

Study topic 2021-2022



The Christian couple
leaven of renewal
for the family and society

TEAMS OF OUR LADY
INTERNATIONAL LEADING TEAM

MEETINGS	OBJECTIVES - CHALLENGES AND ATTITUDES	Word of God
		Endeavours
		Laudato Si
1 Beauty of Creation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemplate nature as a gift and reflection of God and praise the Lord • Be aware of the common purpose to which all beings in the Universe contribute • Proclaim the primacy of the human being by respecting and defending the dignity of each and every species in the hierarchy of Creation. 	Acts 17, 24-28
		[Personal prayer]
		LS, 1-16
2 The Family in God's design	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fight against individualism and a culture centred on “the me” • Care for those excluded by assisting them and helping them integrate into society. • Adopt behaviours that lead to harmony in the family in different contexts (school environment, work, family life balance, parish community, ...). • Live the Family as the Sanctuary of Life • Be present in situations where human dignity and the vulnerability of life are being questioned. 	Song of Solomon 2, 10-12. 17 ; 8, 6 -7
		[Conjugal prayer]
		LS, 17-61
3 The dialogue between Faith and Reason	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reflect on the reality of the Human Being, made up of body and soul, and to find in it the depths of reason and faith. • Think how faith must collaborate with reason to better understand the extent of the problems facing mankind. • Understand how faith and reason influence the choices of the couple and family and thus, • Give meaning to the harmonious evolution of God's work. 	Rev 21, 5-6
		[Listening to the Word]
		LS, 62-88
4 Joint responsibility for the common good	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look at what is happening in the world and take responsibility for the contribution that each person can give to society from their personal and family life. • Exercise your citizenship as a political response and participate responsibly in the service of the common good, in sectors such as education, media, health, work and employment, promotion of life, peace, social inclusion, environment, management of global resources, etc. • Commit yourself with clear actions, to build up the community where your family is living, by taking care of the environment, community groups and communal spaces. • Develop a strong sense of responsibility in your family for your role in society, now and for future generations. 	Acts 2, 42-47
		[Sit down]
		LS, 89-100
5 Technology: creativity and power	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • See how technology contributes to the well-being of people in areas such as health, education and communications. • Consider and critically reflect on the objectives, context, consequences and ethical limits of technology. 	Eccl 3, 9-15
		[Retreat]
		LS, 101-136

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transform communication possibilities into opportunities for encounters and solidarity among all, thus contributing to a culture that celebrates "living together" on the planet. 	
6 An Economy with a Soul	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consume responsibly, recognising that we are protagonists of an economy which is attentive to both its people and to the environment in which we live. • Contribute, in a positive way, with intelligence, creativity and generosity, to create a society where both goods and people are valued and social justice reigns in institutions and in the workplace. • Optimise the use of natural resources (water, energy, ...) and adopt a culture where nothing is wasted. • Share our wealth and possessions with those in need. 	1 Pet 1, 22-23
		[Sit down]
		LS,137-162
7 A society based on Love	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Overcome indifference and be sensitive to the problems of the world and society. • Take care of people who are excluded, accompanying them and helping them integrate into society. • Dare to go out and meet those in material or spiritual need and be for them an instrument of the Mercy of Christ and of the Church. • Welcome, care for and accompany couples and families, especially those who are going through difficult times or in situations of greater need. 	Jn 15, 9-11
		[Rule of Life]
		LS,163-201
8 Education for a new lifestyle	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Live as a family, with joy and sobriety and act responsibly towards the environment. • Contribute with real acts of kindness and service to a happy family life. • Pray as a family, recognising the presence of God, Father and Creator of life, and participate in Sunday Mass and in the life of the Church, developing over time and in community our relationship with God. • Educate for a new attitude and a new way of living in our "Common Home". 	2 Peter 1, 2-7
		[Conjugal and family prayer]
		LS,202-237
9 Beyond the Sun... the infinite Beauty of God	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Contemplate the universe, give thanks and praise God for everything and for everyone. • Root our faith in the Risen Jesus and find in Him the grace and strength for life. • Propagate Christian hope through our welcome, our smile and our loving ways. • Surrender ourselves, as a couple, to God, led by the example of Our Lady. 	Rev 1, 8.17
		[Listening to the Word]
		LS,238-245
10 Review	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Look back on the year that is ending and reflect deeply, individually, as a couple and as a team, on the Way travelled towards Holiness through the care of your Common Home. 	Dt 6, 4, 6-9
		[Personal prayer]
		LS, 246 and Prayers

Meeting 1 - The Beauty of Creation

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Contemplate** nature as a gift and reflection of God and **praise** the Lord
- **Be aware of** the common purpose to which all beings in the Universe contribute
- **Proclaim** the primacy of the human being **by respecting and defending** the dignity of each and every species in the hierarchy of Creation.

Supporting texts

We must recognize the specific value of the human being as a child of God, created in His image and likeness, and his capacities of knowledge, will, freedom, and responsibility. We cannot understand our relationship to the natural world without understanding our relationship to mankind. The notion of having been created in the image of God gives the human being the condition of co-creator. To be able to express oneself and to develop complicated reasoning; to evaluate situations, compare alternatives and make decisions, to think logically and rationally; to aspire to make progress and to innovate. The relationship of the human being with what surrounds him/her is itself a consequence of the processes of perception and representation, and these are constantly changing as we grow.

"Each of us has a personal identity and is capable of entering into dialogue with others and with God himself. Our capacity to reason, to develop arguments, to be inventive, to interpret reality and to create art, along with other not yet discovered capacities, are signs of a uniqueness which transcends the spheres of physics and biology." (LS, 81)

"*And God saw all that he had made; and behold, it was very good*" (Gen 1:31). God, Himself, revels in the wonder of His work. "The glory of God is the living Man," says Saint Irenaeus of Lyon.

But the fact that human beings were created by God does not make them complete. Father Caffarel writes: "The human person arrives at a state where, in order to reach fullness, it is necessary to enter into communion with God. God is no longer a notion, He is no longer a being we hear about, but Someone we meet and with whom a dialogue is established, an intimacy (...) which does not derive solely from the fact of having understood that the feeling of loneliness of adolescence was an aspiration for conjugal communion, but also from having been led by it to the desire for another communion, another marriage, that of the soul with its God" (The Golden Ring, no. 101). The human being completes himself by making two commitments. The first gives priority to God, who must occupy the first place in everything. The other is established in one's conjugal relationship, in life in society and interpersonal dialogue and in one's relation to the world created by God.

In such a relationship with the world, we must recognize that the value of the human person is the basis for recognising the other as an equal, with their own dignity, however fragile their life may be. So, if we either negate the specific value of the human being in the whole of creation or if we overly "divinise the earth" this causes an imbalance that is beneath us as children of God. A more holistic view must include a relationship with the environment but also needs to include both the social dimension of human beings and the transcendent dimension of their openness to God. Everything is interconnected.

Moreover, creation comes out of love. The love of God is the fundamental reason for all creation: "*For you love all things that exist and detest none of the things that you have made, for you would not have made anything if you had hated it.*" (Wis 11:24).

"Every creature is thus the object of the Father's tenderness, which gives it its place in the world. Even the fleeting life of the least of beings is the object of his love, and in its few seconds of existence God enfolds it with his affection." (LS, 77) We collaborate with God in caring for the fragility of nature and this requires us to care responsibly for the world in which we live. We must care for the environment and

commit ourselves to others and to society. However, in many situations we act as absolute masters of the earth, forgetting that we are only caretakers of a world created by God. At other times we act irresponsibly with indifference or cruelty towards other creatures, especially other human beings. Everything is interconnected.

"The vision of the Creator is a creative vision. To look upon and to create is one and the same act of God. God's gaze is not that of a spectator. He does not gaze at a being that already exists, but he introduces and brings that being into existence. God's gaze "conceives" a man, a unique saint, and behold that man exists." (Henri Caffarel in *L'Amour et la Grace*, page 13).

Text by Cardinal Peter K.A. Turkson

The Prefect of the Dicastery for the Service of Integral Human Development, Cardinal Peter Kodwo Appiah Turkson, in his presentation at the International Gathering of Fatima 2018, affirmed that families can embody "a true example of human dignity" and "morality" and in this way be a model for the entire human family; called to live in and to care for our common home and all of creation. In his presentation on conjugal spirituality, as part of a broader "human ecology" that is based on "fraternity" and "communion," he explained that whoever has a home to administer understands well what it means to have "responsibility for our common home." Those who live in a small community such as the family community, where we manage relationships, problems, compromises, projects, know well the importance of proper interaction among people.

For this reason, Cardinal Turkson asked the families present to live day by day—in the reality of the small and large choices they have to make—the close relationship that unites human dignity to the protection of the environment and unites mankind to creation in its entirety. It is a question, he explained, of an "ecological conscience" that surpasses the consciousness that the international community has achieved over the last fifty years, even with the evolution of scientific studies and the political measures of various governments and the United Nations. It is a consciousness that has its roots in the Holy Scriptures, in the biblical narrative of creation where God puts man, "made of the dust of the earth and the breath of God" in the "garden that He planted" for man to cultivate. Therefore, being in charge means to care and protect.

From this point of view, man is no longer "the self-referential centre of creation"; although he carries within him the distinction of being in the image and likeness of God, he is perceived above all as "part of a created, interconnected and interdependent world". But not only that: "Man is a member of a community, he is in communion with others and lives in a network of relationships". Above all, it is in their common nature as children of God that men recognize themselves as "equal in dignity". This is why "every homicide is a fratricide". The human being "is not an individual. He is a relational being, created to coexist in the relationship of a family, a community, a society, with the same dignity and seeking the common good". The human person is created for a life of communion, he also affirmed. All this explains the meaning of the expression "human ecology": "It is not only man's interaction with his environment, but the conditions of goodness, order, justice, love, fraternity, solidarity and mercy that make human life flourish as God's creation" (*L'Osservatore Romano* 21/07/2018).

