love sustained and nourished by faith, a gift of God offered with generosity and magnanimity to all, so that every day, they can discover the meaning of their lives. As a sign of ecclesiastic gratitude and an incentive for the new challenges that we face and as a guarantee of graces and lights from the Most High for the work of the XIth World Gathering of the Equipes Notre-Dame, the Holy Father grants to all participants and their respective families, his much awaited Apostolic Blessing.

I take advantage of this opportunity, to testify to Your Most Reverend Eminence all my sentiments of my fraternal esteem in Christ.

The Vatican, 5 July 2012

Tarcisio Cardinal Bertone
Secretary of State for His Holiness

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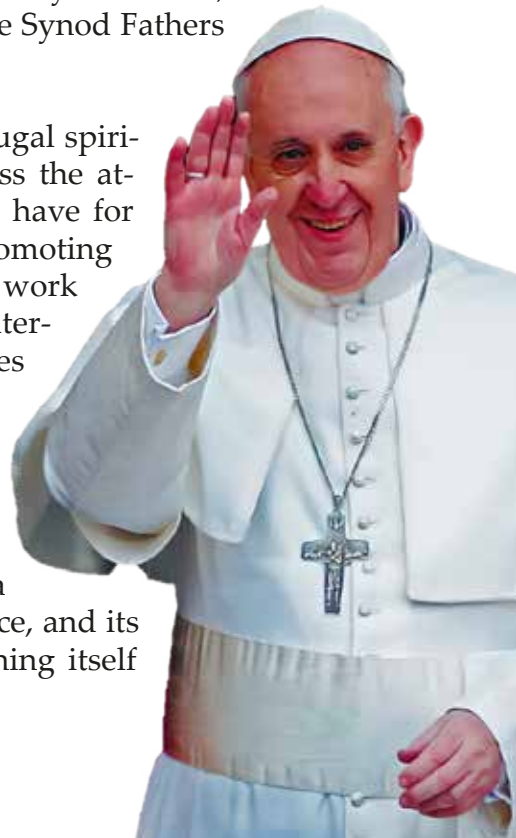
POPE FRANCISCO

Address to the participants in the III International Meeting of Regional Couples of the Teams of Our Lady - September 10, 2015.

I am pleased to welcome you, dear leaders and spiritual counsellors of the Teams of Our Lady, on the occasion of your world meeting. This meeting which I have the joy of attending with you is only a few weeks before the Synod of Bishops that I wished to call together in Rome, so that the Church may reflect with ever greater attention on the situation experienced by families, the vital cells of our societies and of the Church, and who are, as you know, threatened in the present difficult cultural context. In this circumstance, I ask you, as well as all the couples on your Teams, to pray with faith and fervour for the Synod Fathers and for me.

Naturally, a movement of conjugal spirituality such as yours fully express the attention that the Church wants to have for families, and it does so both by promoting the maturation of the couples who work with your Teams, through the fraternal support given to other couples to whom they are sent.

Indeed, I would like to insist on this missionary role of the Teams of Our Lady. Every committed couple certainly receives a great deal from its Team experience, and its conjugal life is deepened by refining itself





through the spirituality of the Movement. However, after receiving from Christ and from the Church, a Christian is irresistibly sent out to witness to and pass on what he has received. “The new evangelization calls for personal involvement on the part of each of the baptized” (Apostolic Exhortation *Evangelii Gaudium*, n. 120). Christian couples and families are often the best placed to proclaim Jesus Christ to other families, to support, fortify and encourage them. What you live as couples and as families — accompanied by the very charism of your Movement — the profound and irreplaceable joy that the Lord enables you to feel in domestic intimacy in joy and sorrow, in the happiness of your spouse’s presence, in the growth of your children, in the human and spiritual fruitfulness that He grants you, all this is to be witnessed to, proclaimed and communicated outside so that others, in turn, may set out on this path.

