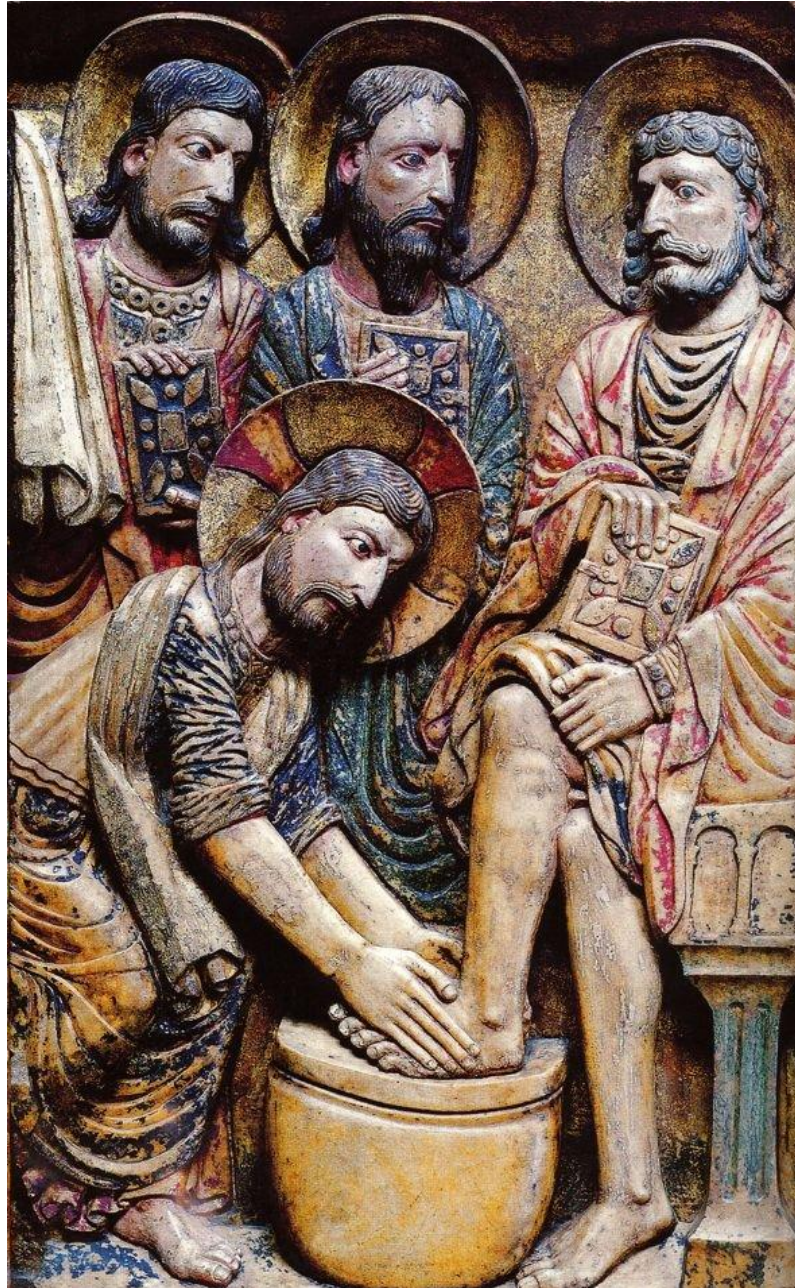


DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL
WELCOMING AND TAKING CARE OF MANKIND



STUDY TOPIC 2013-2014



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Cover: The Washing of the Feet

Maestro della Passione, the Modena Cathedral, Italy.¹ Part of the sculptures of the large choir loft– representing scenes from Christ’s Passion- installed on the occasion of the consecration of the cathedral in 1184².

¹ Copied from: <https://picasaweb.google.com/lh/photo/VhdfMcs79kJwxPmtZ5HBptMTjNZETymyPjy0liipFm0> (on 29.01.2013). Copyright: <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/3.0/deed.pt>

² Translated on 29.01.2013, from: http://www.duomodimodena.it/duomo/storia_casa.html

INTRODUCTION

After Brasilia, many of the Super Regions let the International Leading Team (ERI) know of a need to have available a study topic that could serve both as a deep reflection on the Gospel and the starting point for the mission to which we are all called.

So a new chapter is opening in the story of each of us as an individual, and in each couple in Teams as we become participants in this daring that the Word produces.

The challenge was issued at an international level. Straight away a Portuguese Team generously showed interest and engaged with the topic that was put to them. A Community that demonstrates a dimension of service itself produces a work of charity towards others, as Benedict XVI told us. This work therefore appeared as the result of the disquiet of this community gathered in the name of Christ, freely offering its work which, thanks to its richness and its relevance was immediately approved by the ERI as Topic of the Year.

When we "discover ourselves and allow ourselves to be invited" by Jesus we begin a new journey to glorify the inheritance that the Lord has left us and that makes the Way easier: his Word.

A man and woman who love each other, and who have become one flesh, enable the world to understand the mystery of the Love of Christ and of humanity, which is saved by this Love.

Throughout our itinerary, Jesus asks of us an internal personal transformation, and throughout the journey of each individual, the journey is completed stage by stage, clearly defined by each meeting.

The covenant the couple makes with Jesus is the guarantee that true love perseveres and constitutes the authentic response of a true vocation to God's call. God ratifies this choice that we made by ourselves, which does not prevent it from being made under His gaze so that we learn and teach the art of loving.

The first obstacle to be overcome, as Pope Francis tells us, is not to be afraid of showing the tenderness that each man has in his Heart to offer to his brother. In every page of the Gospel we find Jesus caught up in serving and taking care of His brothers.

Zacchaeus also understood Jesus' words during that meeting whose subject no one knows. Nonetheless, when this intimate conversation with Jesus is over, he paid four times more to the people he had cheated and gave half of his goods to those who had the most need. Charity is creative. Once called by Christ, each of us will discover his way of being of service.

Welcoming and taking care of others is the second priority of the letter from Brasilia.

When the couple freely lives the Sacrament of Marriage, they bear witness to this choice by fully accepting their history of love, which is not exhausted in itself, because they live it and share it with others.

Let's start first of all with ourselves, where everything is a loving relationship: from the most fragile – children, the sick, problems with a child – everything is a challenge to give ourselves unconditionally, to participate daringly in the History of salvation.

If the whole community is part of the people of God, let's then be concerned to give fulfilment to our time.

“Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?”

Learning to feel with Jesus' heart can take time, but learning to see all those who are invisible in our society is an exercise we should undertake with the eyes of our heart.

We can succeed in organising our lives courageously so as to have time for work and rest, time for the family, time for silence and prayer, time to serve others.

Jesus told his disciples that, in His time, the Kingdom of God was already on earth.

We too do not need signs other than those that already exist to prove that the hour has come!

The Lord is already among us. He takes care of us and cures us unfailingly with His Love.

This topic: “Dare to live the Gospel: Welcoming and taking care of mankind” appears as a challenge so that each of us, each couple, each Team learns to see and to act with the eyes of the heart in this age.

So let's be off, our hands in the hands of Mary, to accomplish what He will tell us, in our age!

Tó and José Moura Soares
Responsible Couple for the ERI

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

WELCOMING AND TAKING CARE OF MANKIND

*Daring to live the Gospel is going beyond what was foreseen!
Daring to live the Gospel is embracing the unexpected!*³

In his Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei* Benedict XVI, tells us that “we should rediscover a taste for feeding on the Word of God”⁴. And again, “Teams of Our Lady want to help married couples to live fully according to the Gospel, with the mutual support of the members of a Team and the strength of the whole Movement”⁵.

The challenge to DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL came from the gathering in Brasilia: “So let us dare to live the Gospel being faithful to and having in mind the consistency of the faith ‘by welcoming values and needs in so far as they can be assimilated and linked to the Founding Charism.’” (Father Caffarel — speech at Chantilly, May 1987)⁶.

So we thought: what could be better than proposing that we base the whole outline of the Team meeting on the Word of God? In fact a recent document from the ERI invites us to a doctrine of the Team Meeting while being based on three essential pillars:

- reunited in the name of Christ, the Team turns towards the Father, to welcome his love and his will. “For where two or three meet in my name, I am there among them.” (Mt 18:20)
- united to Christ, the Team shares the love of God, through mutual assistance: “carry each other’s burdens”(Gal 6:2)
- impelled by the Spirit of Christ, the Team sends its members into the world, to bear witness to his love: “The whole group of believers was united, heart and soul” (Acts 4:32)⁷

The call to couples for the year 2013/2014, “Dare to live the Gospel: welcoming and taking care of mankind”⁸, based firmly on the attitudes of Christ⁹, led us to prepare a series of eight topics whose common thread is the text of the Gospels. So the text chosen for each meeting is its centre, both for its preparation and holding the meeting. In truth, the whole of life can be reflected in the light of the Gospel!! So, the couple and the family, a very special environment for the exercise of taking care of others, must always be a subject of reflection and study in an integrated and integral way.

³ Hymn of the XIth International Teams Gathering, Brasilia

⁴ Apostolic Letter *Porta Fidei*, item 3. In (http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/benedict_xvi/)

⁵ Guide of the Équipes Notre-Dame, Chapter V, Edition 2001

⁶ ERI Letter from Brasilia (http://www.equipes-notre-dame.com/documents_privates/Orientations_FR.pdf)

⁷ The Team Meeting, ERI, 2010 (http://www.equipes-notre-dame.com/documents_privates/Equipe_Satellite/RE_FR.pdf)

⁸ ERI Letter from Brasilia, op. cit.

⁹ This is why the image chosen for the cover gives us a dimension of the Christ which is essential to understand how he took care of people.

Therefore, a Gospel text is proposed for each meeting in such a way as to support the topic for the meeting and serve as the basis for the opening prayer. The sharing about the endeavours comes next - individual prayer, conjugal prayer, the sit-down, the rule of life - all starting from the same Gospel text, taken as the source of inspiration. Similarly, we propose that the General Sharing should be prepared and carried out with reference to the same Gospel. We have prepared some suggestions for each of these parts of the meeting that are intended for reflection, which, nonetheless, can be developed or replaced by others selected by team members, if they so choose.

The topics for each meeting, naturally, are focussed on the texts of the Gospel that have been chosen, by calling on Team members to study the Gospels. The better to approach these topics and to support the following reflection, we propose some questions formulated on the basis of the text of the Gospel that has been chosen; however, these questions are only suggestions that are open to personal adaptation. In addition, to help in the preparation of the topic and the reflection, some support texts are being put to you. The central point is always the text of the Gospel, these texts are only reference points that can help us to deepen the meaning of these biblical texts. Seeing that Teams of Our Lady comprise couples from very different cultures and from very varied countries and regions from across the whole world, trusting in the Holy Spirit, we suggest that team members not restrict themselves to these texts for reflection, but seek other alternative texts so as to enrich their reflection and their meeting. In fact the whole development of topics is done in an open way, such that Team members make the choices they consider best suited to the circumstances of the environment they fit into, to their own experience of life, to their traditions and culture. What is important is that the whole life of Teams should be a precious pattern to support families and lead them to "dare to live the Gospel: welcoming and caring for mankind", whether they are men or women, more or less close to the Church, younger or older, whether they think like us or differently from us.

That said, we propose that the Topic be developed throughout the year and be focussed on the invitation to discover and take care of oneself in such a way as to respond to the Lord (1st meeting), to discover and accept others (2nd meeting), to respond as a couple (3rd meeting) and as a family (4th and 5th meetings), in the society that surrounds us (6th meeting), in the bosom of the Church (7th meeting) and fully integrated into the world (8th meeting). So we recall, as Benedict XVI says, that "is it the love of Christ that fills our hearts and impels us to evangelise". Or the words of Pope Francis, during the homily for the Mass inaugurating his pontificate: "the fact of caring for, of looking after someone else, requires goodness, needs to be lived with tenderness [...] denotes a strength of spirit and a capacity for attention, for compassion, for true openness to others, for love. We should not be afraid of goodness, of tenderness!"

Let us cause "streams of living water to flow" in this world which daringly asks us to "go and do likewise"¹⁰.

¹⁰ ERI Letter from Brasilia, op. cit.

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Discovering ourselves and allowing ourselves to be invited

Introduction

Jesus invites us to give meaning to our lives, to be free in our choices, to be hopeful, today, here and now, not just in an unknown future, to love. But above all, He asks that we know who we are, what our personality is, what our weaknesses and strengths are, what our viewpoint is that makes us discover the world around us. He invites us as we are, as we develop, to convert us, to dare to live the Gospel, to follow Him. Our principle in everything we are and affirm is knowing that "It is I" as the blind man affirms after being cured, knowing how to know oneself, as Zacchaeus declared when he accepted conversion. If we know ourselves, if we know who we are, then we can accept the invitation to hope, to be free, to love.

Listening to the Word: Luke 19: 1-10¹¹

Jesus' meeting with Zacchaeus

¹ He entered Jericho and was going through the town ² and suddenly a man whose name was Zacchaeus made his appearance; he was one of the senior tax collectors and a wealthy man. ³ He kept trying to see which Jesus was, but he was too short and could not see him for the crowd; ⁴ so he ran ahead and climbed a sycamore tree to catch a glimpse of Jesus who was to pass that way. ⁵ When Jesus reached the spot he looked up and spoke to him, 'Zacchaeus, come down. Hurry, because I am to stay at your house today.' ⁶ And he hurried down and welcomed him joyfully. ⁷ They all complained when they saw what was happening. 'He has gone to stay at a sinner's house,' they said. ⁸ But Zacchaeus stood his ground and said to the Lord, 'Look, sir, I am going to give half my property to the poor, and if I have cheated anybody I will pay him back four times the amount.' ⁹ And Jesus said to him, 'Today salvation has come to this house, because this man too is a son of Abraham; ¹⁰ for the Son of man has come to seek out and save what was lost.'