Testimonials

The beauty with which God looked upon the world when He created it [Gen 1:1-31] is the same beauty that we are invited to when we look at the world. It is with the same loving gaze of God that, as a Christian couple, we look at creation to find in it the Lord of all things, the Lord of our lives. Men and women created by God, out of love and for love, masterpieces of Creation--we are co-creators, at the service of Creation, responsible for Creation, so that it may continue to be beautiful, the same beauty dreamed of by God

when he created it, so that Creation may be a community of love as God intended it to be. It is good to learn again, through prayer and meditation, to contemplate and to let ourselves be filled with wonder at dawn, by the timid piercing of the sun's rays through the clouds, as we drive towards work and perceive that sweet caress of the Lord at the beginning of a new day. The song of the little birds, which like a harmonious orchestra fills our days with joy. A late afternoon, when we let ourselves be intoxicated by the scent of the sea and praise the Lord to the sound of the waves... on this island in the middle of the sea! So many moments of praise, in harmony with the different forms of expression of nature, the work of His creation!

We have understood that our well-being is interrelated with the well-being of creation. We welcome this new opportunity to take care of our common home.

Together we pray for Creation and give thanks to the Creator. We ask for inspiration so that, through small, simple, and solid gestures, we can find the courage to live as God wants us to live but in communion with the rest of creation.

[Sonia and Vitor]

My testimony as a priest and spiritual counsellor is first and foremost a testimony of gratitude. For me, the Teams of Our Lady are that space where we live the beauty of creation because we recognise the central place that the family occupies in the society in which we live. Each couple with their children bears witness to God's plan; prayer, encounter and the path to holiness are present in every meeting and at every encounter. In the conversations during the meeting, it is real life that is important; the problems and joys that couples experience help them to live in the real world and to let their lives be one continuous prayer. In Teams of Our Lady the meeting and sharing are essential for the journey that we make together; even in the situation that we have recently experienced we have continued to be present in each other's lives. Sometimes we need to stop to understand how God manifests Himself in our lives and how our gaze needs hope to see the beauty that continues to emerge in the small events of each day, even when things do not go the way we wanted them to go, that seemed better or fairer to us; we see God acting through those He puts in our lives. In Teams of Our Lady, we are disciples of Jesus with the help and presence of Mary, whose beauty inspires us. Her life is a model for couples who try to imitate the deeds and attitudes of the Virgin Mary, the first disciple, through whom we understand God's plan. The beauty of creation is not an abstract thought, it is a path that we take, in fidelity to God's plan, where the central place that humanity occupies does not separate us from the world created by God, but rather holds us responsible for safeguarding the work created by God. The choice that the Teams have made throughout this year is to examine in a particular way the Encyclical *Laudato Si*, which arises from the whole social doctrine of the Church and is also completed in *Fratelli Tutti*. The encyclicals encourage us to look at our neighbour as brother and sister and to discover the world around us as a place of communion, where, through creation, we discover and contemplate the Creator. I pray that during this year every couple and every family will be surprised by the beauty of creation and that the Gospel proclaimed and lived will transform the world and life according to God's will.

[Father Valter]

Meeting 2 - The Family in God's Design

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Fight against individualism and a culture centred on “the me”**
- **Care for those excluded by assisting them and helping them integrate into society.**
- **Adopt behaviours that lead to harmony in the family in different contexts (school environment, work family life balance, parish community)**
- **Live the Family as the Sanctuary of Life**
- **Be present** in situations where human dignity and the vulnerability of life are being questioned

Supporting texts

“Christian thought sees human beings as possessing a particular dignity above other creatures; it thus inculcates esteem for each person and respect for others. Our openness to others, each of whom is a “thou” capable of knowing, loving and entering into dialogue, remains the source of our nobility as human persons. A correct relationship with the created world demands that we not weaken this social dimension of openness to others, much less the transcendent dimension of our openness to the “Thou” of God. Our relationship with the environment can never be isolated from our relationship with others and with God. Otherwise, it would be nothing more than romantic individualism dressed up in ecological garb, locking us into a stifling immanence.” (LS, 119)

“In this dimension of relationships with others, the conjugal union assumes particular relevance, “alone”, man does not completely realize this essence. He realizes it only by existing “with someone” - and even more deeply and completely - by existing “for someone.The communion of persons means existing in a mutual “for”, in a relationship of mutual gift.” (Saint John Paul II, January 9, 1980). The Catechism of the Catholic Church 2203 tells us “In creating man and woman, God instituted the human family and endowed it with its fundamental constitution. Its members are persons equal in dignity. For the common good of its members and of society, the family implies a diversity of responsibilities, rights and duties”.

In the pastoral challenges of the Synod of Bishops “The Vocation and Mission of the Family in the Church and in the Contemporary World”(2015), Pope Francis further emphasises that true love between husband and wife, conjugal love, is rooted in Christ: Jesus Christ the Lord “comes to meet Christian spouses in the sacrament of marriage” (GS, 48), and dwells in them. Through the Incarnation, He takes human love upon Himself, purifies it and leads it to fullness, and through His Spirit He gives the spouses the capacity to live this love, infusing their whole life with faith, hope and charity. Thus, marriage involves more than a simple re-ordering of individual experiences, but a mutual gift mirrored in Christ.

“Your home will be an even more explicit witness to God if it represents the union of two seekers of God in the wonderful expression of the Psalms. Two seekers whose minds and hearts are eager to know and meet God, impatient to be united with Him, who have understood that God is the great reality, that God interests them more than anything else.” (Fr. Henri Caffarel, Conference “The Teams of Our Lady facing atheism”, Rome, 1970).

The marital relationship has a central role here, as God intended. He created us man and woman so that, united in one flesh, we would love each other and build each other up through this life-giving love. By divine mandate, the couple cannot keep the graces of married life for themselves. Fr. Henri Caffarel affirmed that “no couple has the right to live an unfruitful existence.” Man and woman, the couple is called to cooperate and to watch together over the work of the Creator. However, if they break one of these commitments, human beings distort their very condition. Without God, they break their ties to

others and to nature, to the point of destroying themselves. By isolating themselves and not respecting the world, they ruin the plan of divine nature.

We can go further in this characterisation and identification of the reality of the family that St. John Paul II called the "Sanctuary of Life" and [add] that Pope Francis reminds us that " the role of the family in building a culture of life is decisive and irreplaceable. " (EV, 92).

"It is necessary to go back to seeing the family as the *sanctuary of life*. The family is indeed sacred: it is the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life. (CA, 39)

In fact, " the first and fundamental structure for "human ecology" is the family, in which human beings receive their first formative ideas about truth and goodness and learn what it means to love and to be loved, and thus what it actually means to be a person. Here we mean the *family founded on marriage*, in which the mutual gift of self by husband and wife creates an environment in which children can be born and develop their potentialities, become aware of their dignity and prepare to face their unique and individual destiny." (CA, 39)

In the same sense, Pope Francis alerts us to the need for coherence in our attitudes, giving as an example: "Since everything is interrelated, concern for the protection of nature is also incompatible with the justification of abortion. How can we genuinely teach the importance of concern for other vulnerable beings, however troublesome or inconvenient they may be, if we fail to protect a human embryo, even when its presence is uncomfortable and creates difficulties? "If personal and social sensitivity towards the acceptance of the new life is lost, then other forms of acceptance that are valuable for society also wither away". (LS, 120)

A point to recognise is that our body puts us in direct relationship with the environment and other living beings, signifying respect for life and human dignity. The acceptance of the body as a gift from God is necessary for us to welcome and accept the whole world and common home as a gift from the Father; on the other hand, a logic of domination over one's body is transformed into a, sometimes subtle, logic of domination over creation. Learning to accept one's body, to care for it, to appreciate it as feminine or masculine, respecting its value is essential for a true human ecology.

Finally, it is true that society in general must create conditions that allow for harmony between the different contexts in which family life takes place, especially work and family life, which also allow for the care of those excluded from society; but it is also the mission of families to be active in the renewal of our society.

Text by Cardinal D. Tolentino of Mendonça

"We know the semantics of proximity and distance, and, in fact, we need both. These are elements of proven importance in the architecture of what we are: without either, we would not exist. Without the primordial proximity we would not even be generated. But without separation and progressive distancing our existence would not take place.

In the allegorical language of the book of Genesis, God created man by kneading him out of the clay of the earth and offering him his own breath, but then He left the human couple alone in the garden so that the adventure of freedom could begin. In the same way, each one of us has been called to build his internal world in the balance of these two words: fusion and distinction. And through them we discover, by trial and error, the meaning of love, trust, care, creation and desire. It is true that in the personal and social field there are distances that are roundabout ways of putting up barriers, of inoculating the

community body with the ideological virus of inequality, of introducing all kinds of inequalities into our common existence (economic, political, cultural, etc.).

And we must also recognise that so many forms of proximity are nothing more than abuses of power over others, corrupt ways of exercising power, as if others were our property. So, distance and proximity need to be purified." (Card. José Tolentino Mendonça, In Expresso, 22.03.2020)

Testimonials

We got married in 2016 and ten months later our first son was born. At that time, we were both at the beginning of our careers, as is the case with so many young couples. Although very different, our jobs were demanding in terms of schedules - one was finishing medical school and had internships and nights to do, and the other worked as a consultant with open ended hours. The birth of our first son, and then our second, changed our priorities and, in the light of God's grace, we realised that we both had to give up some personal interests, including some professional choices. We both decided to make changes - we gave up a career as a doctor abroad and a career as consultant to have more time for each other, with our children and also to maintain close contact with our families and friends who form the environment where we believe we can best raise our children - who today number three. We continue to lead a busy and full life, like so many couples, but we are at peace with the decision we have made, because we made it together and brought it to our personal and conjugal prayer.