In the first place, then, I encourage all couples to put into practice, and to live in depth, with constancy and perseverance, the spirituality the Teams of Our Lady follow. I think that the proposed “concrete points of commitment” are truly effective aides, which enable couples to progress with confidence in conjugal life on the way of the Gospel. I am thinking, in particular, of the a prayer of couples and prayer in the family, a beautiful and necessary tradition that has always supported the faith and hope of Christians, unfortunately abandoned in so many regions of the world. I am also thinking of the time for monthly dialogue proposed to the spouses — the famous and demanding “duty to sit down”, which runs so counter to the habits of the frenetic and agitated world pervaded by individualism — a moment of exchange lived in truth under the Lord’s gaze. It is a precious time of thanksgiving, of forgiveness, of mutual respect and attention to the other. I am thinking, lastly, of faithful participation in Team life, which brings to each one the richness of learning and of sharing, as well as the help and comfort of friendship. In this regard, I emphasize the mutual fruitfulness of this encounter experienced with a priest who supports you. I thank you, dear couples of the Teams of Our Lady, for being a support and encouragement to the ministry of your priests, who always find priestly joy, fraternal presence, emo-

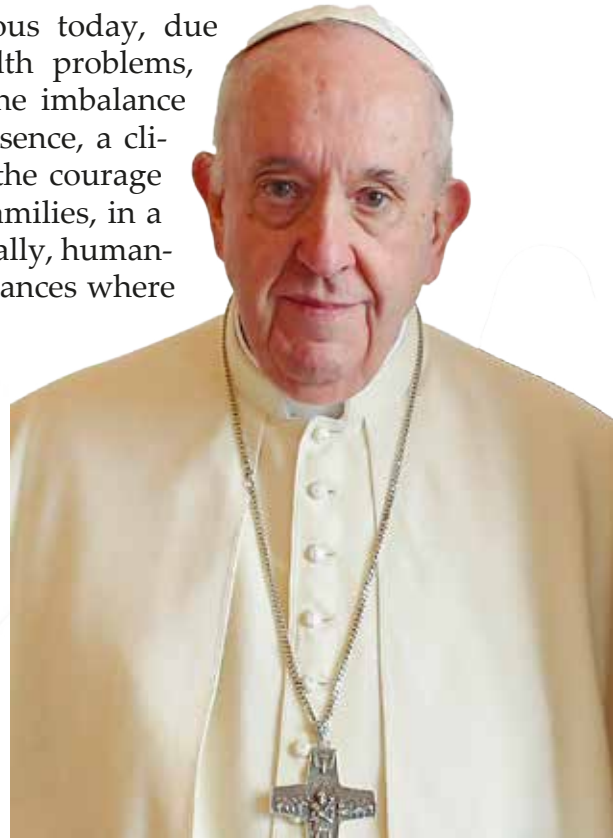


tional balance and spiritual paternity in their contact with your Teams and your families.

Secondly, I invite the couples, fortified by Team meetings in the missionary commitment. This mission which is entrusted to them, is all the more important inasmuch as the image of the family — as God wills it, composed of one man and one woman in view of the good of the spouses and also of the procreation and upbringing of children — is deformed through powerful adverse projects supported by ideological trends. You are certainly already missionaries by the radiation of your family life to the spheres of your friendships and relationships, and also other areas. In fact, a happy and balanced family, inhabited by the presence of God, speaks in and of itself of God's love for all men. I also invite you to commit yourselves, if possible, in an ever more concrete way and with ever renewed creativity, to the activities that can be organized to welcome, form and support in the faith young couples in particular, before and after marriage.

I also exhort you to continue to be close to wounded families, who are so numerous today, due to unemployment, poverty, health problems, mourning, worry over a child, the imbalance caused by an estrangement or absence, a climate of violence. We must have the courage to come into contact with these families, in a discreet but generous way, materially, humanly or spiritually, in those circumstances where they are most vulnerable.