Silent time, prayer time based on the Gospel

¹¹ <http://www.catholic.org/>

Sharing and general sharing

Zacchaeus knew that he was short and was not afraid to stand out by climbing a tree in order to see Jesus. This attitude, which could simply have been curiosity, was enough for Jesus to talk to him.

Jesus told him that he needed him, asked to stay in his house that day. Zacchaeus answered quickly and joyously. This response to a simple request was enough to convert Zacchaeus's whole life.

Sharing

- Are we ready to respond to Jesus' invitations "quickly" and joyously by listening to Him and discussing with Him? (Praying)
- Will we have the desire to know who Jesus is and what he may ask of us and give us? (Conjugal prayer and family prayer).
- How do we share between husband and wife our choices and difficulties or our worries; how do we help each other in order to overcome these, by allowing ourselves to be invited? (Sit-down).
- To what extent can the example of Zacchaeus inspire us to introduce changes into our lives? (Rule of life).

General sharing

Events in our lives that can be seen in the light of the Gospel? To what extent does Zacchaeus' experience remind us of recent, significant events that we would like to tell the Team about?

Discussion on the Study Topic

Luke 19:1-10 gives us an opportunity to reflect on three essential dimensions:

- Zacchaeus' attitude: of humility, consciousness of his limitations, spontaneity and capacity to respond with a change in his life.
- Jesus' attitude, looking at him, not seeing him as a senior tax collector but as someone who can have confidence in him, who is going to stay in his house.
- the attitude of "all the others": mistrust, criticism, prejudice, exclusion.



Jesus and Zacchaeus– Sister Mercedes, 2006, Notre-Dame des Neiges, France

Final Prayer¹²

Father,
I abandon myself into your hands; do with me what you will.
Whatever you may do, I thank you:
I am ready for all, I accept all.
Let only your will be done in me, and in all your creatures.
I wish no more than this, O Lord.

Into your hands I commend my soul;
I offer it to you
with all the love of my heart,
for I love you, Lord,
and so need to give myself,
to surrender myself into your hands,
without reserve,
and with boundless confidence,
for you are my Father.

Charles de Foucauld.

¹² Charles de Foucauld. In <http://viechretienne.catholique.org/prieres/au-pere/574-priere-de-charles-de-foucauld>
English text from
http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/212/Prayer_of_Abandonment_Charles_de_Foucauld.html

The following texts have been chosen as reading suggestions, to help in deepening our reflection

Learning to be spontaneous

Timothy Radcliffe¹³

The point of Christianity, before anything else, is to show that there is a point to our lives. Our lives are pointed towards some ultimate end. Despite all the absurdity and suffering we may endure, meaning has the last word. We may not now be able to tell the story of our lives or of humanity, but our hope is that one day all that we have lived and been will be found to have sense. But can we show anything of that ultimate meaning now? We ended the first chapter with music as one of the most fundamental ways in which we try to express that hope for what is beyond the reach of our words. But are there other ways in which we can make visible the end of the journey? In this and the next chapter, I will suggest two ways in which the final purpose of our lives should break in now. We should have a freedom and a happiness that would make no sense if God does not exist. Christianity invites us to a peculiar freedom and happiness, which is a share in God's own vitality. The end of the journey is thus made manifest now. Our hope is sustained by this taste of the goal of the journey. And we may hope to find this same peculiar freedom and joy among people of other faiths and none. We can make no exclusive claim to share God's life now. But we should be aware that the gospel invites us to a liberty and happiness which should swim against the expectations of our culture, and may look positively eccentric. (p.28)

[...] Jesus is the innocent victim. He is the victim of hatred and fear. His life is out of his hands. He has been betrayed and shortly he will be handed over. He stands beside us in all our experiences of being unfree and victimized. But still he makes choices. His options are extremely limited, but he chooses to gather his disciples for a last meal rather than flee from Jerusalem. He chooses to cross over the Kidron [sic] valley and go to the Garden of Gethsemane to confront his enemies. He is not just a victim. [...] (p35)

[...] Mark tells us time and again that the Son of Man must go to Jerusalem, where he must suffer and die. In embracing this necessity Jesus is supremely free, because what he must do expresses who he most deeply is.

Entering into that freedom, which is Christ's own gift, requires that we be liberated from the wrong idea of God. We must destroy the idol of God as a big and powerful person, usually thought of as male, who bosses us around and tells us what we must do if he is to like us. We must get rid of the God who opposes our freedom, and keeps us trapped in infantile submission. So many people's lives have been crucified by worship of this alien idol. We must discover the God who is the source of freedom bubbling up in the very core of our being, and granting us existence in every moment. (p.45)

¹³Radcliffe, Timothy 2005 *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* Burns & Oates, London: chap. 2.

Go right into yourself

José António Pagola¹⁴

I tell you, and I repeat, that to believe in God you must search for Him in yourself. If you do not find Him in your heart, you must not search for Him elsewhere. But what can we do? We want to be in touch with God but we do not know how to listen to him or even how to speak to Him.

[...] To find God you must not travel widely. You need only stop, close your eyes, enter into your heart and listen to what is in yourself. In this same place where you are at present, God is there surrounding you and filling you with life.

You do absolutely nothing and yet, your heart beats, blood flows through your arteries and your lungs breath. A mysterious power acts on your being. You do nothing to live and yet second after second, you are in the process of receiving life as a marvellous gift. How can you say that you live alone? Who makes you live?

We say out of habit: "I am breathing". In reality, that's not how it is. You are not breathing. Breathing is taking place in you without your realising how it happens. When a newborn breathes for the first time, he does not even know that the breathing apparatus exists; his lungs have never worked until that moment. And yet breathing occurs and the miracle begins.

Unfortunately, this can happen to all of us; we live in a completely artificial way. We see "only water" and we do not discover the immensity of God, who surrounds us, supports us and keeps us alive. We live without listening to the mystery of life in our selves. If one day you stop to listen to it, even in a gentle and somewhat clumsy way, you will discover that you are not alone. You will feel full of God. [...] You will tell me that it is not easy to stop yourself. That you live a very busy life. That you are not accustomed to entering into your heart. Don't worry. Stay silent and close your eyes. Say nothing. You only have to be there and listen peacefully. I think that what the English mathematician A. Whitehead said is true: "Religion is what someone does in his solitude".

If you stop yourself and stay alone with yourself, you will be able to listen to your fears and your most intimate burning desires. The questions that are in you will come to the surface: Is what I feel serious? Why are things going badly with my husband or my wife? What is going to happen to our son? Will I succeed in getting that job?

If you continue in silence and in peace, then you will hear deeper questions: What am I doing with my life? What am I busy looking for? What must I do in order to live more fully? Why did I lose contact with God, little by little? Why do I not let Him enter into my life? Do not forget that silence is the language of God. Only a slight veil comes between your demands, your fears, your desires and the loving presence of God, a veil which can fall at any moment. God is in you!

¹⁴ Pagola, José António 2008 *Crer para quê?* Assafarge. Gráfica de Coimbra 2, Publicações, Lda. (N. T.).

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Discovering and taking care of others

Introduction

We are not alone in the world. Jesus called the people of his time. Some of them became his beloved disciples because they welcomed the call in a special way; others went on with their lives, as always, but they dared to live the Gospel, they followed the Good News, they became a reference point, according to what the Acts tell us; still others, surely more numerous, will only have dared to love others in the silence of their days.

The Good Samaritan was called by compassion, he dared to hope that his action could be rewarding for the other person, an unknown, and he made of him his neighbour. The Good Samaritan dared to live the Gospel in hope, in freedom and with compassion.

Listening to the Word: Luke 10:25-37¹⁵

The Good Samaritan

²⁵ And now a lawyer stood up and, to test him, asked, 'Master, what must I do to inherit eternal life?' ²⁶ He said to him, 'What is written in the Law? What is your reading of it?' ²⁷ He replied, 'You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbour as yourself.' ²⁸ Jesus said to him, 'You have answered right, do this and life is yours.' ²⁹ But the man was anxious to justify himself and said to Jesus, 'And who is my neighbour?' ³⁰ In answer Jesus said, 'A man was once on his way down from Jerusalem to Jericho and fell into the hands of bandits; they stripped him, beat him and then made off, leaving him half dead. ³¹ Now a priest happened to be travelling down the same road, but when he saw the man, he passed by on the other side. ³² In the same way a Levite who came to the place saw him, and passed by on the other side. ³³ But a Samaritan traveller who came on him was moved with compassion when he saw him. ³⁴ He went up to him and bandaged his wounds, pouring oil and wine on them. He then lifted him onto his own mount and took him to an inn and looked after him. ³⁵ Next day, he took out two denarii and handed them to the innkeeper and said, "Look after him, and on my way back I will make good any extra expense you have." ³⁶ Which of these three, do you think, proved himself a neighbour to the man who fell into the bandits' hands?' ³⁷ He replied, 'The one who showed pity towards him.' Jesus said to him, 'Go, and do the same yourself.'

Silent time, prayer time reflecting on the Gospel

¹⁵ http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=49&bible_chapter=10&submit=Go

Sharing and General Sharing

The Samaritan had prepared for a long trip and, faced by the unexpected meeting with a man who had fainted, he immediately found a response.

Compassion was his response.

Hope was his daring.

Freedom was what enabled him to discover and love his neighbour.

Sharing

- Are we capable of rejecting our prejudices in complete freedom? How can we request this gift and divest ourselves to listen to the Lord and respond to His repeated calls? (Prayer).
- And our hope? How do we nourish it in our relationship with God? How do we help each other to strengthen it as a couple and as a family, against despair, the temptation to give up? (Conjugal prayer and family prayer).
- Does our love close in on each of us? Is there room for compassion? Is it capable of focussing on others? In what way do we become each other's neighbours? (Sit-down).
- Are we open to the unexpected? Or, contrariwise, do we become unhappy when the unexpected changes our plans? Are we able to pay attention to aspects of our life that can make it become better, as well as the lives of those around us? (Rule of life).

General sharing

In our lives, is there some special experience, however small it may be, of a meeting with our neighbour?

Can we share some detail in daily life which helps us discover and love our neighbour?

Sharing on the Study Topic

Luke 10:25-37, provides us with an opportunity to reflect on the importance of the discovery of others so that we can truly love them:

- The Good Samaritan dared to be compassionate faced by the suffering of someone he did not know.
- Others passed by, they looked at him but they did not see him, because their prejudices won.
- The Good Samaritan dared to be free to overcome the prejudices of the society amongst whom he lived.
- Others looked at the spotlessness of their clothes and disregarded the bloody wounds of the poor traveller.
- The Good Samaritan made hope work daily.
- Others left it to become lost in time.



The Good Samaritan – Van Gogh, 1890

Final Prayer

Prayer for the care of others¹⁶

Teach us, Lord,

to take care of each other.

To be attentive to individuals who are suffering
right beside us,

whom we rub shoulders with every day

and whom we no longer see...

Give us a heart

that listens like yours.

The following texts have been chosen as reading suggestions, to help in deepening our reflection

The community of truth

Timothy Radcliffe¹⁷

Thomas believed that to see things as they are, we must be contemplative. Contemplation is that quiet, still opening of the mind to what is before it: the word of God, a person, a plant. It is that calm presence to what is not oneself, resisting the temptation to take it

¹⁶ Julien, Secours catholique (Nord). In http://www.prier.presse.fr/prieres/prends-soin-de-lui-08-10-2012-2157_136.php

¹⁷ Radcliffe, Timothy 2005 *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* Burns & Oates, London: chap. 6.

over, to win it or to use it. It means letting the other person be different from oneself, refusing to absorb them into one's own way of thinking. One must let one's heart and mind be stretched open, enlarged by what we see. He loved the phrase of Aristotle, "The soul in some way is all things". Understanding what is other expands our being. Contemplation is being nakedly and humbly present to the other. Simone Weil wrote that 'real genius is nothing else but the supernatural virtue of humility in the domain of thought'. (p122)

The doctrine of Creation teaches us to see the world as created, which is to say as given. Our eyes are opened to the pure gratuitousness of being. Nothing need exist. (p.126)

Healing relationships

Albert Nolan¹⁸

Above all it is *by loving people* that Jesus healed them. He loved each one and identified fully with all. That is why he could say: "in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did it to me" (*Mt 25, 40-45*; my translation).

In some cases, that went as far as a true proximity and intimacy. We often represent Jesus as a man on his own. In reality, all the facts show him as someone who was neither removed nor distant, living in some kind of splendid isolation. Not only did he identify with everyone he found on his path, he had several intimate friendships.

Intimate friendship is not the rival of universal love for every human being, unless it is transformed in one way or another into an exclusive friendship. Jesus' friendships were never exclusive. Being closer to some people than to others simply has to do with human limitations of time and space. It is materially impossible to constantly enjoy intimate relationships with everyone. Moreover, we always have some points in common with some people more than others.