[Diana and José Miguel]

As Father João Seabra said, Catholic families have exactly the same problems as other families. A Catholic marriage does not remove the problems. But a Catholic marriage brings us two important pieces of news: the union is for life and throughout our life we count on the graces of the Sacrament of Marriage. And since we do not want to live all our lives with the same problems, we put an enormous effort into resolving them, and we focus on the path and not on the imperfections of the couple and the family. The main and first service to which we feel called is: in our family's everyday life to encourage our children to listen, to understand, to be resilient, to be persistent, to dialogue, to welcome, to be humble, to share, to forgive, to put the other first, that is to say, to Love. We have discovered that from this effort, from this service, joy, harmony, and happiness are born. It is true that it is often very difficult, but it is also true that more often it is very rewarding! Yes, it is worth not giving up! We humbly end up discovering that the greatest force to make all this happen does not come from us. In this way we discover the power of prayer. This very Love that unites us, impels us to go beyond the family and to go out on mission: throughout our 28 years of marriage, we have accompanied youth teams, we have piloted other teams, we have been catechists in our parish, we have been Responsible couples, at this time we are responsible for Family Ministry. But the basis is always the solidity of our family which we cannot neglect: each one of us, both of us as a couple, our seven children. That is how we build peace, that is how we contribute to the common good, to our common home. Big things become solid when they are built on the solidity of small things.

[Regiani and Tiago]

Meeting 3 - The Dialogue between Faith and Reason

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Reflect on** the reality of the Human Being, made up of body and soul, and find in it the depths of reason and faith.
- **Think about** how faith should collaborate with reason in order to better understand the extent of the problems facing mankind;
- **Understand** how faith and reason influence the choices of the couple and family and thus,
- **Give meaning to** the harmonious evolution of God's work.

Supporting texts

Pope Francis alerts us to the need to reconcile faith and science for a better evolution of humanity. "I am well aware that, in the areas of politics and philosophy, there are those who firmly reject the idea of a Creator, or consider it irrelevant, and consequently dismiss as irrational the rich contribution which religions can make towards an integral ecology and the full development of humanity. Others view religions simply as a subculture to be tolerated. Nonetheless, science and religion, with their distinctive approaches to understanding reality, can enter into an intense dialogue fruitful for both."(LS, 62).

It is necessary to demystify and eliminate preconceptions in the relationship between wisdom and human thought. "Faith goes far beyond reason, but it does not contradict it. I am completely convinced of this, not only in my life, but also in the reality of what religious faith is, and in what human reason can achieve" [George Coyne, North American astronomer and Jesuit]. "The gaze of science thus benefits from faith: faith encourages the scientist to remain constantly open to reality in all its inexhaustible richness. Faith awakens the critical sense by preventing research from being satisfied with its own formulae and helps it to realize that nature is always greater. By stimulating wonder before the profound mystery of creation, faith broadens the horizons of reason to shed greater light on the world which discloses itself to scientific investigation."[LF, 34].

"There is thus no reason for competition of any kind between reason and faith: each contains the other, and each has its own scope for action." Again the Book of Proverbs points in this direction when it exclaims: "It is the glory of God to conceal things, but the glory of kings is to search things out" (*Prov. 25:2*). In their respective worlds, God and the human being are set within a unique relationship. In God there lies the origin of all things, in him is found the fullness of the mystery, and in this his glory consists; to men and women there falls the task of exploring truth with their reason, and in this their nobility consists. The Psalmist adds one final piece to this mosaic when he says in prayer: "How deep to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them! If I try to count them, they are more than the sand. If I come to the end, I am still with you" (*Psalm 139:17-18*). The desire for knowledge is so great and it works in such a way that the human heart, despite its experience of insurmountable limitation, yearns for the infinite riches which lie beyond, knowing that there is to be found the satisfying answer to every question as yet unanswered." (FR, 17 - St. John Paul II).

"Though faith is above reason, there can never be any real discrepancy between faith and reason. Since the same God who reveals mysteries and infuses faith has bestowed the light of reason on the human mind, God cannot deny himself, nor can truth ever contradict truth." (Cc. Vatican I: DS 3017). "Consequently, methodical research in all branches of knowledge, provided it is carried out in a truly scientific manner and does not override moral laws, can never conflict with the faith, because the things of the world and the things of faith derive from the same God. The humble and persevering investigator of the secrets of nature is being led, as it were, by the hand of God in spite of himself, for it is God, the conserver of all things, who made them what they are." (GS 36, § 2). (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 159).

Science and faith share common concerns, the intimate desire to understand the infinite, to reach it, and to understand how man takes part in it. Religion focuses on questions on the origin of the universe and the meaning of life. Science focuses on natural phenomena and seeks to acquire reliable knowledge of the causes and principles of things.

“All human beings desire to know”, and truth is the proper object of this desire. Everyday life shows how concerned each of us is to discover for ourselves, beyond mere opinions, how things really are. Within visible creation, man is the only creature who not only is capable of knowing but who knows that he knows, and is therefore interested in the real truth of what he perceives. People cannot be genuinely indifferent to the question of whether what they know is true or not. If they discover that it is false, they reject it; but if they can establish its truth, they feel themselves rewarded. It is this that Saint Augustine teaches when he writes: “I have met many who wanted to deceive, but none who wanted to be deceived.” It is rightly claimed that persons have reached adulthood when they can distinguish independently between truth and falsehood, making up their own minds about the objective reality of things. This is what has driven so many enquiries, especially in the scientific field, which in recent centuries have produced important results, leading to genuine progress for all humanity.” (FR, 25, Saint John Paul II).

By moving away from God, man sees only himself, his own greatness, and does not realize his own misery. “Every human gaze is narrow. Only the Spirit offers us the wide angle of history and the key to our existence. Without the light of faith, we will never find the exact place where the Spirit dwells. This is not a theological or pastoral matter. It is the soul of everything, the surpassing of all systems, organisations, movements, technocratic elaborations, highly scientific or academic views. It is the supplement, the presupposition, the creator, the principle and the end of the thought, will and action of every man, believer or atheist, Christian, Jewish or Muslim. It is ecumenical, universal, tolerant, vigorous, clarifying, pacifying. The soul of everything. Even that which seems to have no soul. The day of every night.” [Cón. António Rego].

It is necessary for man to detach himself from his arrogance as the owner of truth and from his self-sufficiency so as not to condition his own existence and to make space, in himself, for the work of God, for the continuous and evolving process of reason. As Father Caffarel said, “—your lack of anxiety makes me uneasy. You who are so tranquil in your possession of truth, so comfortably established on the threshold of a virtuous life, is not good enough. Morality is more than that. For morality is not only avoiding evil, or merely doing something, but of doing good, the whole good. As long as there is dissension in the world, and as long as there is a man who suffers, or there is something better to be done, you are not following the law, for each man is responsible for the world. Moreover, you only have to read the Bible, that disquieting little book, to convince yourself of it. Love is life and the biologist tells us—life is tension, movement, ingenuity, tenacity, and irrepressible striving. All that is contrary to quietude. There is no rest for him who loves. But you must understand what love is. To love is to wish the growth of a person, it is to work furiously to that end. It is to give all that you have and all that you are.” Fr. Caffarel in *Propos sur l'Amour et la Grace*

No one can boast of being in perfect accord with it. “The measure of love is to love without measure.” Love is life and the biologist tells us—life is tension, movement, ingenuity, tenacity, and irrepressible striving. All that is contrary to quietude. There is no rest for him who loves. That is why there are so many who seek to hide from love, who fear it and prefer to submit to some code. But you must understand what love is. To love is to wish the growth of a person, it is to work furiously to that end. It is to give all that you have and all that you are. It is to suffer not having riches enough to fill him up without measure.

And he also added, “To be competent is, in fact, to love one’s brothers. One who applies his intelligence and strength to discovering the secrets of nature, (...) does he not practice fraternal love? (...) To be competent is also to love God. For God has done men the honour of willing to need their assistance.” Fr. Caffarel in *Propos sur l'Amour et la Grâce*, [Love and Grace in Marriage]

"If we are truly concerned to develop an ecology capable of remedying the damage we have done, no branch of the sciences and no form of wisdom can be left out, and that includes religion and the language particular to it. The Catholic Church is open to dialogue with philosophical thought; this has enabled her to produce various syntheses between faith and reason. The development of the Church's social teaching represents such a synthesis with regard to social issues; this teaching is called to be enriched by taking up new challenges. " (LS, 63).

Text by Father Luigi Verdi (founder of the Fraternity of Romena)

"Faith does not prevent us from seeing Reason as a tool of God. Reason leads us to communion with transcendence and the universality/diversity of man's gaze upon the universe and its mysteries because Jesus is not closed, he is catholic, that is to say, universal, and we must get used to thinking that light can come from afar, and that we do not possess "truth" exclusively. Everyone has his or her own angle of truth, and instead of fighting against those who have a different faith, we must learn with them. We do not find in Jesus the will to conquer, the desire to impose his will. Therefore, the truth where we can all find ourselves, no matter what our path is, is the merciful goodness of this Father of all, and our authentic search. Jesus, master of the *impossible*, teaches us to be in communion with those who seek Him and those who do not seek Him, to participate in the faith of all and also in the non-faith of those who, by temperament or formation, do not succeed in joining a faith, but who strive to continue to seek sincerely.

I got used to calling everyone by the name of Jesus, to pronounce it in Aramaic, *Je-sciu-a*, that word that evokes the sound of the wind, that resounds when you are alone and sad, when you have to look at yourself within or in a mirror. It is the only name that speaks of the goodness of the world." [Padre Luigi Verdi, in *La realtà sa di pane*, ed. Romena].