I cannot but encourage the couples of the *Équipes Notre Dame* to be instruments of the mercy of Christ and of the Church towards people whose marriage has failed. Never forget that your conjugal fidelity is a gift of God, and that mercy has





been exercised on behalf of each one of us. A united and happy couple can understand better than anyone else, as from within, the wound and the suffering caused by abandonment, betrayal, failure of love. Therefore, it is necessary that you be able to bring your testimony and your experience to help Christian communities to discern the real situations of these people, and to accept them with their wounds, and help them to walk in faith and in truth, under the gaze of Christ the Good Shepherd, to play an appropriate role in the life of the Church. Nor should you forget the unspeakable suffering of youngsters who experience these painful family situations: you can give them much.

Dear Teams of Our Lady, I renew my confidence in you and my encouragement. From the moment that the Cause of Beatification of your Founder, Fr Enrico Caffarel, was introduced in Rome, I have prayed that the Holy Spirit may enlighten the Church in the judgment that she will have to pronounce in due time in this regard. I entrust your couples to the protection of the Virgin Mary and of St Joseph, and I impart to you my heartfelt Apostolic Blessing.

Franciscus

POPE FRANCIS

12

Message to the participants in the XII International Meeting of the Teams of Our Lady, held in Fatima - July 2018.

It is with pleasure that I welcome the request for blessing all the participants of the 12th International Gathering of Teams Our Lady which takes place in Fatima from July 16 to 21, 2018, under the theme "The Prodigal Son". Pope Francis greets you fraternally, reminding everyone that the Church condemns sin, because it must speak the truth, but at the same time embraces the sinner who recognizes himself as such, approaches Him and speaks about God's infinite mercy. What great hope and what joy the parable of the Prodigal Son brings us! It does not only speak to us of welcome or forgiveness, but also of "feast" for the son who returns. (Luke 15:32).

The Holy Father invites us to recognize ourselves in this lost son who returns to the Father. This Father who never tires of hugging him and restoring his greatness as a son. Let us be moved by such great kindness and let our hearts speak: It is true, Lord! I am a sinner. I feel as such and I'm sure of being it. I'm lost. In a thousand ways, I have shunned your love, but here I am to renew my covenant with you. I need you. Save me once again Lord! Take me, once more, into your redeeming arms (*Evangelii Gaudium* 3)

These open arms on the cross prove that no one is excluded from the Father's love, from his mercy. He does not want to lose anyone, moreover, He does not resign himself to losing anyone: husband or wife, parents or children ... You are well aware, that in the eyes of Jesus, nobody is definitely lost, there are only people who need to be found, and, He pushes us to go out looking for them. For



if we want to find the Lord, we must seek Him where He wants to meet us and not where we want to find Him; the Shepherd can only be found where the sheep is lost. While informing us that He leaves in search of the lost sheep, He encourages the ninety-nine to participate in the reunification of the flock. And if that happens, it's not just the sheep that He carries on the shoulders and takes home that will make a party with friends and neighbors, but also the whole flock. (Luke 15:4-6).

Thus “taken by the hand by the Virgin Mary and under her gaze, we can joyfully sing the Lord’s mercies. We can say to Him: My soul is singing for you Lord! The mercy you have used with your saints and with all your faithful people has spread to me. Because of the pride of my heart, I lived focused on my ambitions and my interests, but I did not occupy any throne, Lord! The only possibility of delight that I have is that your Mother takes me in her arms, covers me with her cloak and places me near your Heart”.

(Pope Francis’ Message: introduction to the Marian Vigil, Fátima 12/5/2017).

Thus, consecrated to the merciful hearts of Jesus and Mary, you can count on their grace, just as, a hundred years ago, through the Virgin Mother of God, grace shone in the eyes of the three little shepherds and shaped their lives with the purpose of “saving sinners”. Wishing that this passion of the little shepherds will seize spouses, parents, children, members of Teams of Our Lady spread around the world, Pope Francis grants you, as well as Spiritual, Retreats and Gatherings Counsellors, the implored Apostolic Blessing.