Jesus' friendship had a very strong healing effect on people who were close to him and conversely, as we shall see, their love for him was not without effect on him.

Peter, James and John were clearly closer to Jesus than the other apostles were. He took them up on the mountain to pray (*Luke 9:28*) and at the time of his agony in the garden of Gethsemane, it is these same friends whom he wanted to have with him (*Mark 14:33*). He had an affectionate but stormy relationship with Peter, which must have had a profoundly healing and transformative influence on the impetuous disciple.

And then there were Jesus' friends in Bethany: Martha, Mary and Lazarus. Each was close to him in his or her own way. [...]

Mary Magdalen loved Jesus with a deep and unshakable love. She was not afraid to stand at the foot of the cross with Mary, his mother, while practically all the other disciples had fled (*Mark 15:40; Mat 27:55-56; John 19:25*). She followed those who took down Jesus'

¹⁸ Nolan, Albert 2009 *Suivre Jésus aujourd'hui*. Montréal. Novalis, chap. 7 : 113-115.

body from the cross to see where they would lay it (*Mark 15:47*). Then, when the Sabbath was over, at dawn, she was at the tomb to embalm his body, ready to face whoever might try to prevent her. It is she who discovered the empty tomb (*John 20:1*). [...]

Above all, Jesus must have been influenced by the love of his mother, Mary. The love of a mother is not only special, it is irreplaceable. Jesus' life was so free of wounds, breaks and egoism, and was so unique in his way of being one with God that we can conclude that as a child he had been loved unconditionally by Mary and Joseph. For him that was surely the very first manifestation of the depth of the love his *abba* or divine parent had for him.

He saw him

Timothy Radcliffe¹⁹

The Good Samaritan sees the man lying by the road and has compassion. The priest and the Levite do not really see him. They see a problem, someone who will destroy their ritual purity perhaps, or who will delay their return home to their families.

Jesus is someone whose eyes are open. He sees Nathaniel under the fig tree, and that he is a man without guile (*John 1.48*). He sees the despised tax collector Levi hidden in the crowd, and sees a disciple (*Mark 2.14*). He spots Zacchaeus up the sycamore tree and sees a friend (*Luke 19.5*). He sees the widow putting into the treasury her little coins (*Mark 12.42*) and her vast generosity. The priest and the Levite see from the outside. They see someone in terms of their own preoccupations. Jesus sees from the inside. He sees the goodness and hidden beauty of people. He sees them as created by God, as gifts.

How do we learn to see with the eyes of Jesus and the Good Samaritan? This can take time. When Jesus healed the man born blind (*Mark 8.22ff*), he needed two goes. After the first attempt the man did not see people but trees walking. Sometimes I feel that is where I am at!

A first step may be to see the person to whom you are married! When you fell in love, then you gazed into each other's eyes with adoration! You are astonished at their beauty and goodness. How could she or he possibly love me! But after a few years of marriage, some people stop looking too closely. We become a little blind. Perhaps we think that we know them so well, that it is no longer necessary to look! And so we miss the signs of unhappiness, the desire for tenderness, the unspoken word on their lips. And so when suddenly someone leaves a marriage, the other person is often surprised. They never saw the crisis coming because they had stopped looking!

Fear can make us blind. We are afraid to see that we do not matter so much. Jealousy made Othello blind, and so he could no longer see his wife and her love for him. Guilt may make us unable to look the other person in the eyes.

¹⁹ Timothy Radcliffe 2012 Talk at the XIth International Teams Gathering, Brasília, 23 July 2012
<http://www.brasilia2012.com.br/ens/index-en.php?page=detalhes-dia-a-dia&id=24>

Seeing is not a matter of looking intensely, placing them under a microscope. We may see best when we look out of the corner of the eye, and glimpse their utter humanity. Look at them when they are asleep and all their defences are down. In India it is said that when we sleep our face 'is the friend of the world.' Pope Benedict has often stressed the link between love and truth. Your gaze is only truthful if it is loving, and only really loving if it attends to the truth of the other person. When did you last really see your husband or wife?

The big concern that many of you have expressed is how to reach out to people in broken or uncommitted relationships. Do not look at them as a problem to be solved! For example, this young couple who are cohabiting must get married! This divorced and remarried couple must get an annulment. We must fix it! Jesus is not a problem solver.

Before we have anything to say, we must see what is good in people's love, even if there situation is not the ideal proposed by the Church. We must not look at them as failures but as on the journey to the fullness of love, just like us. We must not be like the man who was asked the way to Dublin. He said that if he wanted to go to Dublin he would not start here! But wherever people are, whatever the mess and the wounds, they are able to begin again the journey towards God.

The biggest challenge is to see people whom we think of as enemies. During the revolution in Nicaragua, an American Dominican helped a young group of Nicaraguans to enact the parable of the Good Samaritans during Mass. They showed how a young Nicaraguan was beaten up and left half dead by the road. A Dominican friar went by and ignored him. Then a delegate of the word passed by as well. And then one of the enemy, a 'contra', came by wearing a military uniform. He stopped, put a rosary around the neck of the Nicaraguan, gave him water and carried him to the next village. At this point, half of the congregation began to shout and protest. It was unacceptable that a contra could do this. They are terrible people. 'We have nothing to do with them'. The Mass broke up in chaos. Then the people began to discuss what the parable meant. Because they had been shocked, they came to understand it more deeply. Do we register how shocking is this parable?

Finally we must learn to see the poor, who are often invisible in our society. Celebrities are visible everywhere. Everyone looks at the rich. Just before the parable of the Good Samaritan, Jesus turns to the disciples and says, 'Blessed are the eyes which see what you see' (10.23). The eyes of the saints see the poor. Mother Teresa of Calcutta went to a party in her honour in Rome. It was filled with important dignitaries, ambassadors and Cardinals. At the door she stopped to talk to a beggar. On and on they talked. Finally someone came and said, 'Mother, their excellencies are waiting to meet you.' And she replied, 'Can't you see that I am talking to Christ?'

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Accepting the invitation to live the Gospel as a couple

Introduction

In the marriage feast at Cana the Gospel invites us to go and meet the sole true love of our lives. Mary is present in an intercessory and mediating role, the one who knows how to understand the needs of the brothers, and therefore lets her Son know that something essential to the feast is missing, at the same time that She lets us see Her confidence in Jesus, which suggests to us that we too should have this confidence.

The presence of Jesus in the life of the couple is the guarantee that what is essential will never be lacking and that, even during conjugal difficulties, He is always there to help us to find a solution. God, in all his creative capacity, strengthens the couple's relationship and each day can be full of joy and happiness.

The presence of Mary at a wedding celebration can be seen as a sign of Her [sic] involvement in our married lives and an invitation to "dare to live the Gospel" as a couple.

The symbolism of the transformation of the water into wine, suggests the need of transformation demanded by "making a couple".

Listening to the Word: John 2:1-12²⁰

The Wedding Feast at Cana

¹ On the third day there was a wedding at Cana in Galilee. The mother of Jesus was there, ² and Jesus and his disciples had also been invited. ³ And they ran out of wine, since the wine provided for the feast had all been used, and the mother of Jesus said to him, 'They have no wine.' ⁴ Jesus said, 'Woman, what do you want from me? My hour has not come yet.' ⁵ His mother said to the servants, 'Do whatever he tells you.' ⁶ There were six stone water jars standing there, meant for the ablutions that are customary among the Jews: each could hold twenty or thirty gallons. ⁷ Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water,' and they filled them to the brim. ⁸ Then he said to them, 'Draw some out now and take it to the president of the feast.' ⁹ They did this; the president tasted the water, and it had turned into wine. Having no idea where it came from -- though the servants who had drawn the water knew -- the president of the feast called the bridegroom ¹⁰ and said, 'Everyone serves good wine first and the worse wine when the guests are well wined; but you have kept the best wine till now.' ¹¹ This was the first of Jesus' signs: it was at Cana in Galilee. He revealed his glory, and his disciples believed in him. ¹² After this he went down to Capernaum with his mother and his brothers and his disciples, but they stayed there only a few days.

Silent time, prayer time reflecting on the Gospel

Sharing and General Sharing

The impression of the wedding feast that emerges from this Gospel of John is an invitation to the joy of the couple and an invitation to trust Jesus, following Mary's example.

Above all, Mary reminds us of the wine that is lacking in our conjugal relationship and in our family.

Sharing

- Do we place our trust in Jesus and do we listen to what he tells us? Do we do what Mary suggests to us: «do what he tells you»? (Prayer).
- Do we recognise that living the life of a couple is a "true miracle"? What significance do we give to the role of God in this daily "miracle"? (Conjugal prayer and family prayer).
- Is the "wine" of love insipid because of the routine of our life? Is it like the wine of understanding that demands of us a different attention for the other party? (Sit-down).
- Could Mary be drawing our attention, above all, to the "wine" that is lacking in our conjugal relationship, with regard to our family, with regard to all those around us? (Rule of life).

General sharing

"Events" or "stories" from our recent life with signs of the joy of the "wine of love" or, otherwise, signs of its absence that we would like to share with the Team?

Sharing on the Study Topic

John, 2:1-12

Jesus and Mary wanted to take part in the wedding feast. It is there that Jesus began his public life with a miracle, revealing Himself, following Mary's words: "do what he tells you".

- At Cana, Mary's sensitivity saw what the wedding couple needed, Jesus provided for their needs and the servants obeyed.
- The wine of the transformation was of better quality than the earlier wine and it carried the imprint of Jesus' action.
- The wedding couple invited Jesus and His Mother to the feast and the transformation took place.



Wedding feast at Cana – Julius Schnorr von Carolsfeld, 1820

Final prayer²¹

Mary, attentive woman at Cana, help us to be people whose eyes are open and whose hands are available.

There are so many of us who get drunk on the bad wine of false happiness. In so doing, we distance ourselves from God, and our neighbours, as well as from nature, while destroying it.

We need the wine of joy, of a life that has delicious, beautiful meaning.

Mary, give us Jesus' wine. May He multiply our love, despite our rigid and flawed wine vats. May He transform our routine existences into existences of quality, our indifference into an unconditional faith.

Mary, we want to drink and share the wine of Jesus.

Amen!

The following texts have been chosen as reading suggestions, to help in deepening our reflection

From the ERI letter of 1 September 2012

Our greatest daring will be living our conjugal relationship — always impelled by love and abnegation — which must be a witness to the life of the couple and of the family.

In Chantilly, Father Caffarel affirmed in this regard: *"There is no love without abnegation, and any abnegation that is not a loving abnegation is an abnegation that cannot be carried*

²¹ <http://www.slideshare.net/AfonsoMurad/maria-nas-bodas-de-can-e-na-cruz>

through", because only a love that is full of abnegation and faithful is true. Father Caffarel went on to say: "*Conjugal life brings with it very great riches as well as very great demands*".

Opening talk, XIth International Teams' Meeting, Brasilia

Timothy Radcliffe

[...]At each stage of your married life, you will discover new aspects of who you are, and who the person whom you married is. When one of you faces sickness, then once again, you are both changed. If the other person gets depression or Alzheimer's, then there is a new discovery to be made. To be married is to promise to carry on the voyage of discovery, being surprised by yourself and the other person. Martin Buber, the Jewish philosopher, talked of true friendship as 'Holy Insecurity.' You do not know what you become as you walk to Jericho. You promise to let the other person go on being a surprise. After a while the temptation may be to think that you have got the other person worked out. You have heard every story of their childhood, you can anticipate their jokes, you know what they will order in the restaurant, and what they will forget to pack on holiday. But you promise to let them surprise you. You promise to be surprised by yourself! So any true love invites us to let go of final self-definition. I do not know in advance who is the person to whom I must become a neighbour. Part of our Christian witness is not to worry who we are. When Dietrich Bonhoeffer was in prison, he was haunted by questions of his own identity. Finally he learned just to leave it in God's hands.

[...] First of all, let us look at fidelity. At the Last Supper. Jesus gave his body to us forever. It does not matter that the disciples will not be faithful to him; he will always be faithful to us. If love is the life of God, then love must be eternal. Marriage is a sacrament of God's faithful love because it is 'for better and worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part'. And we believe that the intrinsic meaning of a giving your body to someone else is that you are given forever. Is this a remote and impossible ideal?

[...] St Thomas Aquinas wrote that 'in love the two become one but remain distinct.' The art of loving knows when to be one and when to be two, when to be close and when to give space. Sometimes I may want intimacy, but the other person needs to breathe. Or maybe, I want to be alone, but I see that the other person is longing for a hug. True love is in being open to what the other needs in that moment. Sometimes teenagers going through a difficult time do not know what they want. If you hug them, they will say 'Leave me alone.' And if you do, they will say 'No one loves me.' Nothing is right. And loving them will mean enduring that difficult time of confusion!

[...] Let me quote myself: 'The Last Supper teaches us that the heart of a Christian sexual ethics is the renunciation of violence. We seek mutuality and equality. When someone desires the body of another person, then that desire should not be rapacious, seeking to take possession of the body, as if it were a piece of meat to be devoured. We must learn to

desire in a way that delights in the other, that treasures their vulnerability, that takes pleasure in their very existence. We must delight in another as God delights in us, tenderly and without dominion. In so far as there is a taking possession, then it is to be mutual. As St Paul said, 'For the wife does not rule over her own body but the husband does; likewise the husband does not rule over his own body, but the wife does.' (1 Corinthians 7:4). (4) If we are to reach out to people in the world of wounded relationships, then we must dare to face up to any violence in our own marriages, whether hurtful words, contempt, or even violence in our sexuality. Then we shall be able, like the risen Lord, to say to other people wounded people, 'Peace be with you.'