Testimonials

We consider that faith and science are two complementary instruments with diverse methods and epistemologies (theories of knowledge), for the permanent search for Truth.

In general, human beings tend to believe more easily in what they see or what science explains! However, faith calls for the acceptance of what it is not physically possible to see (John 20:29: "have you believed because you have seen me? Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have come to believe!") or which is not explainable by science (existence of God, the soul and its immortality, the incarnation and resurrection of Christ...). To believe is an act for which we ask divine help, "Lord, I believe, but increase my faith".

Science in its search for natural truths uses objective processes, the scientific method, and its discoveries are credible once accepted by the scientific community. Each scientific discovery is not a creation from nothing, but rather an advance in the understanding of the complexity, beauty and harmony of nature, discovering new truths that need to be explained.

We can see, therefore, that scientific advancement can be considered as a way of arriving at the Truth of God, while being an invaluable aid in the search for supernatural truths about faith.

[Sofia and José Carlos]

During my youth, knowing reality and understanding the laws of mathematics, physics and chemistry was something that bothered me and made me study. At the same time, I have always participated in the life of the Church, but I must admit that at that time I had not yet understood the unity of the person and it seemed to me that science and faith were two separate worlds. They were not in conflict, but they did not connect. It was only later that I began to understand that it is not only a question of being able to have faith and scientific knowledge at the same time. It is not about two worlds. Truth is one. Faith lived is always an experience that requires intelligence to be truly human; and human reason is not closed to what we can define. Reason is the human capacity to open oneself up to reality and to seek meaning of

everything. It was fundamental to understand that man is naturally capable of entering into a relationship with God and of welcoming God's Revelation. This explains why faith needs reason and reason opens itself to faith. Faith is, in fact, the knowledge of Revelation and becomes a relationship with God. It is not only a religious feeling, but also the encounter with Jesus Christ who saves us from sin and fully reveals God and his plan for humanity and, because of this, it is a light that helps reason to know the fullness of the Truth.

[Father Duarte]

Meeting 4 - Joint Responsibility for the Common Good

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Look at what is** happening in the world and **take** responsibility for the contribution that each person can give to society from their personal and family life.
- **Exercise your citizenship** as a political response and participate responsibly in the service of the common good, in sectors such as education, media, health, work and employment, promotion of life, peace, social inclusion, environment, management of global resources, etc.
- **Commit yourself with** clear actions to build the community where your family is living by taking care of the environment, of community groups and communal spaces.
- **Develop** a strong sense of responsibility in your family for your role in society, now and for future generations.

Supporting texts

The Common Good is a principle defined in the Social Doctrine of the Church as "the sum of those conditions of social life which allow social groups and their individual members relatively thorough and ready access to their own fulfilment," [GS, 26]. Today we easily understand that everything is linked and therefore access to fundamental rights such as work, health, education, and housing are part of the set of living conditions, as well as the environment as a "collective good, the patrimony of all humanity and the responsibility of everyone" [LS, 95].

From this perspective there are three points worth reflecting on: the universal destination of goods, the responsibility for the proper use of natural resources, and the responsibility for caring for the environment in which the family thrives.

From a Christian perspective, the Earth, with its resources and fruits, is an inheritance from God who created the world for the benefit and fulfilment of all. For this very reason, the Christian tradition defends the legitimate right to private property but at the same time clearly emphasises the social function of all forms of private property so that goods may serve the purpose for which God intended them. Saint John Paul II forcefully reaffirmed this as "the first principle of the whole ethical and social order" (LE, 19), stating that "God gave the earth to the whole human race for the sustenance of all its members, without excluding or favouring anyone". (CA 31) These are strong words. He noted that "a type of development which did not respect and promote human rights – personal and social, economic and political, including the rights of nations and of peoples – would not be really worthy of man". (LS, 93).

A healthy and sustainable environment as well as access to natural resources such as water and biodiversity are an integral part of the ecosystem where people live and develop. For this reason, it is expected that everyone will do their duty in a responsible and supportive manner. Their concern for the environment and the rights of future generations (e.g., moderation in the use of resources, reuse and recycling) is shown in the way they conduct their daily lives. When we talk about the environment we think about the relationship between nature and the society that inhabits it. "Recognizing the reasons why a given area is polluted requires a study of the workings of society, its economy, its behaviour patterns, and the ways it grasps reality. Given the scale of change, it is no longer possible to find a specific, discrete answer for each part of the problem. It is essential to seek comprehensive solutions which consider the interactions within natural systems themselves and with social systems. We are faced not with two separate crises, one environmental and the other social, but rather with one complex crisis which is both social and environmental. Strategies for a solution demand an integrated approach to combating poverty, restoring dignity to the excluded, and at the same time protecting nature." (LS, 139]

Humanity is by force of circumstances, waking up to this reality. The economic risk due to the loss of biodiversity has been taken into account by the World Economic Forum. Health is considered one of the fundamental human rights, and for the World Health Organisation it is not only the absence of disease, but a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. Biodiversity¹ is essential to human health, as it maintains the functioning of the ecosystems on which we depend for food and fresh water; it helps regulate climate, floods, and diseases; it produces benefits for well-being and offers aesthetic and spiritual enrichment.

The United Nations General Assembly has declared 2021 - 2030 as the "United Nations Decade for Ecosystem Restoration".² During this decade, it is hoped that the restoration of 350 million hectares of degraded ecosystems and soils will generate \$9 trillion in ecosystem services and remove between 13 and 26 giga tons of greenhouse gases. These initiatives include the³ Bonn Challenge, the 20x20 Initiative in Latin⁴ America and the African Forest Landscape Restoration Initiative AFR100⁵.

In this effort, "Every creature has a function, none is superfluous. The whole universe is a language of God's love, of his boundless affection for us: earth, water, mountains, everything is God's caress." [Pope Francis, 22/5/2019, International Day for Biological Diversity]. The environment is also our home, our place of work, our neighbourhood, anywhere we live, where we learn to understand ourselves, where we express our identity. Thus, caring for the environment in a responsible and supportive manner also includes helping to ensure that, even with limitations, common spaces and Christian homes are welcoming, dignified, and inclusive. It is only through human relationships with neighbours that it is possible for each person to feel "held within a network of solidarity and belonging" (LS, 148), within the framework of a dignified life.

It is not only governments and large institutions that have the responsibility to change this path of progress. "...It is the Church's task to show the true face of God in our age. But, in a certain sense, this is very especially the task of couples. I can guess your reaction: 'The mission is great, very great; we have neither time nor competence'. But I say to you: you are particularly suited to carry out this mission precisely because you are couples. You have a special charism. Moreover, to be the witnesses that the world is waiting for, you do not need to abandon your family and professional duties; you do not need to go on a distant crusade. Let me explain: the atheist world, without knowing it, awaits the essential witness of your conjugal love, of your home." [Fr. Caffarel, May 1970].

Finally, it is worth considering the contribution to the common good due to different social institutions. The encyclical *Laudato Si* states that "social ecology is necessarily institutional and gradually extends to the whole of society, from the primary social group, the family, to the wider local, national and international communities. Within each social stratum, and between them, institutions develop to regulate human relationships. Anything which weakens those institutions has negative consequences, such as, injustice and violence and the loss of freedom." [LS, 142]. The integrity of the institutions, as well as the political role that corresponds to each one, are fundamental requirements. Conditions and processes must be created so that institutions, beginning with the Family, can contribute to the common good without replacing or cancelling each other out. "However, it should be added, though, that even the best mechanisms can break down when there are no worthy goals and values, or a genuine and profound humanism to serve as the basis of a noble and generous society." [LS, 181].

Letter from the Portuguese Bishops

¹ <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>

² <https://www.decadeonrestoration.org/get-involved/strategy>

³ <http://www.bonnchallenge.org/content/challenge>

⁴ <https://initiative20x20.org/>

⁵ <https://afr100.org/>

We ask all citizens, Catholics and those who share the ethical principles of the Church's social teaching that we have just outlined, to encourage public life and the common good of the community with responsible solidarity, by renewing the following energies:

that of hope against pessimism,

that of trust against defeatism,

that of participation against passivity,

that of responsible commitment for the common good against seeking refuge in individualism,

that of dialogue in the search for solutions to the problems of our society against fruitless confrontations with no future perspective,

that of justice and the option for the poor against inequality,

that of welcoming foreigners and immigrants against exclusion,

that of promoting human rights against attacks on human dignity,

that of peace against terrorism, conflicts and wars,

that of participatory democracy against dictatorships,

that of reform of laws and public institutions against stagnation,

that of safeguarding the environment against ecological disasters and irresponsible attitudes,

that of the culture of life against cultures of death,

that of the dignity of life against diseases and the destruction of the human being,

that of social peace against environments in crisis,

that of solidarity and subsidiarity against selfishness and injustice.

We invoke the Mother of God to give us all more trust, hope and generosity. United with the Pope's intentions, we pray for peace, for families, and for a fraternal society. It is everyone's duty to build a more just and supportive society.

[Letter from the Portuguese Bishops, Lisbon, September 15, 2003].

Text by Benedictine Theologian, Joan Chittister

"Never endure what is not in itself essentially good, or designed to make everybody's world a better place, or, in the end, really good for your own development. To violate any of those things is to violate the will of God for creation." [Joan Chittister in "It's New" - Pastoral culture, 7/3/2020].

Testimonials

Politics, "the science or art of governing the common good," must be part of Christian action and participation, for if it is guided by values, social benefit will be better guaranteed.

On being invited to take on a political role, I hesitated to accept and as a couple we prayed for help with making our decision.