Vatican, June 13, 2018

The substitute of His Holiness’ Secretary of State

POPE FRANCIS

Message to the Teams of Our Lady in private audience to the International Responsible Team ERI on May 4, 2024, on the occasion of the XIII International Meeting to be held in Turin in July 2024.

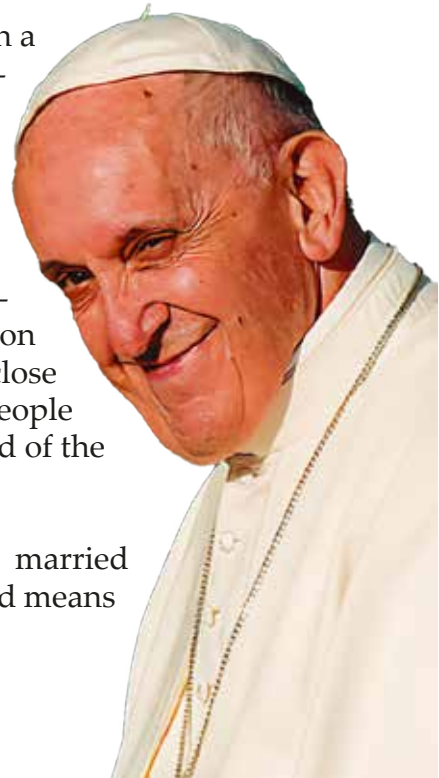
Dear brothers and sisters!

I am pleased to meet you, international leaders of the *Équipes Notre-Dame* Movement. Thank you for coming and above all thank you for your commitment to families.

You are an expanding movement: thousands of *équipes* spread throughout the world, many families who are seeking to live Christian marriage as a gift.

The Christian family is going through a genuine “cultural storm” in this changing era, and is threatened and tempted on various fronts. Your work, therefore, is valuable for the Church. You closely accompany married couples so that they do not feel alone in the difficulties of life and in their marital relationship. In this way, you are an expression of the “outbound” Church, which is close to the situations and problems of the people and unreservedly committed to the good of the families of today and tomorrow.

It is a true mission to accompany married couples today! *Protecting marriage* indeed means





protecting an entire family, it means saving all the relationships generated by marriage: the love between couples, between parents and children, grandparents and grandchildren; it means saving that witness of a love that is possible and forever, which young people struggle to believe in. Indeed, children need to receive from their parents the certainty that God created them out of love, and that one day they too will be able to love and be loved as their mother and father did. Be sure that the seed of love, sown in their hearts by their parents, will germinate sooner or later.

I see a great urgency today: to help young people to discover that *Christian marriage is a vocation*, a specific calling that God addresses to a man and a woman so that they can fully realize themselves as generative, becoming a father and a mother, and bringing the Grace of their Sacrament into the world. This Grace is the love of Christ united with that of the married couple, His presence between them, it is God's fidelity to their love: it is He who gives them the strength to grow together every day and to remain united.

Today, it is thought that the success of a marriage depends only on the willpower of the people. It does not. If it were so, it would be a burden, a yoke placed on the shoulders of two poor creatures. Marriage, on the other hand, is a "three-way step", in which Christ's presence between the bride and groom makes the journey possible, and the yoke is transformed into a game of glances: a glance between the bride and groom, a glance between the bride and groom and Christ. It is a game that lasts a lifetime, which can be won together if one takes care of one's relationship, if one cherishes it like a precious treasure, helping each other to pass through each day, even in married life, that gateway that is Christ. He said: "I am the gate. Whoever enters by me will be saved" (*Jn 10:9*). And, speaking of glances, once, during a General Audience, there was a couple, married for sixty years; she was 18 when she got married, and he was 21. They were therefore 78 and 81 years old. And I asked them, "And now, do you still love each other?". And they looked at each other, then they came to me,