The good news of marriage

Father Louis de Raynal²²,

Marriage, an action by Christ

The sacrament of marriage unites two souls, two lives, but a third comes into play: Christ marries the husband and wife and they serve him as ministers. It is not only on the day of the celebration of their marriage that Christ gives to the couple his loving graces, but also throughout their lives where "Christ will not only be *near* them but *in* them". Father Caffarel speaks of the sacrament of marriage as a permanent source of grace for the couple, as long as their conjugal union lasts:

Marriage is a source of grace when it is concluded and remains a source of grace: their union, their continuing society never ceases to be their own title to the grace of the Lord for the couple, which God uses to sanctify, spiritualise, divinise each one, as well as to complete their love and their unity.

Father Caffarel describes some of the loving graces that Christ incessantly bestows on the heart of the Christian family: healing and purification, transfiguration, fruitfulness:

A first grace is a grace of healing and of purification: the figure of Christ is here that of the vigilant Good Samaritan, who picks up and cares for the man whose love has been injured. He comes to heal spiritual illness and egoism as well as carnal fever. Christ's grace teaches the couple to open themselves and give themselves.

A second grace given by Christ is that of transfiguration: the mystery of Christ lived by the couple is also the paschal mystery of death and resurrection. The husband and wife serve a daily apprenticeship within the family of a love that is often laborious and crucified: by the grace of Christ they learn not only to maintain their love but also to surpass themselves. This mystery of daily deaths and resurrections leads towards the final death and resurrection.

A third grace received by the family is a grace of fruitfulness: conjugal love that is inhabited by Christ gives a new dimension to human fruitfulness. This new value is giving children to

²² Raynal, Père Louis de 2010 *La bonne Nouvelle du Mariage – Le Père Caffarel, prophète pour notre temps*. Dijon. L'échelle de Jacob: 85-87.

God: by bringing their children to the baptismal font, and by taking care to cultivate in them the grace of baptism. In this way Christian married couples are able to give a depth of meaning to reproduction and to education, as Father Caffarel said:

Collaborators with God and co-redeemers with Christ, parents have the job not only of awakening in their child a sense of God, but of being a model for him little by little in the likeness of his divine Brother by cultivating the graces of his baptism. The grace of marriage gives them the heart of God, the hands of God, so that from day to day they can fashion this masterpiece: a child like His Child.

The sacrament of marriage is a grace from Christ. With the sacrament as a sign of grace, so far we have viewed things from God's side. But what is the situation from the couples' viewpoint?

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Being a family and taking care of it

Introduction

The feast of the Holy Family shows us Jesus, already at twelve years of age going up to the Temple with his parents on the occasion of the Feast of the Passover (Luke 2:41-52). In Israel, an adolescent of twelve was declared “bar-mitsva” (son of the law) and He was considered expert in Law, able to proclaim It and provide commentary on it in the Temple.

This is what Jesus did when discussing and exchanging ideas with the Doctors of the Law. The text shows us not only an exceptionally gifted youth challenging his Masters by asking them questions, but above all that Jesus had chosen a course in life: *“Do you not know that I must be in my Father’s House?”* It was clear that His parents did not understand Him. But they respected Him. For his part: *He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority.*

The text alerts us to the difficulty parents have in understanding their children and at the same time the necessity of respecting them.

Listening to the Word: Luke 2:41-52²³

Jesus among the Doctors

⁴¹ Every year his parents used to go to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover. ⁴² When he was twelve years old, they went up for the feast as usual. ⁴³ When the days of the feast were over and they set off home, the boy Jesus stayed behind in Jerusalem without his parents knowing it. ⁴⁴ They assumed he was somewhere in the party, and it was only after a day’s journey that they went to look for him among their relations and acquaintances. ⁴⁵ When they failed to find him they went back to Jerusalem looking for him everywhere. ⁴⁶ It happened that, three days later, they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them, and asking them questions; ⁴⁷ and all those who heard him were astounded at his intelligence and his replies. ⁴⁸ They were overcome when they saw him, and his mother said to him, ‘My child, why have you done this to us? See how worried your father and I have been, looking for you.’ ⁴⁹ He replied, ‘Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in my Father’s house?’ ⁵⁰ But they did not understand what he meant. ⁵¹ He went down with them then and came to Nazareth and lived under their authority. His mother stored up all these things in her heart. ⁵² And Jesus increased in wisdom, in stature, and in favour with God and with people.

Silent time, prayer time reflecting on the Gospel

²³ http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=49&bible_chapter=2&submit=Go

Sharing and General Sharing

God, who came into the world in the bosom of a family, shows that this institution is a sure way to meet him and recognise him, just as it is a constant call to work for the unity of all around love. (...)In love, we share equally in sufferings and joys, because we all feel protected by the affection that reigns in the household, from the simple fact of being members of the same family.²⁴

Sharing

- Has each of us become conscious of the presence of God in the daily building of our conjugal life? (Prayer).
- How do we live the grace of God in the bosom of the family? (Conjugal prayer and family prayer).
- How do we help each other and as a family in the face of the difficulties that appear before us each day, in imitation of Mary and Joseph during those three days of anguish at having lost their child? (Sit-down).
- After the 'shock' Mary and Joseph bear witness to their respect for freedom and their confidence in their son - What must we change in order to follow their example? (Rule of life).

General sharing

What sufferings and joys that we have lived in our family would we like to share with members of our Team?

Sharing on the study topic

It is in this text from Luke (2:41-52) that for the first time Jesus affirms that he is the Son of God even though he was born into and lived in a human family. Nonetheless He accepts his condition of being a man and humbly follows his parents.

We can imagine how surprised his parents were on being confronted with the affirmation of His life choice. Naturally they did not understand Him entirely but they respected Him.

Always alert, Mary stored up all these things in her heart.

²⁴ Benedict XVI, ANGELUS, *Saint Peter's Square, Sunday 27 December 2009.*



Jesus among the doctors – Ingres, 1862

Final Prayer

Prayer for the family

Lord Jesus you restored the family, re-establishing unity, living at Nazareth with Mary, Your mother and Joseph Your adoptive father. Keep everything that could threaten our families at a distance.

Help us to promote the health, union, generous love, permanent fidelity, perseverance, and above all Your presence, in the midst of families.

Amen!

The following texts have been chosen as reading suggestions, to help in deepening our reflection

Jesus' childhood

Joseph Ratzinger²⁵

Epilogue

[...] Let's come back to Jesus' parents. The Torah prescribed that for the three great feasts—the Passover, Shavuot (Pentecost) and Sukkot – every Jew should present himself in the Temple (cf. Ex 23:17; 34, 23 sq; Deut 1:16 sq.). The question as to knowing whether women were also obliged to make this pilgrimage was discussed between the schools of Shammai

²⁵ Joseph Ratzinger - Benedict XVI *L'enfance de Jésus*, pp. 174-176.

and Hillel. For boys, the obligation came into force from the end of their thirteenth year of life. Even so, it was prescribed that little by little adolescents little should get used to the commandments and the pilgrimage helped do this from the age of twelve. So the fact that Mary and Jesus participated in the pilgrimage shows once again, the devoutness of Jesus' family.

In the course of the return journey, something unexpected occurred. Jesus doesn't leave with the others, he stays in Jerusalem. His parents do not realise this until the end of the first day returning from the pilgrimage. Plainly it was completely normal for them to suppose that he was somewhere in the big group. To describe the latter Luke uses the word *synodía* — "travelling community" — a technical term for a caravan. According to our view of the Holy Family, which is perhaps too petty, we find this astonishing. However this shows us that, in a very beautiful way, in the Holy Family, freedom and obedience were reconciled with each other. The twelve year old child could freely decide to stay with the young people of his age and with his friends in order to travel in their company. However, his parents were expecting him in the evening.

The fact that he was not there no longer has anything to do with young people's freedom, but evidently takes us to another level: to the special mission of the Son. So begin days full of anguish and worry for his parents. The evangelist tells us that it is only three days later that they find Jesus again, in the Temple where he was seated among the doctors, while He listened to them and questioned them (cf. Luke 2:46).

*Familiaris Consortio*²⁶

John Paul II

6. The situation in which the family finds itself presents positive and negative aspects: the first are a sign of the salvation of Christ operating in the world; the second, a sign of the refusal that man gives to the love of God.

On the one hand, in fact, there is a more lively awareness of personal freedom and greater attention to the quality of interpersonal relationships in marriage, to promoting the dignity of women, to responsible procreation, to the education of children. There is also an awareness of the need for the development of interfamilial relationships, for reciprocal spiritual and material assistance, the rediscovery of the ecclesial mission proper to the family and its responsibility for the building of a more just society. On the other hand, however, signs are not lacking of a disturbing degradation of some fundamental values: a mistaken theoretical and practical concept of the independence of the spouses in relation to each other; serious misconceptions regarding the relationship of authority between parents and children; the concrete difficulties that the family itself experiences in the

²⁶ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html

transmission of values; the growing number of divorces; the scourge of abortion; the ever more frequent recourse to sterilization; the appearance of a truly contraceptive mentality.

At the root of these negative phenomena there frequently lies a corruption of the idea and the experience of freedom, conceived not as a capacity for realizing the truth of God's plan for marriage and the family, but as an autonomous power of self-affirmation, often against others, for one's own selfish well-being.

Worthy of our attention also is the fact that, in the countries of the so-called Third World, families often lack both the means necessary for survival, such as food, work, housing and medicine, and the most elementary freedoms. In the richer countries, on the contrary, excessive prosperity and the consumer mentality, paradoxically joined to a certain anguish and uncertainty about the future, deprive married couples of the generosity and courage needed for raising up new human life: thus life is often perceived not as a blessing, but as a danger from which to defend oneself.

The historical situation in which the family lives therefore appears as an interplay of light and darkness.

This shows that history is not simply a fixed progression towards what is better, but rather an event of freedom, and even a struggle between freedoms that are in mutual conflict, that is, according to the well-known expression of St. Augustine, a conflict between two loves: the love of God to the point of disregarding self, and the love of self to the point of disregarding God. (16)

It follows that only an education for love rooted in faith can lead to the capacity of interpreting "the signs of the times," which are the historical expression of this twofold love

Marriage, This Great Sacrament

Henri Caffarel²⁷

Image and mystery

What he is on the right of the Father, he is too in the midst of his great Church, and so he is just as much in his "little church", the family founded on his sacrament.

But his priestly office of mediator is not restricted to intercession. All the joys, all the sufferings of the family (and God knows how many of these there are, both light and heavy, in a lifetime!), the work and pleasure, the people and the possessions, all these things that are the substance and life of the family, he takes into his "holy and venerable hands", and offers all of this to his Father, intimately united to his sacrifice. But also, in the opposite direction, turning this time to the family, he offers it the riches that he draws from the

²⁷ L'Anneau d'Or – *Le Mariage, Ce Grand Sacrement*. Numéro spécial 111-112, Mai – Août 1963 : pp. 203-224.

bosom of the Father: earthly goods and supernatural goods, everything that is necessary to growth, to the family's human and spiritual blooming, to its holiness. And not infrequently he will pass on to the family the Father's pardon, although not without inviting it to turn to the sacrament of penance.

What joy, what comfort, what security for family members, if they understand that they are not alone, do not struggle alone, do not pray alone, but that Christ *their priest*, struggles and prays with them in their home.

[...] Well beyond the husband and wife, it is the whole family that the Christ-priest wants to belong to. He makes the whole family into a priestly community in which, with which and through which he means to adore, offer himself to and praise the Father. A community to which he belongs just as much to intercede in favour of all the inhabitants of the building, of all the families in the street and in the town, and even, beyond the visible horizon, of all mankind.

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Living as a family - always

Introduction

Living as a family presupposes making permanent choices, as is shown in the episode between Martha and Mary whom Jesus makes become conscious of what is essential, as regards our options. This presupposes faithfulness to God in the person of Jesus and, in the case of the family, faithfulness to the plan they have in prospect. Within the context of constant change and unpredictability, if the family is to stay anchored, it is obliged to make choices that are not always self-evident.

In Luke the primordial objective is the presence of Christ in this house, which makes household tasks secondary.

T. Radcliffe (Talk on 22 July 2012, Brasilia) referring to faithfulness contends that: "At the Last Supper. Jesus gave his body to us forever. It does not matter that the disciples will not be faithful to him; he will always be faithful to us. If love is the life of God, then love must be eternal. Marriage is a sacrament of God's faithful love because it is 'for better and worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health, until death do us part'".

It is this presence of Jesus in families that enables the family to be faithful to its mission as a solid witness in society throughout time.

Listening to the Word: Luke 10:38-42²⁸

At Martha and Mary's house

³⁸ In the course of their journey he came to a village, and a woman named Martha welcomed him into her house. ³⁹ She had a sister called Mary, who sat down at the Lord's feet and listened to him speaking. ⁴⁰ Now Martha, who was distracted with all the serving, came to him and said, 'Lord, do you not care that my sister is leaving me to do the serving all by myself? Please tell her to help me.' ⁴¹ But the Lord answered, 'Martha, Martha,' he said, 'you worry and fret about so many things, ⁴² and yet few are needed, indeed only one. It is Mary who has chosen the better part, and it is not to be taken from her.'