Rereading the Catechism of the Catholic Church, 1906, "*the common good concerns the life of all. It calls for prudence on the part of each one ...*" we felt the strength to accept the challenge. The motto - "*Cowards never start; the weak never finish and the winner never quits*" - made me move forward without hesitation.

The fulfillment of my duty was based on the courage to never give up in the face of obstacles, to make decisions in accordance with the road map for the common good even if sometimes there was emotional pain.

I have never used words like refuge because I believe that the country needs pragmatic and active people. It is fundamental to act in order to achieve the supreme goal - the common good, being indifferent to slander, ingratitude, etc.

We have kept the promise to work for the common good day after day.

[Isabel and Joaquim]

In February 2008, we were called to become Responsible Couple for Teams for the Region of Mozambique. By accepting this responsibility together, we have been called not by our merits but by the

gaze that the divine Saviour has placed upon us. Our yes, "Here we are, Lord," has become our joint commission. (Lk. 9:1-6).

We began our journey with enormous challenges facing the Movement and society.

We accepted our departure towards the vast Mozambican territory carrying the cross of Christ in the mission of evangelising (going out to radiate), in the mission of piloting and formation of team couples.

We quickly understood that the success of our mission of joint responsibility would teach us to participate in the building of a humanised and fraternal society in the search for the common good.

We encouraged the spirit of helping each other within the movement, of promoting peace, harmony and social inclusion. We participated in activities of solidarity with families in need, affected by hurricanes and terrorism in Cabo Delgado, through the gathering and distribution of supplies and goods. We urged the team members to make known the positions of the Government and the Church in the prevention of Covid19.

Families have grown in their role as domestic church, through the practice of the Endeavours as a team. We recognise in this journey, especially during this period of Covid19 worldwide, that in our country in particular, there has been not only an economic crisis but also a spiritual crisis. Through our joint responsibility, it is up to us to commit ourselves to creating the conditions for fraternal dialogue with the couples who are living this spiritual crisis.

In short, our responsibility of solidarity for the common good that we have lived in our journey as a Regional Responsible couple is a true school of learning in how to defend the fundamental rights of the human person.

[Olinda and Ernesto]

Meeting 5 - Technology: Creativity and Power

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **See** how technology contributes to the well-being of people in areas such as health, education, and communications.
- **Consider** and critically **reflect on the** objectives, context, consequences, and ethical limits of technology.
- **Transform** communication possibilities into opportunities for encounters and solidarity among all, thus contributing to a culture that celebrates "living together" on the planet.

Supporting texts

"Humanity has entered a new era in which our technical prowess has brought us to a crossroads. We are the beneficiaries of two centuries of enormous waves of change: steam engines, railways, the telegraph, electricity, automobiles, aeroplanes, chemical industries, modern medicine, information technology and, more recently, the digital revolution, robotics, biotechnologies and nanotechnologies. It is right to rejoice in these advances and to be excited by the immense possibilities which they continue to open up before us, for "science and technology are wonderful products of a God-given human creativity" (LS, 102).

In fact, the progress made in the fields of medicine, engineering and communications, among others has helped us to overcome many situations of illness, exclusion, loneliness, sacrifice and pain. In addition, they have led to the emergence of alternatives in the use of natural resources for a more sustainable development.

However, with the advancement of technology there are two challenges for humanity. Firstly, "it must also be recognized that nuclear energy, biotechnology, information technology, knowledge of our DNA, and many other abilities which we have acquired, have given us tremendous power." [LS, 104]. Never has humanity had so much power over itself, but there is no guarantee that it will use it skilfully - let us look, for example, at the atomic bomb, the manipulation of embryos, discrimination and violation of privacy, organ trafficking. Even some environmental movements that "defend the integrity of the environment, rightly demanding that certain limits be imposed on scientific research, sometimes fail to apply those same principles to human life. There is a tendency to justify transgressing all boundaries when experimentation is carried out on living human embryos. We forget that the inalienable worth of a human being transcends his or her degree of development. In the same way, when technology disregards the great ethical principles, it ends up considering any practice whatsoever as licit. (.....), a technology severed from ethics will not easily be able to limit its own power." [LS, 136].

On the other hand, the easy access to technology and its globalisation, which are in themselves good realities, ultimately influencing people's lifestyles and social lives. Can we manage to live without our mobile phones? Without being permanently connected? What do we express in social networks? These behaviours that are popular (we all have to look happy), addictive (we can't live without them) and compulsive (we interact all the time) are proof that "Our capacity for making decisions, a more genuine freedom and the space for each one's alternative creativity are diminished." [LS, 108]. Little by little, we cease to command our destiny, to have our own identity that expresses the diversity of human life, and interpersonal relationships are mediated by screens and systems that we can switch on or off at will. The Christian ideal, on the contrary, will always invite "to overcome suspicion, habitual mistrust, fear of losing our privacy, all the defensive attitudes which today's world imposes on us. Many try to escape from others and take refuge in the comfort of their privacy or in a small circle of close friends, renouncing the realism of the social aspect of the Gospel. For just as some people want a purely spiritual Christ, without flesh and without the cross, they also want their interpersonal relationships provided by sophisticated equipment, by screens and systems which can be turned on and off on command. Meanwhile, the Gospel

tells us constantly to run the risk of a face-to-face encounter with others, with their physical presence which challenges us, with their pain and their pleas, with their joy which infects us in our close and continuous interaction." [EG, 88].

Because of all this, it is important to think critically about the ethical limits of the development and application of technology. Basically, to frame technology as a means at our disposal to better carry out our vocation, especially in our relationship with God, with others and with the world. Above all, to reflect as a couple, to think as a couple, creating the foundations of a truly human family culture.

To think in pairs is to be open to God invading the common space of thought, of our conjugal prayer, and of enlightening it. "...It would be more accurate to say that the thoughts came neither from her nor from me - they came from the union, the marriage of our intelligences or rather the marriage of an intelligence with a soul. There is an intellectual fruitfulness which is the fruit of love. This kind of dialogue requires a certain state of grace... Only an effort of humility and love will allow us to find it... Above all, it made me understand that it is not the thoughts of humanity that are important, but the fact that they are imbued with the thought of God." (Fr. Caffarel in *Aux carrefours de l'Amour*, page 20/21).

New forms of organisation of work and society such as the possibility of working at home, allowing for fewer daily commutes, better accompaniment of the family, and the development of models of close community proximity - but also time for face-to-face meetings with friends, for family meals without a mobile phone, for silent prayer, and for other habits of common social life, these are examples of good places to start.

In conclusion, science and technology are not neutral. And what is happening puts before us the responsibility of being, as a family, the protagonists of a cultural revolution that affirms that "we can once more broaden our vision. We have the freedom needed to limit and direct technology; we can put it at the service of another type of progress, one which is healthier, more human, more social, more integral." [LS, 112].

Text by Cardinal D. Vincenzo Paglia ⁶

"The real risk of technologizing the human and not humanising the technical already exists. Skills that are necessarily human are quickly attributed to so-called "intelligent machines". It is necessary to better understand what intelligence, conscience, emotion, affective intentionality, and autonomy of moral action mean in this context. Artificial devices that simulate human actions do not actually have human qualities. This must be taken into consideration in order to regulate either their use or the research itself, for a constructive and fair interaction between the human and the most recent machines.

It is necessary to identify a model of interdisciplinary support for shared research on ethics throughout the process where different skills are involved in the development of technological devices (research, design, production, distribution, individual and collective use). It is an indispensable mediation, given the capacity of the instrumentation of Artificial Intelligence to determine real forms of control and orientation of mental and relational habits, and not only to enhance cognitive and operational functions. It is a matter of developing a shared model that makes it possible to examine, from different points of view, the foreseeable repercussions of each stage of the process. (...) Making ethical choices today means trying to transform progress into development. It means orienting technology towards a humanism that is always

⁶<https://romecall.org/2020/04/14/the-principles-of-a-new-ethic-for-todays-technology-and-for-artificial-intelligence/>
<https://romecall.org/2020/03/02/rome-call-for-ai-ethics/>

centred in the dignity of the person and of the entire human family.” [Cardinal Vincenzo Paglia, interview with Rossella Avella, April 14, 2020]

Testimonials

With the arrival of the Covid 19 pandemic, the world, and particularly our family, has experienced one of the most recent shocks in history. One of our family members was hospitalised in critical care for seventeen days... days of anguish and total surrender to God's will. Without technology we would not have been able to maintain contact in a situation of total isolation; yet we managed to have our family and friends united with us in a chain of prayer that made all the difference in the outcome of this situation. This is the most recent event that has forced us to rethink, as a family, the meaning of life, and to re-evaluate how science and technology support us and allow us to develop our creativity, to go to meet the One who loves us and welcomes us with His infinite love, the Lord. During our time in hospital, in total confinement, we made our days a continuous prayer. We had the opportunity to pray with friends from all over the world, to attend Mass and to experience moments of very intense prayer, in places belonging to our family history... and we were never alone. Because of this family event, several prayer groups were formed which, six months later, continue to pray together a few days a week. We were able to bring together the extended family, some of whom now pray with us. This "common home" of ours reminds us how important it is to take care, to watch and to be attentive to the signs of God who shakes us, uses our fragility, but also our mobile phone or the media, to teach us to see the planet as a space for sanctification.

[Isabel and Paulo]

We live in a time of great challenge as families, when we say that everything is just a click away. For our children, four boys, temptations and "nonsense" are therefore very accessible and their exposure on social networks diminishes the capacity for dialogue. The "competition" with books is brutal.

With working from home, "telework", enabled by technology, we are also living in a time of change with regard to the organisation of daily family life.

We cannot change these realities. However, we can take advantage of them to reinforce our goal of putting God at the centre. Our 19-year-old son, for example, listens daily to the "10 Minutes with Jesus" on WhatsApp, and we often use this time to talk about the theme of the day.