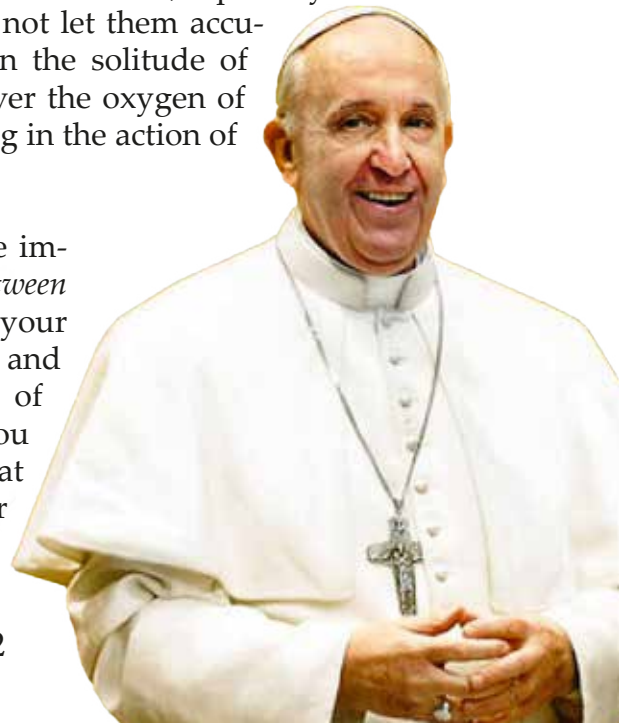


with tears in their eyes: “We still love each other!” Beautiful!

Therefore, I would like to leave you with two brief reflections: the first relates to *newly-wed couples*. Take care of them! It is important that newly-weds experience a *nuptial mystagogy*, that will help them to live the beauty of their Sacrament and a spirituality of the couple. In the first years of marriage, it is necessary above all to discover faith within the couple, to taste it, to savour it by learning to pray together. Many people marry today without understand how faith enters into their married life, perhaps because no-one bore witness to it before them prior to their marriage. I invite you to help them with a “catechumenal” journey – let’s call it that – of rediscovery of the faith, both personal and as a couple – so that they learn straight away to make room for Jesus and, with Him, succeed in taking care of their marriage.

Your work, next to priests, in this sense, is valuable; you can do a great deal in parishes and in communities, opening up to welcome the youngest families. We must start out again from the new generations to make the Church fruitful: to generate many domestic Churches in which a Christian style of life is lived, where one feels familiar with Christ, where one learns how to listen to those who are next to you, just as Christ listens to us. You can be like flames that kindle other flames to faith, especially among the youngest couples: do not let them accumulate sufferings and wounds in the solitude of their homes. Help them to discover the oxygen of faith gently, patiently, and trusting in the action of the Holy Spirit.

The second reflection is on the importance of *co-responsibility between married couples and priests within your movement*. You have understood and live tangibly the *complementarity* of the two vocations: I encourage you to take this into the parishes, so that the laypeople and priests discover its richness and necessity. This





helps to overcome that clericalism that prevents the Church from being fruitful – beware of clericalism! – and this will also help married couples to discover that, with marriage, they are called to a mission. Indeed, they too have the gift and the responsibility of building the ecclesial community, alongside ordained ministers.

Without Christian communities, families feel alone, and loneliness does a great deal of harm! With your charism, you can become rescuers attentive towards those who are in need, those who are alone, those who have family problems and do not know how to talk about them because they are ashamed or have lost hope. In your dioceses, you can make families understand the importance of helping each other and forming a network; building communities where Christ can “dwell” in the homes and in family relations.

Dear brothers and sisters, next July you will have your international gathering in Turin. In the midst of the synodal journey that we are undertaking, may it be for you a time of listening to the Spirit and fruitful planning for the Kingdom of God.

I entrust your mission and all your families to the Virgin Mary, so that She may protect you, keep you steadfast in Christ, and always make you witnesses of His love. In this year dedicated to prayer, may you discover and rediscover the joy of praying, praying together at home, with simplicity and in daily life. This time I will not say anything about mothers-in-law, because there are some here! I bless you from my heart. And I ask you to please pray for me. Thank you!

Franciscus