Silent time, prayer time reflecting on the Gospel

²⁸ <http://www.catholic.org/>

Sharing and General Sharing

The two sisters, Martha and Mary, envisage life in different ways. Although Jesus says to Mary that she has made the better choice, he is not indifferent to the actions of Martha who dedicated her time to preparing his meal (He certainly ate it). Families function in the same way: despite their divergences each is always a member of the same family. This obliges each member to have perspectives that are open to diversity, even outside the family, being able to welcome everyone considering them part of the family.

Sharing

- With whom do we identify most? With Martha or with Mary? With space in each of us for both, how can we reconcile our chores with the challenges of an invasive society? (Prayer).
- How do we welcome the different forms of relationship of members of our family with God? How do we help them while respecting their freedom and their differences? (Conjugal prayer and family prayer).
- how do we view and help each other to overcome the changes that take place in us and in those around us throughout our lives? (Sit down).

What can we do to choose what is best at each moment of our daily lives? (Rule of life).

- The annual retreat is the opportunity for us to “stop” like Mary. Are we committed to it? (Annual retreat).

General sharing

As regards Jesus' welcome, is there a similarity between our family life and that lived by the two sisters?

Could we share with the team a situation that we have lived, akin to that lived by the two sisters in the presence of Jesus?

Sharing on the Study Topic

In Luke 10:38-42, during Jesus' visit to His friends, daily life is brought out.

- In this context, Mary took advantage of the opportunity to listen to Jesus and Martha, drowning in work, did not realise the importance of taking greater advantage of his presence.
- Martha criticises Mary for not helping her, but Jesus tells her that she has made the better choice.
- In today's world, where the concept and perception of time have changed (everyone complains about not having the time) and the role of the family as an anchor has suffered from several changes in circumstances, reflection on this “story” can be an important aide.



Jesus with Martha and Mary – Vermeer, 1654

Final prayer

Family prayer²⁹

Lord, from You every family in heaven and on earth takes its name. Father, You are Love and Life. Through Your Son, Jesus Christ, born of woman, and through the Holy Spirit, the fountain of divine charity, grant that every family on earth may become for each successive generation a true shrine of life and love.

Grant that Your grace may guide the thoughts and actions of husbands and wives for the good of their families and of all the families of the world.

Grant that the young may find in the family solid support for their human dignity and for their growth in truth and love.

Grant that love, strengthened by the grace of the sacrament of Marriage, may prove mightier than all the weaknesses and trials through which our families sometimes pass.

Through the intercession of the Holy Family of Nazareth, grant that the Church may fruitfully carry out her worldwide mission in the family and through the family.

We ask this of You, who are Life, Truth, and Love with the Son and the Holy Spirit. Amen.

[*L'Osservatore Romano*, 5-25-80, 19]

²⁹ http://www.crossroadsinitiative.com/library_article/537/Prayers_of_Pope_John_Paul_II.html

The following texts have been chosen as reading suggestions, to help in deepening our reflection

Familiaris Consortio

John Paul II³⁰

Love as the Principle and Power of Communion

18. The family, which is founded and given life by love, is a community of persons: of husband and wife, of parents and children, of relatives. Its first task is to live with fidelity the reality of communion in a constant effort to develop an authentic community of persons.

The inner principle of that task, its permanent power and its final goal is love: without love the family is not a community of persons and, in the same way, without love the family cannot live, grow and perfect itself as a community of persons. What I wrote in the Encyclical *Redemptor hominis* applies primarily and especially within the family as such: "Man cannot live without love. He remains a being that is incomprehensible for himself, his life is senseless, if love is not revealed to him, if he does not encounter love, if he does not experience it and make it his own, if he does not participate intimately in it."(45)

The love between husband and wife and, in a derivatory and broader way, the love between members of the same family-between parents and children, brothers and sisters and relatives and members of the household-is given life and sustenance by an unceasing inner dynamism leading the family to ever deeper and more intense communion, which is the foundation and soul of the community of marriage and the family

Pour une spiritualité du chrétien marié (For a spirituality of the married Christian)

Henri Caffarel³¹

The 'temptation to sanctity'

So I now propose to give you an insight into the "spirituality of the married Christian". But from the very beginning, let us repeat: there are not several sanctities, there is only one Christian perfection. Saint Thomas Aquinas defines it in this way: "Every being is perfect in so far as he achieves his end, which is his final perfection. Now, the final end of human life is God and it is love that unites us to him, as Saint John says: "God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him". So the perfection of the Christian life

³⁰ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html

³¹ *L'ANNEAU D'OR*, NUMERO 84, NOVEMBRE –DECEMBRE 1958 : 425-436.

consists especially in love.” Sanctity is the same for lay people and for religious people and is defined in the same way.

Every Christian — and therefore every married Christian — is called to perfection.

Nonetheless we must recognise that lay people are sometimes seized by panic in the face of sanctity when they become conscious of it. Nothing is as impressive as this admission by Jacques Rivière: “My God, keep the temptation to sanctity away from me. It is not my field. Be satisfied with a pure and patient life that I shall make every effort to give you. Do not deprive me of those delicious joys that I have known, that I love so much, that I am so keen to rediscover. Make no mistake. I am not the sort you need. I am married and a father. I am a writer. Do not tempt me with impossibilities, I should be wasting my time, — time I could spend serving you!”

What is the Point of Being a Christian?

Timothy Radcliffe³²

“In *Law, Love and Language*, Herbert McCabe wrote that the commandment to keep holy the Sabbath and to do no work, “is aimed at the idolatry of work. Just as all idols are “the work of men’s hands” so this work may always become an idol, a means of alienation... The Sabbath is there to stop you being absorbed in the success story, to prevent you being enslaved to productivity and profit’. In a world in which people find the meaning of their lives in their work, then what one does when one is not working is not so important. One does not work so as to be able eventually to relax. One has leisure so that one will be able to go back to work again. And what one does in one’s free time, one’s Sabbath, is not important, so long as one is back at work, refreshed on Monday morning. I quote McCabe again:

A man must do what he is told during his work time, but in his leisure (non-work) he is free to do, believe, worship, read, what he likes. It is only in so far as these touch on the work relationship that they are restricted... In this society culture tends to become a private game which, because it is ‘free’, is free from relevance, and because it is irrelevant is not worth controlling. Philosophers, scientists, novelists and theologians need feel no responsibility towards the community in what they say because nobody takes them seriously.”

Joseph Pieper, in his beautiful little book, *Leisure, The Basis of Culture*, writes that we must rediscover the priorities of any civilized society. The word for work in Greek – ασχολια - comes from ‘not to be at leisure’, σχολια. Just as in Latin, ‘*negotium*’ ‘business, occupation employment’, derives from ‘*neg-otium*’ ‘not leisure’. We must therefore be liberated from a barbarous work ethic, which makes our jobs, if we are lucky to have one, the centre of our lives, and our leisure to be when we happen not to be working. The Sabbath invites us beyond the idolatry of work to worship the true God in freedom.

³² Radcliffe, Timothy 2005 *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* Burns & Oates, London: chap. 11.

[...] Surely we anticipate our rest in God not just by stopping work, but in the quality of our mutual presence? We need moments of leisure where we serenely let ourselves be naked before God and in the eyes of those whom we love. It takes time to unveil ourselves, to let ourselves be seen in our complexity and our contradictions. You cannot show yourself in a moment. We need moments of Sabbath with each other, with our families, our friends, our religious communities, when we can edge into visibility, confident of a merciful regard. When we make profession as Dominicans, we ask for God's mercy and that of the brethren. It is only by trusting in a merciful gaze, a forgiving eye, that we can dare to live with each other. This implies giving time so that we may tell who we are and learn who is my companion. We need the time to discover in the eyes of the other that I have value and that my life has a coherence and a meaning. To be loved is to be seen in a certain way: as more than useful, more than entertaining, and more than desirable. It is to be seen not as an object but as a subject, as one who returns the gaze as well.

*Dies Domini*³³

John Paul II

19. "We celebrate Sunday because of the venerable Resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ, and we do so not only at Easter but also at each turning of the week": so wrote Pope Innocent I at the beginning of the fifth century,(15) testifying to an already well established practice which had evolved from the early years after the Lord's Resurrection. Saint Basil speaks of "holy Sunday, honoured by the Lord's Resurrection, the first fruits of all the other days";(16) and Saint Augustine calls Sunday "a sacrament of Easter".(17)

The intimate bond between Sunday and the Resurrection of the Lord is strongly emphasized by all the Churches of East and West. In the tradition of the Eastern Churches in particular, every Sunday is the *anastàsimos hemèra*, the day of Resurrection, (18) and this is why it stands at the heart of all worship.

In the light of this constant and universal tradition, it is clear that, although the Lord's Day is rooted in the very work of creation and even more in the mystery of the biblical "rest" of God, it is nonetheless to the Resurrection of Christ that we must look in order to understand fully the Lord's Day. This is what the Christian Sunday does, leading the faithful each week to ponder and live the event of Easter, true source of the world's salvation.

[...]25. In effect, Sunday is the day above all other days which summons Christians to remember the salvation which was given to them in baptism and which has made them new in Christ. "You were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead" (*Col 2:12*; cf. *Rom*

³³http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_letters/documents/hf_jp-ii_apl_05071998_dies-domini_en.html

6:4-6). The liturgy underscores this baptismal dimension of Sunday, both in calling for the celebration of baptisms — as well as at the Easter Vigil — on the day of the week "when the Church commemorates the Lord's Resurrection",⁽²⁴⁾ and in suggesting as an appropriate penitential rite at the start of Mass the sprinkling of holy water, which recalls the moment of Baptism in which all Christian life is born.⁽²⁵⁾ When Christians relive the Apostles' joyful encounter with the Risen Lord and receive the life-giving breath of his Spirit

The day of faith

29. Given these different dimensions which set it apart, Sunday appears as the supreme *day of faith*. It is the day when, by the power of the Holy Spirit, who is the Church's living "memory" (cf. *Jn* 14:26), the first appearance of the Risen Lord becomes an event renewed in the "today" of each of Christ's disciples. Gathered in his presence in the Sunday assembly, believers sense themselves called like the Apostle Thomas: "Put your finger here, and see my hands. Put out your hand, and place it in my side. Doubt no longer, but believe" (*Jn* 20:27). Yes, Sunday is the day of faith. This is stressed by the fact that the Sunday Eucharistic liturgy, like the liturgy of other solemnities, includes the Profession of Faith. Recited or sung, the Creed declares the baptismal and Paschal character of Sunday, making it the day on which in a special way the baptized renew their adherence to Christ and his Gospel in a rekindled awareness of their baptismal promises. Listening to the word and receiving the Body of the Lord, the baptized contemplate the Risen Jesus present in the "holy signs" and confess with the Apostle Thomas: "My Lord and my God!" (*Jn* 20:28).

An indispensable day!

30. It is clear then why, even in our own difficult times, the identity of this day must be protected and above all must be lived in all its depth. An Eastern writer of the beginning of the third century recounts that as early as then the faithful in every region were keeping Sunday holy on a regular basis.⁽³⁶⁾ What began as a spontaneous practice later became a juridically sanctioned norm. The Lord's Day has structured the history of the Church through two thousand years: how could we think that it will not continue to shape her future? The pressures of today can make it harder to fulfil the Sunday obligation; and, with a mother's sensitivity, the Church looks to the circumstances of each of her children. In particular, she feels herself called to a new catechetical and pastoral commitment, in order to ensure that, in the normal course of life, none of her children are deprived of the rich outpouring of grace which the celebration of the Lord's Day brings. It was in this spirit that the Second Vatican Council, making a pronouncement on the possibility of reforming the Church calendar to match different civil calendars, declared that the Church "is prepared to accept only those arrangements which preserve a week of seven days with a Sunday".⁽³⁷⁾ Given its many meanings and aspects, and its link to the very foundations of the faith, the celebration of the Christian Sunday remains, on the threshold of the Third Millennium, an indispensable element of our Christian identity.

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Discovering our neighbour in society

Introduction

Daring to discover our neighbour means looking at him from a position of being available, with a welcoming and attentive attitude following Jesus' example towards the woman taken in adultery. He saw beyond her condition as a marginalised woman – labelled by society.

The Scribes and Pharisees brought her to Jesus to be judged. Their objective was also to put Him to the test before the law. But as always, Jesus was astonishing, turning the application of the law on her accusers by appealing to their consciences.

Jesus' daring encourages us to take risks, to dare to discover others, even while confronting the society to which we belong.

Listening to the Word: John 8:1-11³⁴

The woman taken in adultery

¹ ...and Jesus went to the Mount of Olives. ² At daybreak he appeared in the Temple again; and as all the people came to him, he sat down and began to teach them. ³ The scribes and Pharisees brought a woman along who had been caught committing adultery; and making her stand there in the middle ⁴ they said to Jesus, 'Master, this woman was caught in the very act of committing adultery, ⁵ and in the Law Moses has ordered us to stone women of this kind. What have you got to say?'

⁶ They asked him this as a test, looking for an accusation to use against him. But Jesus bent down and started writing on the ground with his finger. ⁷ As they persisted with their question, he straightened up and said, 'Let the one among you who is guiltless be the first to throw a stone at her.' ⁸ Then he bent down and continued writing on the ground. ⁹ When they heard this they went away one by one, beginning with the eldest, until the last one had gone and Jesus was left alone with the woman, who remained in the middle. ¹⁰ Jesus again straightened up and said, 'Woman, where are they? Has no one condemned you?' ¹¹ 'No one, sir,' she replied. 'Neither do I condemn you,' said Jesus. 'Go away, and from this moment sin no more.'