The laity and the Church must take advantage of technology for a better relationship with prayer and with God. There is an urgent need to offer ethical and moral formation, taking advantage of the benefits of technology so that it may be at the service of Truth and Justice.

At a professional level, technology can offer a greater balance between work and family. In particular, we are able to be more present and accompany our children more; and we have, in our work, the possibility of freeing ourselves from tasks with no added value and of being able to focus on our *raison d'être*, linked to our personal purpose and that of our work. The humanisation of functions and the good use of talents will happen through this good adaptation of technology.

[Joana and José Luís]

Meeting 6 - An Economy with a Soul

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Consume** responsibly, recognising that we are protagonists of an economy which is attentive to both its people and to the environment in which we live.
- **Contribute, in a** positive way, with intelligence, creativity and generosity, to create a society where both goods and people are valued and social justice reigns in institutions and in the workplace.
- **Optimise** the use of natural resources (water, energy, ...) and adopt a culture where nothing is wasted.
- **Share** our wealth and possessions with those in need.

Supporting texts

"Some circles maintain that current economics and technology will solve all environmental problems, and argue, in popular and non-technical terms, that the problems of global hunger and poverty will be resolved simply by market growth. They are less concerned with certain economic theories which today scarcely anybody dares defend, than with their actual operation in the functioning of the economy. They may not affirm such theories with words, but nonetheless support them with their deeds by showing no interest in more balanced levels of production, a better distribution of wealth, concern for the environment and the rights of future generations. Their behaviour shows that for them maximizing profits is enough. Yet by itself the market cannot guarantee integral human development and social inclusion." [LS, 109].

With honesty it is up to us to "question certain models of development, production and consumption" [LS, 138]. The world and what exists in it is a gift that we have been given and that we will pass on to future generations. We do need to consider the criteria for efficiency and productivity as they are important but mitigating the effects of current social and environmental imbalances depends on what we do now, especially if we consider our common responsibility towards present and future generations.

On September 23, 1976, at the Basilica of Our Lady of the Angels, Father Caffarel spoke about St. Francis of Assisi to thousands of couples from thirty countries. He told them: "*Francis, who are you? What do you have to tell us? (...)* Francis' message for Christian couples is that of the evangelical radicalism of total love, the same as the crucified Christ, of whom the stigmatised Francis becomes the icon: the Christian must be another Christ: if he is not, he will be nothing... But watch out! You will be subtly tempted, deep down in your heart you will think that Francis is more to be admired than imitated, that his ideal and the imitation of his life are unattainable... Do not give into this temptation, I beg of you. It would be no more honest to accept then abandon the message of the stigmatised Francis than it would be to abandon the message of the Crucified Christ. It is precisely what is not possible - living in shacks, giving up studying - that gives us a lesson that we cannot question. Material riches, the respect of others, the desire for glory and power, and our lack of faith are all insurmountable obstacles to our union with Christ, if we give in, even just a little, to the temptation of complacency and to an attachment to these things: *Your heart will always be where your treasure is*. For the disciple of Christ - whether in a religious order or married - it is essential to be detached from material possessions. Love is uncompromising: no one can serve two masters, no one can love two people. But he who is united to the one Master, in His Name, can and must serve and love all beings. "

[Father Henri Caffarel in *Les Equipes de Notre-Dame à Rome et à Assise* 1976, page 67].

Although the topic of the economy is vast, we suggest you reflect on three areas: consumption and production within the framework of an integrated ecology; work, employment, and the promotion of human dignity; and, finally, the distribution of wealth being conscious of social justice.

In relation to the first point, it will be good to consider that it can be beneficial to reduce the frantic pace of consumption and production that governs the market for which we are all responsible. We do not want to hinder progress and human development, but to reflect on the value created (and destroyed) by each economic activity not only in the light of financial criteria, but also in the light of social, environmental and sustainability criteria. The truth is that "technological and economic development which does not leave in its wake a better world and an integrally higher quality of life cannot be considered progress." [LS 194]. It is a question of opening the way to different opportunities, not stopping creativity and its dream of progress, but redirecting it towards intelligent and profitable ways of reusing, recovering and recycling, improving energy efficiency and rationalizing the use of natural resources and raw materials. "Efforts for sustainable use of natural resources are not an unnecessary expense, but an investment that can generate other economic benefits in the medium term." [LS, 191].

Therefore, a different model of integral development must also have as its goal access for all to a dignified life through work. Work is a need and a right, it is part of our human vocation, the reason for life on earth, it is a path to achievement, human development, and personal fulfilment. Consequently, helping someone with money should only be a temporary response to emergencies because living on state benefit without being able to find work takes away the dignity of the person receiving it. The challenges are varied, particularly when technological progress has as its goal the reduction of production costs by replacing the workforce with machines. An alternative for generating employment is the promotion of an economy that fosters productive diversification, entrepreneurial spirit and entrepreneurial creativity. "Business is a noble vocation, directed to producing wealth and improving our world. It can be a fruitful source of prosperity for the areas in which it operates, especially if it sees the creation of jobs as an essential part of its service to the common good." [LS, 129].

Moreover, it is not enough to just create work, it is important to promote humane conditions so that work can be carried out in a dignified manner; internships and adequate training should be provided, workers should be made aware of what they contribute to the mission of the institution, a framework should be drawn up for the different job descriptions, regulations should be in place for health and safety standards, job security, sickness benefits and retirement pensions, work schedules should allow for a good work-life balance allowing for time with family, leisure and religious commitments and so on.

Finally, the debate on the distribution of wealth created by economic activities leads us once again to realise that everything is interrelated. Indeed, there are plenty of resources and money in the world, but what we need to examine is how everyone can have equal access to opportunities, and wealth can be shared out in a fair and just way, as wages, incomes, benefits, or any other possible ways. Alternatives and solutions will only emerge from a dialogue between politics and the economy which will address inequality, poverty, and environmental degradation, either on a global, national, or local level. Let us hope that in this debate we might find ways to collaborate for the common good. It will be up to each person to contribute to this debate, in a positive way, intelligently, creatively, and generously.

In conclusion, current economic models have contributed to the increase in social inequality and environmental degradation. Hence the need for a different form of understanding of the economy, so that so-called economic interests do not override the common good and so that harmony in the ecosystem in which we live is preserved. We need a new economy that is commensurate with humanity, an economy which is socially just, economically viable, environmentally sustainable, and ethically responsible. But, beyond the theories and debates, it is useful for every person, every family to think and commit themselves to real tasks: how can we optimise the use of resources, how can we reduce consumption, how can we avoid waste, what can we reuse, what can we share with others in need?

Text by Pope Francis

"The economy is a vital element of any society, it largely determines its quality of life, even of death, it contributes to making human existence worthy or unworthy. Therefore, it occupies an important place in

the Church's thinking; men and women are called to cooperate with God's plan through their work in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services....

Our world is capable of the best and the worst. It has always been like this, but today technical and financial resources augment the possibilities for good and evil. The Church whilst spreading the Gospel message of charity and justice, cannot remain silent in the face of injustice and suffering. She can and she wants to join the millions of men and women who say no to injustice and suffering in a peaceful way, committing themselves to greater fairness. Everywhere I see people who are law abiding, saying yes to life, justice, and solidarity. I have so many meetings that confirm to me that the Gospel is not a utopia, but a true hope, even for the economy: God does not abandon his creatures to the mercy of evil. On the contrary, He invites us to never lose courage and to all cooperate for the common good.

There are a few "no's" that must be said to the mentality of waste: we must avoid acting individually, thinking and acting courageously against the common trend. According to the teaching of Scriptures, everyone can repent, be converted, become a witness and prophet of a more just and united world. (...)

It is impossible not to believe that, with God's help and together - I repeat, together - it is possible to improve our world and to revive hope, which is perhaps the most precious virtue of the present day. If we are together, united in His name, the Lord is among us as He promised (cf. Mt 18:20); then He is also with us in the world, in factories, in businesses, and in banks as well as in homes, slums, and refugee camps. Can we, should we, have hope? (Pope Francis, Preface to the book *Potere e Denaro, La giustizia sociale secondo Bergoglio* by **Michele Zanzucchi** (*Power and money, Social Justice according to Bergoglio*)).

Testimonials

We live in a time when the "me" and the "now" is the only direction we are urged to go. What we want and when we want it, without asking why, what, and with what purpose. We try not to be drawn in by this throwaway economy of unbridled consumption where money buys everything, because we know that at this rate it will be impossible for us to give our children the future that we have dreamed of for them. We see their options constantly thwarted by the lack of respect for our planet and for community life as we would like it to be.

Consequently, we are trying, either on a professional or a personal level, to counteract this trend through a variety of actions, such as reducing, reusing, and recycling, using renewable energies, using efficient electrical appliances, and finding ways to reduce water and energy consumption, stimulating the sharing of goods with those who need them, and putting our talents to work for the greater good.

[Fabíola and Nuno]

We are both 41 years old, we have been married for 14 years and we have three children of 8, 6 and 1 and a half.

As professionals – an architect and an entrepreneur in the wine sector - we are both interested in local culture and respect for nature.

-Joana: through architecture I seek to reinterpret local and indigenous cultures according to contemporary logistics. Using natural materials and traditional crafts, I believe in improving the economic, social, and aesthetic daily lives of those involved in the creative and construction processes and the daily lives of those who will enjoy these spaces.

-Diogo: in the world of wine, I encourage a close relationship between the consumer, the people, and the region, thus optimising our economy and the culture of Portuguese wine in the world. I put a lot of effort into boosting the local economy by making people realise its value, and by highlighting environmental concern in the production and marketing of wine.