Silent time, prayer time reflecting on the Gospel

³⁴ http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=50&bible_chapter=8&submit=Go

Sharing and general sharing

Faced by the woman taken in adultery, Jesus confronts the doctors of the law. When questioned, He waited, he took his time, in such a way that the accusers had time to think, and He used compassion. He did not condemn the woman but gives her a fresh opportunity sending her off and telling her to sin no more. Jesus welcomed her with pity and, while telling her to sin no more, Jesus had humanity towards this woman, because pity for the sinner is the most perfect way of giving her back her dignity. That is why he bent down, so as not to humiliate this woman any more before those who were accusing her. Similarly the sinner, no matter how grave his sin, has a dignity which must be recognised and respected. That is what the accusing finger does not understand.

In this case, too, we are invited, to follow Jesus' example and not make hasty judgements: judge not and you shall not be judged, is His commandment.

Sharing

- How often do we ignore, label and distance ourselves from those who act differently from our principles and values? Are we fully conscious that it distances us from Jesus' proposition? (Individual prayer).

- How do we approach Jesus and how do we promote access to someone different, whether as a couple or as a family, with an attitude of conversion? (Couple prayer and family prayer).

- Are we able to share about our difficulties and to help with the acceptance of difference? And to give attention to the discovery of those who run across us in the different contexts of the society around us? (Sit Down).

- What must we change as regards our behaviour in society so as to promote hope, generosity and justice? (Rule of life).

General sharing

Could we share a lived experience, with a contemporary story related to the topic?

Sharing on the study topic

Jesus was conscious of the questioning of the accusers, even before this sinful woman was present. Could we imagine being questioned about someone who flaunts behaviour that devastates us?

The doctors of the law and the Pharisees, being sure of themselves, provoke Jesus by bringing before Him a woman who has been taken in adultery. As Christians, how often are we not confronted, provoked and put to the test!

Let us make an effort to reflect on the best way to discover the multiple "others" that we run across and how we react vis-à-vis our weaknesses.



The woman taken in adultery – Harry Anderson, 20th century

Final prayer³⁵

Grant me, O Lord my God,
a mind to know You,
an eagerness that seeks You,
a wisdom that is pleasing to You,
faithful perseverance in waiting for you,
and a hope that finally embraces you.
Amen

The following texts have been chosen as reading suggestions, to help in deepening our reflection

³⁵<http://www.catholic.org/clife/prayers/prayer.php?p=832>; amended

Albert Nolan³⁶

Identifying with others

When Matthew wants to summarise one last time Jesus' teaching on the love of God and of our neighbour, he composes a dramatic judicial scenario where a judge must separate the just from evildoers, the sheep from the goats (*Mt* 25:31-46). The teaching on which his scene is based comes effectively from Jesus, but resort to the final judgement as a dramatic technique for teaching purposes comes from Matthew. None of the other evangelists tells a similar story, although we find in each the same fundamental teaching about the love of God and of our neighbour. In more than one way, the story by Matthew refines our understanding of Jesus' spirituality.

First of all, the criterion for judgement in this story is the way in which those who appear before the judge acted towards their human brothers and sisters. They are not asked any question about their attitude to God, their dutifulness in fulfilling their obligations, in respecting the Sabbath or any other commandment. What is to be found at the heart of the judgement, are activities that today we would call "works of mercy". Did you give food to those who were hungry? Did you give a drink to those who were thirsty? Did you welcome the stranger, clothe the naked, take care of the sick, or visit prisoners? In concrete terms, that is what loving your neighbour means. That is the criterion according to which we judge whether or not we loved our neighbour.

The second characteristic of this judgement is that in it love of neighbour is considered, in practice, as identical to love for God, whether or not the person being judged was conscious of this. So, when you fed those who were hungry, gave a drink to those who were thirsty, welcomed the stranger, clothed the naked, cared for the sick or visited prisoners, you did this to God. And when you refused to help a hungry, thirsty or naked person, to welcome a stranger or to visit someone who was sick or imprisoned, it is God who was ignored, whether or not you were conscious of this. It is impossible to make us grasp the identification between God and neighbour in a more striking or more effective way.

The third thing to observe is that the judge identifies with the victims who were helped or who were not. At the beginning of the story he is described as "the Son of Man" and a little later as "the king". Who are we dealing with? With God, with Jesus, or with both? It is not clear. But manifestly, God identifies with every human being, so much so that everything we do to another person, we are doing it to God. This is what Jesus did, too: "[...] in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." It is impossible to better express that Jesus was at one with all human beings. For Jesus, what we do to another human being, we do to him.

The appeal could not be clearer. Following Jesus today consists in so closely identifying ourselves with all his brothers and sisters in humanity that we can say: "What is done to them is done to me". In other words, what constitutes my identity is not only my individual

³⁶Nolan, Albert 2009 *Suivre Jésus Aujourd'hui*. Montréal. Novalis.

and unique being. My identity is that great “we” of the human race¹. And above all, let’s not understand this as a simple metaphor or something of that kind. We are not invited to love our neighbour as if our neighbour were ourselves. In Matthew’s story, the judge does not say: “in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, it is as if you did it to me” but rather “you did it to me”. It is a question of an objective, concrete identification. God is one with all human beings, and we are one with the others, whether we are conscious of this or not.

How important it is to become conscious of this! In fact, loving each other is born spontaneously of the discovery and of the continuous consciousness of being nothing but one with the others.

What is referred to here is the solidarity that exists at the heart of family relationships. Normally we experience this type of solidarity with our near relations. A mother identifies so much with her child that she could say “what you do to my child, you do to me”. It’s the same thing between brothers and sisters. Blood ties can even unite members of the extended family or of a clan to the point that if one is insulted, all the others are as well.

The primary origin of love of neighbour in the Jewish Scriptures is the family relationship. In Leviticus, neighbours are male or female family members (Lv 19:18). It goes without saying to love them as one loves oneself. One can even envisage an extension to include “the resident alien, the stranger who lives with you” (Lv 19:34; Dt 10:18-19), but no one else, above all no enemies.

Jesus enlarged solidarity or the family bond to the whole human race. “You have heard how it was said, ‘You will love your neighbour and hate your enemy’. But I say this to you, love your enemies” (Mt 5, 43-44). For him, everyone was his brother, his sister, his mother, his uncle, his aunt. He identified with them, whoever they were, whatever they had done and however they behaved towards him. He could even have said of his enemies: “in so far as you did this to one of them, you did it to me”.

I am because we are

Timothy Radcliffe³⁷

When Thomas Merton left his monastery after some years, to visit the local town for the first time, he was overwhelmed with a sense of the beauty and goodness of the people whom he met:

It is a glorious destiny to be a member of the human race, though it is a race dedicated to many absurdities and one which makes terrible mistakes: yet, with all that, God Himself glorified in becoming a member of the human race. A member of the human race! To think that such a commonplace realisation should suddenly seem like news that one holds the winning ticket in a cosmic sweepstake. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun... There are no strangers... If only we could see each

³⁷ Radcliffe, Timothy 2005 *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* Burns & Oates, London; pp.141-142.

other as we really are all the time. There would be no more war, no more hatred, no more cruelty, no more greed... I suppose that the big problem would be that we would fall down and worship each other... the gate of heaven is everywhere.

The Church should be a community in which the beauty of ordinariness is disclosed, because in our God, whose centre is everywhere and whose circumference is nowhere, then no one should feel on the edge.

On the road to Jerusalem, the apostles argue among themselves as to which of them is the greatest. James and John, the sons of Zebedee, ask Jesus, 'Grant us to sit, one at your right hand and one at your left, in your glory' (Mark 10.37) They wish to have the top jobs, to bask in the glory, to be raised up above the competition. They do not wish to be ordinary, 'common or garden' apostles. But Jesus says that 'to sit at my right hand or at my left is not mine to grant, but it is for those for whom it has been prepared'. (10.40). And indeed, when he is lifted up in glory on the cross, it is two ordinary thieves, whose names we do not even know, who have the places of honour.

*Familiaris Consortio*³⁸

John Paul II

The Christian Family's Grace and Responsibility

47. The social role that belongs to every family pertains by a new and original right to the Christian family, which is based on the sacrament of marriage. By taking up the human reality of the love between husband and wife in all its implications, the sacrament gives to Christian couples and parents a power and a commitment to live their vocation as lay people and therefore to "seek the kingdom of God by engaging in temporal affairs and by ordering them according to the plan of God."(113)

The social and political role is included in the kingly mission of service in which Christian couples share by virtue of the sacrament of marriage, and they receive both a command which they cannot ignore and a grace which sustains and stimulates them.

The Christian family is thus called upon to offer everyone a witness of generous and disinterested dedication to social matters, through a "preferential option" for the poor and disadvantaged. Therefore, advancing in its following of the Lord by special love for all the poor, it must have special concern for the hungry, the poor, the old, the sick, drug victims and those who have no family.

³⁸ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/apost_exhortations/documents/hf_jp-ii_exh_19811122_familiaris-consortio_en.html

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Being a family in the Church community

Introduction

In John's text we are assured that the Father takes care of us as a community. Love, which is always present in this relationship between God and men, presupposes our responsibility towards others, who are united by the same love. This is implicit in the call to "bear fruit". This mission is committed to the family, as the domestic Church implanted in the heart of the community, as well as that of taking care of others without ever forgetting the injunction to love each other.

Listening to the Word: John 15:1-17³⁹

Parable of the vine

¹ I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. ² Every branch in me that bears no fruit he cuts away, and every branch that does bear fruit he prunes to make it bear even more. ³ You are clean already, by means of the word that I have spoken to you.

⁴ Remain in me, as I in you. As a branch cannot bear fruit all by itself, unless it remains part of the vine, neither can you unless you remain in me. ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches. Whoever remains in me, with me in him, bears fruit in plenty; for cut off from me you can do nothing.

⁶ Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a branch -- and withers; these branches are collected and thrown on the fire and are burnt.

⁷ If you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for whatever you please and you will get it. ⁸ It is to the glory of my Father that you should bear much fruit and be my disciples.

⁹ I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love.

¹⁰ If you keep my commandments you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and remain in his love. ¹¹ I have told you this so that my own joy may be in you and your joy be complete.

¹² This is my commandment: love one another, as I have loved you. ¹³ No one can have greater love than to lay down his life for his friends. ¹⁴ You are my friends, if you do what I command you. ¹⁵ I shall no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know the master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learnt from my Father. ¹⁶ You did not choose me, no, I chose you; and I commissioned you to go out and to bear fruit, fruit that will last; so that the Father will give you anything you ask him in my name.

¹⁷ My command to you is to love one another.

³⁹ http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=50&bible_chapter=15&submit=Go

Silent time, prayer time reflecting on the Gospel

Sharing and general sharing

We are the shoots of the vine, we are the people of God, and we cannot “bear fruit” unless we remain in Christ. This is also the strength of the family inserted into the community, with ecclesial responsibilities.

Sharing

- How do we give thanks for the gifts we have received and how do we develop them, united in the same vine as the Christ? (Individual prayer).
- What place does our concern to take care of our Pastor and our community, with their problems and preoccupations, occupy in our prayers? Are we concerned to pray for all those who make up the Church, for the people of God, for the flowering of all vocations? (Couple and family prayer).
- Individually and as a couple, are we accustomed to reflecting on our active participation in the life of the community and of the local Church? That is to say, what is our response to the ‘call’, since we have been chosen by Him? (Sit down).
- What must we change in our lives, a change which must help us to remain in the joy and love of God and which facilitates the flow of the energising sap between us? (Rule of life).

General sharing

Have we experiences of participation in the life of the Church, in our community, that can have an influence on our way of being Christians that we would like to share? Or other experiences that we want to share?

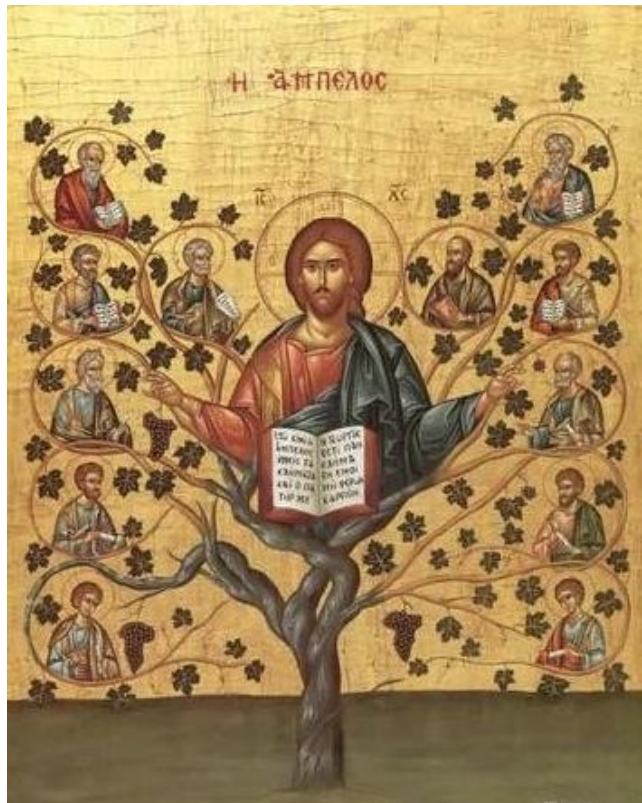
Could we share a lived experience, in a contemporary account in harmony with the topic?

Sharing on the study topic

“I have loved you just as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love”.

There we have the energy source of Christian life and of the vocation of Christians who are called to participate in building the kingdom of God.

That is the challenge of daring to live the Gospel, which calls us to be responsible in our actions and in caring for the community.



Jesus is the true vine

Final Prayer

Prayer to the Holy Spirit⁴⁰

Come Holy Spirit,
 fill the hearts of your faithful
 and kindle in them the fire of your love.
 Send forth your Spirit
 and everything shall be created.
 and You shall renew the face of the earth.

O, God, who by the light of the Holy Spirit,
 did instruct the hearts of your faithful,
 grant that by the same Holy Spirit
 we may know and love what is good
 and ever enjoy His divine consolations,
 Through Christ Our Lord, Amen.

The following texts have been chosen as reading suggestions, to help in deepening our reflection

⁴⁰ http://www.diocese-mont-laurier.org/rubriques/haut/paroisses/nos-paroisses/sainte-agathe/prieres/ms_document_view

First letter of Saint Paul, Apostle, to the Corinthians⁴¹

²⁶ Then what should it be like, brothers? When you come together each of you brings a psalm or some instruction or a revelation, or speaks in a tongue or gives an interpretation. Let all these things be done in a way that will build up the community.

²⁷ If there are to be any people speaking in a tongue, then let there be only two, or at the most three, and those one at a time, and let one of these interpret.

²⁸ If there is no interpreter, then let each of them be quiet in the assembly, and speak only to himself and God.

²⁹ Let two prophets, or three, speak while the rest weigh their words;

³⁰ and if a revelation comes to someone else who is sitting by, the speaker should stop speaking.

³¹ You can all prophesy, but one at a time, then all will learn something and all receive encouragement.

³² The prophetic spirit is to be under the prophets' control,

³³ for God is a God not of disorder but of peace. As in all the churches of God's holy people,

Gaudium et Spes⁴²

76. The political community and the Church

It is very important, especially where a pluralistic society prevails, that there be a correct notion of the relationship between the political community and the Church, and a clear distinction between the tasks which Christians undertake, individually or as a group, on their own responsibility as citizens guided by the dictates of a Christian conscience, and the activities which, in union with their pastors, they carry out in the name of the Church.

The Church, by reason of her role and competence, is not identified in any way with the political community nor bound to any political system. She is at once a sign and a safeguard of the transcendent character of the human person.

The Church and the political community in their own fields are autonomous and independent from each other. Yet both, under different titles, are devoted to the personal and social vocation of the same men. The more that both foster sounder cooperation between themselves with due consideration for the circumstances of time and place, the more effective will their service be exercised for the good of all. For man's horizons are not limited only to the temporal order; while living in the context of human history, he preserves intact his eternal vocation. The Church, for her part, founded on the love of the Redeemer, contributes toward the reign of justice and charity within the borders of a nation and between nations. By preaching the truths of the Gospel, and bringing to bear on

⁴¹ http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=53&bible_chapter=14

⁴² http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_19651207_gaudium-et-spes_en.html

all fields of human endeavour the light of her doctrine and of a Christian witness, she respects and fosters the political freedom and responsibility of citizens.

The Apostles, their successors and those who cooperate with them, are sent to announce to mankind Christ, the Saviour. Their apostolate is based on the power of God, Who very often shows forth the strength of the Gospel on the weakness of its witnesses. All those dedicated to the ministry of God's Word must use the ways and means proper to the Gospel which in a great many respects differ from the means proper to the earthly city.

The conjugal community, a cell within the body of the Church

Henri Caffarel⁴³

We can see why the union of two people who have been baptised should be considered as "mystery". It has not only a simple extrinsic relationship with Christ, with the union of Christ and the Church: the relationship of the copy to its archetype; but also a real, essential relationship. The man-woman union is linked organically to the Christ-Church union: it participates in its nature, in its life, in its character as a mystery. It is carried along, penetrated, irrigated, transfigured by that grandiose union of Christ with the Church.

In other words, the Christ-Church union, is not only manifested but realised in every Christian couple.

One expression, that of the "cell of the Church", conveys very well this situation of the couple in the body of Christ. A basic, germinating, generative cell, doubtless the smallest, but also the most fundamental in the ecclesial organism.

The Fathers of the Church and theologians, following on from Saint Jean Chrysostom, occasionally call the Christian family: "a church in miniature", *ecclesia mikra*. This formulation which they understand in an extrinsic, social sense can quite properly be taken in an infinitely more forceful sense: the couple's being and life participate really in the being and life of the Christ-Church union. So we hold strongly to this first conclusion : in the man-woman union, a cell of the Church, are manifested and realised the life and the mystery of the Christ-Church union.

We find in the plan of the mystical Body what contemporary biologists teach us, namely that each cell of the human body contains all the specific characteristics of the whole body.

So it should be said that the union of men and women is a "great mystery" in the Pauline sense of the term (Eph. 5:32); a sacrament in the sense of Catholic theology: that is to say, a "sign" which not only represents the mystery of the Christ-Church union but also "contains" it and "radiates" it

For all that I don't mean to say that one can conclude on the basis of this page from Ephesians that marriage is one of the seven sacraments instituted by Christ. If the Church

⁴³ Henri Caffarel 1963 « Par rapport au Christ et à l'Église ». *L'Anneau d'Or – Le Mariage, ce grand Sacrement*. Numéro spécial 111-112 : 323-339.

has always seen in marriage a *res sacra* (sacred thing), she waited until the XIIIth century to declare that it is properly one of the seven sacraments of the new Law. She first lived this doctrine and reflected on its practice before arriving at the definition of the marriage-sacrament. (pp. 323-339)

Citizens of the Kingdom

Timothy Radcliffe⁴⁴

If the community is healthy, then it will not suppress one's personal identity: 'I am because we are.' The Church should help us to flourish by being a community in which I can speak with confidence. But the Church claims to be more than just another community to which one might belong, in addition to one's local darts team or even one's nation. It is the sacrament of the unity of humanity in Christ. But what does that mean?

Christians often use the word 'solidarity' to articulate that sense of belonging to the human community. Jean-Paul II said [...] 'culture of solidarity', [...] but what might a culture of solidarity look like? 'Solidarity' is a word whose roots lie in early nineteenth-century France, meaning the solidarity of the French people over against such enemies as the English. It was a solidarity based on exclusion, 'us' over against 'them' like the 'us' of the Pharisees over against Jesus and the man born blind. There is an Arabic proverb: 'I, against my brother; my brother and I against my cousin; my cousin, my brother and I against the world.' [...] To call oneself a Catholic is to accept identification - *kath' holon*, according to the whole, the universal communion of the Kingdom. It is to refuse an identity based on exclusion. (p 143-144)

[...] Christianity is gravely wounded in its ability to witness to the future unity of humanity, both because of divisions between Christians and divisions within the Churches. (p. 164)

[...] What young people are going to find their home in a community that is so angry? Who will be attracted to a Church in which people devote so much energy to being aggressive about other members? (p.164)

[...] How are we to heal the wounds of Christ's body? How are we to learn to breathe again with the rhythm of the Eucharist – gathering people into community to share the bread and reaching out for the fullness of the Kingdom? (p.179)

⁴⁴ Radcliffe, Timothy 2005 *What is the Point of Being a Christian?* Burns & Oates, London: chapters 9 and 10.

DARE TO LIVE THE GOSPEL

Building ecumenism and peace

Introduction

Human beings are called to be happy - happy because they are engaged with others, because they have compassion for others, and not because they are offered an easy happiness. We are called to be happy when we feed or provide refreshment, when we give clothes or shelter someone, when we visit or welcome, when we help to build peace and ecumenism, not neglecting those we consider different; those whom God created equal.

The family is called to happiness because, man and woman, they give themselves mutually and they both give themselves to their children. The family constitutes a place in its own right for practice of compassion, whether at home or in the outside world. It is in the bosom of the family that we learn that we are all equal and it is there that peace can be made in each heart.

The family is the first place that makes it possible to exercise compassion while directing it outwards and contributing to building peace.

Listening to the Word: Matthew 25, 31- 40⁴⁵

Last Judgement

³¹ 'When the Son of man comes in his glory, escorted by all the angels, then he will take his seat on his throne of glory. ³² All nations will be assembled before him and he will separate people one from another as the shepherd separates sheep from goats. ³³ He will place the sheep on his right hand and the goats on his left.

³⁴ Then the King will say to those on his right hand, "Come, you whom my Father has blessed, take as your heritage the kingdom prepared for you since the foundation of the world. ³⁵ For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you made me welcome, ³⁶ lacking clothes and you clothed me, sick and you visited me, in prison and you came to see me." ³⁷ Then the upright will say to him in reply, "Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you drink? ³⁸ When did we see you a stranger and make you welcome, lacking clothes and clothe you? ³⁹ When did we find you sick or in prison and go to see you?" ⁴⁰ And the King will answer, "In truth I tell you, in so far as you did this to one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did it to me." '

Silent time, prayer time reflecting on the Gospel

⁴⁵ <http://www.catholic.org/bible/>

Sharing and general sharing

What makes men truly men is the capacity to be compassionate. At the last judgement, according to what Matthew tells us, we will only be judged by 'non-religious' criteria. For God, we reach perfection in proportion to our compassion. Divisions between men come from a diversion of this practice in our relationships: appropriation of resources by some, to the detriment of others; development conditions creating dependency. These obstacles need to be eliminated if there is to be dialogue and peace-making.

Sharing

- How do we prepare our way, throughout our lives, for the definitive meeting with God? (Individual prayer)
- How do we help each other to nourish an attitude of compassion and for peace-making in prayer? (Conjugal and family prayer).
- As husband and wife, do we support each other in the difficulties we experience when it comes to exercising compassion? Are we peace-makers? (Sit Down).
- To what extent does this "troubling revelation" from Matthew's Gospel impel us to journey towards God while being fully human with mankind? (Rule of life).

General sharing

Faced by the challenge of sanctity that is presented here, what experiences do we want to share?

Sharing on the study topic

According to Matthew, Jesus is very clear about the Father's criteria according to which each of our lives will be judged. In fact, it is not a matter of religious criteria in the sense of the traditions to which we are accustomed, but of truly demanding and difficult propositions, which nonetheless are the only way to stimulate compassion, ecumenism and peace-making.

Let's reflect together on the place we allow each other to seek the peace-making road and the way we help each other to eliminate the causes of division amongst us.



The Beatitudes Sermon – James Tissot – 20th century

Final prayer⁴⁶

Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love;
where there is injury, pardon;
where there is doubt, faith;
where there is despair, hope;
where there is darkness, light;
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek
to be consoled as to console;
to be understood as to understand;
to be loved as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive;
it is in pardoning that we are pardoned;
and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen

⁴⁶ Prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi. *In* <http://www.catholic-forum.com/saints/pray0027.htm>

The following texts have been chosen as reading suggestions, to help in deepening our reflection

*Ut Unum Sint*⁴⁷

John Paul II

Ecumenism and peace

10. In the present situation of the lack of unity among Christians and of the confident quest for full communion, the Catholic faithful are conscious of being deeply challenged by the Lord of the Church. The Second Vatican Council strengthened their commitment with a clear ecclesiological vision, open to all the ecclesial values present among other Christians. The Catholic faithful face the ecumenical question in a spirit of faith.

The Council states that the Church of Christ "subsists in the Catholic Church, which is governed by the Successor of Peter and by the Bishops in communion with him", and at the same time acknowledges that "many elements of sanctification and of truth can be found outside her visible structure. These elements, however, as gifts properly belonging to the Church of Christ, possess an inner dynamism towards Catholic unity".¹¹

"It follows that these separated Churches and Communities, though we believe that they suffer from defects, have by no means been deprived of significance and value in the mystery of salvation. For the Spirit of Christ has not refrained from using them as means of salvation which derive their efficacy from the very fullness of grace and truth entrusted to the Catholic Church".¹²

11. The Catholic Church thus affirms that during the two thousand years of her history she has been preserved in unity, with all the means with which God wishes to endow his Church, and this despite the often grave crises which have shaken her, the infidelity of some of her ministers, and the faults into which her members daily fall. The Catholic Church knows that, by virtue of the strength which comes to her from the Spirit, the weaknesses, mediocrity, sins and at times the betrayals of some of her children cannot destroy what God has bestowed on her as part of his plan of grace. Moreover, "the powers of death shall not prevail against it" (*Mt* 16:18). Even so, the Catholic Church does not forget that many among her members cause God's plan to be discernible only with difficulty. Speaking of the lack of unity among Christians, the Decree on Ecumenism does not ignore the fact that "people of both sides were to blame",¹³ and acknowledges that responsibility cannot be attributed only to the "other side". By God's grace, however,

⁴⁷ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_paul_ii/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_25051995_ut-unum-sint_en.html

neither what belongs to the structure of the Church of Christ nor that communion which still exists with the other Churches and Ecclesial Communities has been destroyed.

Indeed, the elements of sanctification and truth present in the other Christian Communities, in a degree which varies from one to the other, constitute the objective basis of the communion, albeit imperfect, which exists between them and the Catholic Church.