As a growing family we seek to improve our emotional and social framework as a foundation for our common growth. The sense of equality begins, at home, in our relationships. We work on the recognition of what God gives us and, during the time of prayer and sharing as a family, we give thanks for all that we

receive every day. We instil in our children the duty to care for others and for what we receive, extending the family circle to friends and community. To do this, we encourage each other to carefully look out for others, at family gatherings and meetings with friends. As parents, during the first years of our children's lives, we are gradually teaching them about the world and its different cultures, explaining to them that we all have the mission and the responsibility to *leave the world a little better than we found it*. Through the stories, travels and experiences of grandparents, aunts, uncles, and friends we teach them about adventures experienced in situations different from ours.

We try to teach them that the greatest challenge is to discover one's vocation, to discover how to be happy and to make others happy. The awareness of living in a world that belongs to all and exists for all makes us more attentive and active in our social and environmental responsibility.

[Joana and Diogo]

Meeting 7 A Society Based on Love

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Overcome** indifference and **be sensitive** to the problems of the world and society.
- **Take care** of those excluded from society, **accompanying** and **helping them integrate** into society.
- **Dare to go out and** meet those in material or spiritual need and **be for them an instrument of the Mercy** of Christ and of the Church.
- **Welcome, Care for** and **Accompany** couples and families, especially those who are going through difficult times or in situations of greater need.

Supporting Texts

A society founded on love implies going to the very depths of our own self and of our own existence. It reminds us that we were created in the heart of God and therefore "each one of us is the result of a thought of God. Each of us is willed, each of us is necessary."⁷ Three fundamental ideas emerge from this reflection. The first is that we all have our origin in God's Love and for this reason the dignity of every human person is infinite. The second idea is that each one of us is the result of a unique creative act of God which makes us unique in the universe, each one with different talents but all of us necessary. The third idea is that having been created out of love our fundamental vocation is to reflect God's Love in our relationships and in our life in general.

Rooted in love this common origin requires an attitude of attentive openness to others, to the world and to God. It is contrary to any selfish ideal which is centred and closed in on itself, to the exclusion of others. Generally speaking, we find in today's society many individualistic lifestyles characterised by a globalisation of indifference to the world and to others. "Almost without being aware of it, we end up being incapable of feeling compassion at the outcry of the poor, weeping for other people's pain, and feeling a need to help them, as though all this were someone else's responsibility and not our own. The culture of prosperity deadens us." [EG, 54].

Let us think, for example of the social phenomenon of people who are excluded and marginalised, of those without work, without prospects and without a future, which is an unprecedented global reality. "Those who are excluded are not 'exploited', but waste, 'leftovers'." [EG, 53]. This inequality, which makes the world balance unsustainable, is not new. St. John Paul II previously stated that "if we look at the regions of our planet, we immediately see that humanity has disappointed God's expectations." [LS, 61].

A renewed society based on love implies a personal change of heart which is able to overcome indifference, neglect and, so often, inconsistency between what one says and how one actually lives. It is an integral internal conversion created by an ecological conversion which leads us to live our vocation as guardians of God's work, and of a social conversion which leads to the development of a sensitivity and a truly human solidarity with others who are our neighbours.

This path of caring love is made up of very simple daily gestures, which sow peace and friendship and break the logic of violence, exploitation and selfishness. It can be simply persevering in personal prayer, performing real acts of fraternal charity, being close to those in need or simply not missing the opportunity for a kind word or a smile.

⁷ Pope Emeritus Benedict XVI; Homily, St. Peter's Square, April 24, 2005

It also presupposes a change of heart in the community towards the development of a true culture of care for others. It makes sense to think of policies that promote family life, community and other levels of organisation of society, which are more oriented towards a true social ecology. "This conversion calls for a number of attitudes which together foster a spirit of generous care, full of tenderness. First, it entails gratitude and gratuitousness, a recognition that the world is God's loving gift, and that we are called quietly to imitate his generosity in self-sacrifice and good works: "Do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing... and your Father who sees in secret will reward you" (Mt 6:3-4). It also entails a loving awareness that we are not disconnected from the rest of creatures, but joined in a splendid universal communion. As believers, we do not look at the world from without but from within, conscious of the bonds with which the Father has linked us to all beings." [LS, 220].

In this context, it is worth recalling that because we are all unique this means that society is plural in itself and that this diversity must be understood as a great richness. Whether it is in terms of race, age, gender, religion, academic background, cultural origin, aptitudes or any other factor reflecting diversity, this brings into society vision, skills, structures of priorities, beliefs and even ways of communicating which are very varied among themselves. A new society is a society better prepared to deal with new contexts and challenges that call for innovative solutions, different from the usual ones. What is at stake is social inclusion, that is, the concrete experience of a unity that respects and safeguards differences. That is why it is necessary to ensure that people, and communities in general, are able to access essentials, such as education, decent work, health care, etc., and thus achieve the minimum level of stability to make integral human development possible.

Religions themselves have been identified as the source and cause of misunderstandings and wars. Yet, "at times fundamentalist violence is unleashed in some groups, of whatever religion, by the rashness of their leaders. Yet, the commandment of peace is inscribed in the depths of the religious traditions that we represent... As religious leaders, we are called to be true 'people of dialogue', to cooperate in building peace not as intermediaries but as authentic mediators... Each one of us is called to be a peacemaker, by uniting and not dividing, by extinguishing hatred and not holding on to it, by opening paths of dialogue and not by putting up barriers". [FT, 283, 2020].

Teams Couples are also called to commit themselves creatively to the renewal of society, being especially suited to welcoming, forming and accompanying couples and families, especially in times of greatest need: from courtship to commitment; the first years of life as a couple; stages of crisis and difficulties; moments of pain and of suffering; complex situations caused by breakdown, abandonment, failed marriages, broken families.

Pope Francis said to the Teams of Our Lady in 2015, "... a happy and balanced family, inhabited by the presence of God, speaks in and of itself of God's love for all men. I also invite you to commit yourselves, if possible, in an ever more concrete way and with ever renewed creativity, ... to continue to be close to wounded families, who are so numerous today, due to unemployment, poverty, health problems, mourning, worry over a child, the imbalance caused by an estrangement or absence, a climate of violence. We must have the courage to come into contact with these families, in a discreet but generous way, materially, humanly or spiritually, in those circumstances where they are most vulnerable." [Pope Francis' letter to Teams of Our Lady, 2015].

Father Caffarel also encouraged couples to be bold in their readiness to serve. He said: "True children of God not only respond to the call when they hear it, but also, inspired by a love impatient to serve, live in an attitude of readiness - not to be confused with a taste for grand gestures nor with restlessness and instability... *O that today you would listen to his voice! Do not harden your hearts, [Ps 95:7-8; Heb 3:7].* Avoid the ruses of the spirit and of the heart. Be true children of God, doing him the honour of believing that he does not ask unreasonable things. Always be ready to let yourselves be called on and to proceed,

without exercising rights, without putting off and without delay. Blessed are those whom the divine calls, throughout their earthly journey, and are found ready to answer". [Fr Henri Caffarel in *Aux carrefours de l'amour*, pp. 115 and 118].

Text of Pope Francis

"None of us can live without love. And a bad form of slavery to which we can all fall victim is that of thinking that love must be earned. Perhaps a good part of contemporary man's anguish comes from this: believing that, if we are not strong, attractive, and beautiful, no one will take care of us. Many people nowadays seek visibility only to fill an interior void, as though we were always in need of approval. However, can you imagine a world in which everyone is looking for ways to attract the attention of others, and in which no one is instead willing to *freely give love to another person*? Imagine a world like this: a world without freely given love! It appears to be a human world but in reality, it is hellish....and what can make us feel *happy* if not the experience of giving and receiving love? The life of human beings is an exchange of *glances*: someone who, by looking at us, steals a first *smile*. Thus, we who smile freely at those who are locked up in sadness, open a way out for them: an exchange of glances, looking people in the eye will open the doors of hearts.

The *first step* that God takes towards us is that of a love that anticipates and is unconditional. God is the first to love. God does not love because there is something in us that engenders love. God loves us because he himself *is love*, and, by its very nature, love tends to spread and give itself. God does not even condition his benevolence on our conversion. If anything, this is a consequence of God's love....

What medicine is needed in order to change the heart of an unhappy person? What medicine can change the heart of a person who is not happy? [they reply: "love!"] Louder! [they shout: "love!"] Good! Very good, well done everyone! And how do we make the person feel that we love them? We must first embrace them. Make them feel wanted, which is important, and they will stop being sad. *Love calls for love* in a stronger way than hatred calls for death. Jesus did not die and rise for himself, but for us, so that our sins might be forgiven. It is therefore the time of resurrection of all: time to raise the poor once again from their discouragement, in particular those who have been lying in the sepulchre for much longer than three days. A wind of liberation blows here on our faces. Here, the gift of hope is sprouting up. And the hope is that of God the Father who loves us as we are: he loves us all and always."

[Pope Francis, General Audience, 14.06.2017]

Testimonials

We are a family of 7. Our 5 children (3 girls and 2 boys) are between 19 and 12 years old. Our youngest son was adopted 9 years ago and is profoundly disabled. With a 99.5% disability, he cannot see, can't talk and can't walk alone.

The decision to adopt was based on our desire to have more children and the medical recommendation not to have more biological children. During the process we understood that we could welcome a child with health difficulties, but in view of the situation we had to think about it for quite a long time - to adopt a 3-year-old child with a disability is to assume that when we reach the age of 80, we will have a 40-year-old handicapped child in our care. After a long process and many doubts, we heard a phrase that made our decision: Do not underestimate the power of love!

And during these last 9 years we have experienced this saying very clearly and in many ways.