To the extent that these elements are found in other Christian Communities, the one Church of Christ is effectively present in them. For this reason the Second Vatican Council speaks of a certain, though imperfect communion. The Dogmatic Constitution *Lumen Gentium* stresses that the Catholic Church "recognizes that in many ways she is linked" ¹⁴ with these Communities by a true union in the Holy Spirit.

[...]

14. All these elements bear within themselves a tendency towards unity, having their fullness in that unity. It is not a matter of adding together all the riches scattered throughout the various Christian Communities in order to arrive at a Church which God has in mind for the future. In accordance with the great Tradition, attested to by the Fathers of the East and of the West, the Catholic Church believes that in the Pentecost Event God has *already* manifested the Church in her eschatological reality, which he had prepared "from the time of Abel, the just one".¹⁹ This reality is something already given. Consequently we are even now in the last times. The elements of this already-given Church exist, found in their fullness in the Catholic Church and, without this fullness, in the other Communities,²⁰ where certain features of the Christian mystery have at times been more effectively emphasized. Ecumenism is directed precisely to making the partial communion existing between Christians grow towards full communion in truth and charity.

God is not private property

Bento Domingues, Dominican

2. [...] It is not possible to leave interreligious and intercultural dialogue solely in the hands of political and religious leaders, and of specialised commissions, even if they have the duty of sensitising public opinion to the urgency of such a task. What we are aiming for, is citizens - Muslims and Christians - besotted with dialogue, so that we are not manipulated by fanatics and terrorists. In this sense, today we have an edifying Jewish story in the catholic liturgy (Nm 11:25-29).

We are told that Moses was advised to collect 70 elders to stand beside him with a view to guiding the people. Two of them, who were not present at the ceremony, also received the Spirit of God and proved to be prophets even 'more' than the others, that is to say, more foresightful than the others. A young man who was taken aback by this went to tell Moses what was happening. One of the elders, who had not liked what he heard, said: "My Lord Moses, stop them".

Moses showed his disagreement: "Are you jealous on my account? If only all Yahweh's people were prophets", that is to say, critical, foresightful!

This is an exemplary story where politics and religion meet– if I may be forgiven the anachronism – democratic participation and the lucid and universal exercise of citizenship.

3. In the New Testament, we find a similar story, with an obvious bearing on interreligious dialogue: 'Master, we saw someone who is not one of us driving out devils in your name, and because he was not one of us we tried to stop him" Jesus gives a spectacular reply: "Anyone who is not against us is for us." (M 9:38-43, 45, 47-48).

Such a response was never readily accepted. Despite Paul having said that in Jesus God makes no distinction between Jew and Greek, slave or free man, man or woman, an antiChristian formula has persisted for centuries. "No salvation outside the Church". [...]

I think that Jesus' originality consists in this bond with God which all human beings have in their hearts and which we can find or forget in a thousand ways

True religion knows that it is not God we need to take care of but the children of God. This is the admirable message proclaimed in the letter of St James. [...]

It is pointless saying that there is only one God, if, as Christians and Muslims, we forget that there is only one humanity for all of us to respect and serve.

Ecumenism and peace

A couple's reflection

Building ecumenism and peace implies the possibility of establishing dialogue and the necessity of becoming conscious of what all men have in common. A television programme about one of the first humanoids in Africa referred to the discovery of the bones of an adolescent with congenital malformations that would not allow him to survive beyond a very young age, without major assistance and being totally dependent on other members of the group! In other words, *it has been observed* that these living beings (our ancestors) had the capacity to exercise compassion and exercised it... Apparently this free relationship cannot be found in other living beings... *Could compassion be a characteristic that differentiates us as men?*

What is deviant and separates men can essentially be summarised by the temptations of Christ (Luke 4:3-11): a) violation of nature (changing stones into bread); b) hunger for power; c) vanity (showing off an apparent superiority). All of that can be seen as a lack of respect for God's plans but evidently, also, as an inseparable form of lack of compassion for other men: the possibility of devastating their access to natural resources; of forcing them into submission, by exercising several forms of power; of humiliating them, by forcing them to feel inferior. More obviously, Matthew makes us see the fundamental importance of compassion in the relationship between Men, because the latter is the only criterion that he points to in order for God to accept us (Mat 25:34-40). The examples given by Saint Matthew are all related to sharing essential resources (food and clothing), welcoming

foreigners (be they migrants or pilgrims), those who suffer violence, even if it is legitimate (the prisoner) and those who quite simply, depend on others thanks to limitations imposed on them by poor health. So what makes men truly Men is the capacity to exercise compassion. And this is also what saves them!

On arriving at this point, a doubt occurred to me, a doubt that I share with you: to succeed in balancing behaviour in relationships between men, should we view Christ's example not so much as "true God", but as "true Man"? I speak of "true Man" not only in the strict sense of "a man like us", but in the sense that He is also "divine" (which could lead us to into the temptation of thinking that everyone could not attain this), I am speaking of Him as "Man in his full flowering", the fullness that we should seek to attain to correspond to the expectation of God, who wants our collaborative acceptance, not submission to a will that is imposed. When we seek to be that Man do we make communication with others easier? What direction does Christ give us?

The elements of this issue are symbolically brought together in Jesus' dialogue with the Samaritan woman (John 4:5-25) (divisions between men) and the way to find solutions: the Jews do not get on with the Samaritans. Jesus created the conditions that would allow dialogue (peace): the differences between ways of adoring God have lost their importance and left a justification for division because they have been put in the context of what is the true relationship with God (ecumenism).

It is appropriate to recall the meaning of owning a well in a Semitic community: it is only used by the community and anyone else must ask for access. Jesus asked although he was a Jew, - "You are a Jew. How is it that you ask me, a Samaritan, for something to drink?"⁴⁸ – It is this approach with this "unthinkable" attitude that facilitated dialogue, that made it possible to address those aspects that divided Samaritans and Jews as regards the proper way of praying to God and doing away with the confusion between what is essential and what constitutes a mere sociocultural framework. Once the barriers are broken down, it was possible for the Samaritan woman to say to Jesus (John 4:19-24):¹⁹ 'I see you are a prophet, sir,' said the woman. 'Our fathers worshipped on this mountain, though you say that Jerusalem is the place where one ought to worship.' Jesus said: Believe me, woman, the hour is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem. You worship what you do not know; we worship what we do know; for salvation comes from the Jews. But the hour is coming -- indeed is already here -- when true worshippers will worship the Father in spirit and truth: that is the kind of worshipper the Father seeks. God is spirit, and those who worship must worship in spirit and truth.⁴⁹

Can we conclude, as I have supposed, that compassion is what defines us as Men and that we will be judged by compassion? I have not detected any reference to our capacity for reflection, which we place such a high value on, or any other attributes that are a source of pride for so many people! Only the capacity for *asking* and of *sharing* a limited resource

⁴⁸ http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=50&bible_chapter=4&submit=Go

⁴⁹ Id.

(water, in Samaria) was capable of breaking down the barriers and making peace and permitting Ecumenism.

*Pacem In Terris*⁵⁰

John XXIII

Every human being is a person, with rights and duties.

9. Any well-regulated and productive association of men in society demands the acceptance of one fundamental principle: that each individual man is truly a person. His is a nature, that is, endowed with intelligence and free will. As such he has rights and duties, which together flow as a direct consequence from his nature. These rights and duties are universal and inviolable, and therefore altogether inalienable. (7)

10. When, furthermore, we consider man's personal dignity from the standpoint of divine revelation, inevitably our estimate of it is incomparably increased. Men have been ransomed by the blood of Jesus Christ. Grace has made them sons and friends of God, and heirs to eternal glory.

Mutual Collaboration

31. Since men are social by nature, they must live together and consult each other's interests. That men should recognize and perform their respective rights and duties is imperative to a well ordered society. But the result will be that each individual will make his whole-hearted contribution to the creation of a civic order in which rights and duties are ever more diligently and more effectively observed.

Social Life in Truth, Justice, Charity and Freedom

35. Hence, before a society can be considered well-ordered, creative, and consonant with human dignity, it must be based on truth. St. Paul expressed this as follows: "Putting away lying, speak ye the truth every man with his neighbour, for we are members one of another." (25) And so will it be, if each man acknowledges sincerely his own rights and his own duties toward others.

Human society, as we here picture it, demands that men be guided by justice, respect the rights of others and do their duty. It demands, too, that they be animated by such love as will make them feel the needs of others as their own, and induce them to share their goods with others, and to strive in the world to make all men alike heirs to the noblest of intellectual and spiritual values. Nor is this enough; for human society thrives on freedom, namely, on the use of means which are consistent with the dignity of its individual members, who, being endowed with reason, assume responsibility for their own actions.

⁵⁰ http://www.vatican.va/holy_father/john_xxiii/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11041963_pacem_en.html

Review meeting The team's Sit-down!

Introduction

Jesus tells us we should wash each other's feet and He was the first to give the example. Overcome by this attitude, Peter said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?'⁷ Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.'

Listening to the Word: John 13:1- 17⁵¹

Jesus washes the feet of the disciples

¹ Before the festival of the Passover, Jesus, knowing that his hour had come to pass from this world to the Father, having loved those who were his in the world, loved them to the end. ² They were at supper, and the devil had already put it into the mind of Judas Iscariot son of Simon, to betray him. ³ Jesus knew that the Father had put everything into his hands, and that he had come from God and was returning to God, ⁴ and he got up from table, removed his outer garments and, taking a towel, wrapped it round his waist; ⁵ he then poured water into a basin and began to wash the disciples' feet and to wipe them with the towel he was wearing. ⁶ He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, 'Lord, are you going to wash my feet?' ⁷ Jesus answered, 'At the moment you do not know what I am doing, but later you will understand.' ⁸ 'Never!' said Peter. 'You shall never wash my feet.' Jesus replied, 'If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me.' Simon Peter said, ⁹ 'Well then, Lord, not only my feet, but my hands and my head as well!' ¹⁰ Jesus said, 'No one who has had a bath needs washing, such a person is clean all over. You too are clean, though not all of you are.' ¹¹ He knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said, 'though not all of you are'. ¹² When he had washed their feet and put on his outer garments again he went back to the table. 'Do you understand', he said, 'what I have done to you?' ¹³ You call me Master and Lord, and rightly; so I am. ¹⁴ If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, you must wash each other's feet. ¹⁵ I have given you an example so that you may copy what I have done to you. ¹⁶ 'In all truth I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, no messenger is greater than the one who sent him. ¹⁷ 'Now that you know this, blessed are you if you behave accordingly.

Silent time, prayer time reflecting on the Gospel

⁵¹ http://www.catholic.org/bible/book.php?id=50&bible_chapter=13&submit=Go

We are invited to review where we stand⁵²

Isn't adoption of the Sit Down methodology the best way of reviewing the year just past in our Team? This methodology can help us to reveal ourselves to each other both as a couple and as a Team

It is perhaps the moment where the Team, all together, under the gaze of the Lord, can dialogue in truth, where each Team member can reveal his feelings and thoughts on the life of the Team during the past year and bring about better understanding and mutual help. In this way it will be possible to review the past, to analyse the Team's journey and to make plans for the future.

The last meeting is not an end, but a new starting point!

The "prayer time" or silent time, like the Sit Down as a couple, will help the Team to become more conscious of the presence of God.

Peter did not want to agree that the Lord should wash his feet. Jesus answered him: If I do not wash you, you can have no share with me.

It is also during this supper, where Jesus says good-bye to His friends before returning to the Father that he leaves us a recommendation: I give you a new commandment: love one another; you must love one another just as I have loved you⁵³

Taking as our guide the development of the topic for the year, let's evaluate the strong points and the weak points each of us has played in communication in the Team. Let us reflect on these two key points: have we washed each other's feet? Do we allow our feet to be washed?

- To what extent has life as a Team been reflected in our prayer as individual, couples, as families and as a team during this year?
- How have we helped each other to understand and to integrate into our lives the approach adopted by the topic for each meeting?
- What obstacles to putting this into practice have we encountered?
- In what way is Jesus' advice to the apostles - My command to you is to love one another⁵⁴
- translated into the choices of our "Rules of life"?
- How has dialogue within the couple and the Team developed, following practice of the other Endeavours?
- Have we *dared to welcome the Gospel* throughout the year? Have we cared for and welcomed the Men around us?

⁵² Elaboration following the Guide of the *Teams of our Lady*

⁵³ John 13:34

⁵⁴ John 15:17



The last supper - Sister Mercedes, 2006, Notre Dame des Neiges, France

Final prayer

Magnificat⁵⁵

*My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit exults in God my saviour!
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.
Yes, from this day forward
all generations will call me blessed.
for the Almighty has done great things for me.
Holy is His name,
and His mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear Him.
He has shown the power of His arm,
He has routed the proud of heart.
He has pulled down princes from their thrones
and exalted the lowly.
The hungry He has filled with good things,
the rich He sent empty away.
He has come to the help of Israel His servant,
mindful of His mercy
according to the promise He made to our ancestors,
of His mercy to Abraham and to his descendants for ever.
Glory to the Father, to the Son, to the Holy Spirit,
Amen!.*

⁵⁵ http://www.equipes-notre-dame.com/documents_privates/Equipe_Satellite/RE_ENG.pdf

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2. ILLUSTRATIONS

Cover

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Meeting 1

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Meeting 2

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