From the very start we accepted his difference in the intensity of the experience that Bernardo has generated not only in our nuclear family, but also in our extended family, in our friends; then in the love that Bernardo awakens in everyone he meets - it is astounding to see what his fragility provokes, the love he generates, ... It awakens the best in each person. Finally in all the energy that he stimulates with so many initiatives that have emerged from this experience of ours - in school, in church, in the community. And that is how the ICF (Inclusive Community Forum in the Nova School of Business and Economics in Portugal) was born. The work has been developed in the Patriarchate of Lisbon and with close collaboration with the school where Bernardo studies.

Bernardo has added so much value where he has been - despite his 99.5% disability. Or maybe because of his 99.5%. It is really amazing to witness Bernardo's added value. Or rather, the added value of love.

[Carmo and Rui]

The family is a community of life and love. It is the main cell of a society founded on love. We have a vocation of marriage as we have been married twice. We were both widowed and we think that our meeting was God-led. We keep the memory of our first spouses in our hearts. We have each felt close to them and shared some years of our lives.

We have created our own story, a love where we have already shared 35 years, along with the three children from our previous marriages. With much love, we have taught them and have brought them together. This has been a difficult journey where we have had to make compromises. We shared everything and selfishness was often overcome. Among the five of us there has been understanding, trust and respect and above all much love.

God is our friend and has given us the gift of faith. The Beatitudes are our motto of life. Pope Francis invites us to live as a family, to bear witness to the life of a Christian couple with faith. Our children have already married, have formed their own families, but we remain ready and willing to help (with grandchildren), respecting each other.

"God, thinking of all, chooses some." (Lk 6:2). We cannot remain in a closed Christianity, we must be open to the needs of others, to the Parish Community, following the example of Christ, and with the help of the Holy Spirit.

In the parish, Cecilia has been a catechist for 40 years, leading catechists to meet Christ, respecting their identity and freedom, and listening to them attentively. For 16 years she has been a volunteer at the Parish Centre, both as a member of the leadership team and as a Prayer leader with the faithful. She is part of the Liturgy team and is a reader. José has been secretary of the Parish Finance Council and has been a Eucharistic minister and reader for several years.

Indeed "when the heart is truly open to a universal communion, nothing and no one is excluded from this fraternity" (LS. 92). We were aware of welcoming, forming and accompanying couples who were preparing for marriage. For some years, we have been part of the Catholic Parish Ministry Team, where our witness as a Christian couple has been shared, with much joy and tenderness.

We thank God and the Church for caring for our vocation and especially for the Teams of Our Lady.

[Cecilia and Jose]

Meeting 8 Education for a New Lifestyle

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Live** as a family with joy and sobriety and **act** responsibly towards the environment.
- **Contribute with** real acts of kindness and service to a happy family life
- **Pray** as a family, recognising the presence of God, the Father and Creator of life, and **participate** in Sunday Mass and the life of the Church, developing over time and within the community our relationship with God.
- **Educate for** a new attitude and a new way of living in our "Common Home."

Supporting Texts

Many people, especially young people, have developed a new ecological sensitivity and a critical, creative and generous spirit to act. However, many of them have grown up in a context of high consumption and well-being that makes it difficult to acquire new habits. And yet there are others, who have not grown up in these conditions, and value them as the measure of success in life. For all these reasons, we are faced with an educational challenge. *"As never before in history, common destiny beckons us to seek a new beginning (...). Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life."* (Earth Charter, The Hague, 29 June 2000) [LS, 207].

A good start would be to believe that *"we are always capable of going out of ourselves towards the other.* Unless we do this, other creatures will not be recognized for their true worth; we are unconcerned about caring for things for the sake of others; we fail to set limits on ourselves in order to avoid the suffering of others or the deterioration of our surroundings. Disinterested concern for others, and the rejection of every form of self-centeredness and self-absorption, are essential if we truly wish to care for our brothers and sisters and for the natural environment. These attitudes also attune us to the moral imperative of assessing the impact of our every action and personal decision on the world around us." [LS, 208] And in going out of ourselves, we quickly realise that we all need everyone else, and God needs every one of us.

The question arises: So, what methods should be adopted to achieve an efficient ecological pedagogy? Let us look at Father Caffarel's answer: "Consider divine pedagogy. He who all beings need and who does not need any of them, wanted to need human beings, because He loves them. God needs human beings. He knows us. He knows very well that his needing us is the great means to enable us to give the best of ourselves, to lead us to the highest summits. He wanted to need a mother and see how this vocation raised Mary to the summit of holiness. He wanted to need the apostles and see to what perfection the mission entrusted to Paul raised his human and spiritual personality! The great perfection of love lies in knowing how to need Him to whom we give everything." [Henri Caffarel, *Aux Carrefours de l'Amour*, p. 83]. "God is treating you as children; for what child is there whom a parent does not discipline?" (Heb 12:7) "As a parent disciplines a child, so the Lord your God disciplines you." (Deut. 8:5). This educational process must begin with a dialogue with God, and in interior prayer. Once this interior door has been opened, Christians must go out of themselves and assume the mission which the Father entrusts to them. To this end, in the same way that Jesus did, we are invited to "use all the resources of interpersonal communication, such as word, silence, metaphor, image, example, and many diverse signs, as was the case with the biblical prophets. Inviting his disciples to follow him unreservedly and without regret, Christ passed on to them his pedagogy of faith as a full sharing in his actions and in his destiny."⁸

⁸ Congregation for the Clergy, *General Directory for Catechesis*, 140.

Ecological education can take place in a variety of settings, but “the great importance of the family must be emphasised, because it is the place in which life — the gift of God — can be properly welcomed and protected against the many attacks to which it is exposed and can develop in accordance with what constitutes authentic human growth. In the face of the so-called culture of death, the family is the heart of the culture of life.” [CA, 39]. “In the family we first learn how to show love and respect for life; we are taught the proper use of things, order and cleanliness, respect for the local ecosystem and care for all creatures. In the family we receive an integral education, which enables us to grow harmoniously in personal maturity. In the family we learn to ask without demanding, to say “thank you” as an expression of genuine gratitude for what we have been given, to control our aggressivity and greed, and to ask forgiveness when we have caused harm. These simple gestures of heartfelt courtesy help to create a culture of shared life and respect for our surroundings.” [LS, 213]

“Christian spirituality proposes an alternative understanding of the quality of life, and encourages a prophetic and contemplative lifestyle, one capable of deep enjoyment free of the obsession with consumption. ... It is the conviction that “less is more”. A constant flood of new consumer goods can baffle the heart and prevent us from cherishing each thing and each moment... Christian spirituality proposes a growth marked by moderation and the capacity to be happy with little. It is a return to that simplicity which allows us to stop and appreciate the small things, to be grateful for the opportunities which life affords us, to be spiritually detached from what we possess, and not to succumb to sadness for what we lack.” [LS, 222]. The family is the natural place to learn to experience responsible sobriety, to contemplate the world with gratitude and to care with attention and tenderness for those who need it most, and for the environment.

For example, “There is a nobility in the duty to care for creation through little daily actions, and it is wonderful how education can bring about real changes in lifestyle. Education in environmental responsibility can encourage ways of acting which directly and significantly affect the world around us, such as avoiding the use of plastic and paper, reducing water consumption, separating refuse, cooking only what can reasonably be consumed, showing care for other living beings, using public transport or car-pooling, planting trees, turning off unnecessary lights, or any number of other practices. All of these reflect a generous and worthy creativity which brings out the best in human beings. Reusing something instead of immediately discarding it, when done for the right reasons, can be an act of love which expresses our own dignity.” [LS, 211].

But it is not enough to care for the environment. We must go further. “We have to dare to speak of the integrity of human life, of the need to promote and unify all the great values. Once we lose our humility and become enthralled with the possibility of limitless mastery over everything, we inevitably end up harming society and the environment. It is not easy to promote this kind of healthy humility or happy sobriety when we consider ourselves autonomous, when we exclude God from our lives or replace him with our own ego, and think that our subjective feelings can define what is right and what is wrong.” [LS, 224].

A simple and daily expression of this attitude is when we stop and give thanks to God before and after meals. A brief and profound gesture which “reminds us of our dependence on God for life; it strengthens our feeling of gratitude for the gifts of creation; it acknowledges those who by their labours provide us with these goods; and it reaffirms our solidarity with those in greatest need.” [LS, 227]

“The Sacraments are a privileged way in which nature is taken up by God to become a means of mediating supernatural life. Through our worship of God, we are invited to embrace the world on a different plane. Water, oil, fire and colours are taken up in all their symbolic power and incorporated in our act of praise.” [LS, 235] The Eucharist reminds us, in a special way, of the whole significance of creation itself. Through transubstantiation, that is, through the changing of bread and wine into the Body and Blood of Christ, “the Eucharist joins heaven and earth; it embraces and penetrates all creation.” [LS, 236]

Participation in the Eucharist is particularly important on Sundays. The Lord's Day is meant to be a day which heals our relationships with God, with ourselves, with others and with the world. But the values of contemplative rest and of celebration, two essential components of human life, also make up Sundays.

Finally, it is worth remembering that what the Gospel teaches us has consequences for our way of thinking, feeling and living. In terms of education, it becomes a concrete journey that every child is invited to make: learning to be, to know, to live together, and to do. As parents, rather than proposing ideas, above all, it is more a question of giving reasons to nurture a passion for the care of our Common Home." "A commitment this lofty cannot be sustained by doctrine alone, with a spirituality capable of inspiring us, without 'an interior impulse which encourages, motivates, nourishes and gives meaning to our individual and communal activity.'" [LS, 216].

And Pope Francis continues, "Every change calls for an educational process that involves everyone. There is thus a need to create an 'educational village', in which all people, according to their respective roles, share the task of forming a network of open, human relationships. According to an African proverb, 'it takes a whole village to educate a child'. We have to create such a village before we can educate." But this village must be built as a prerequisite for education. "To reach these global objectives, our shared journey as an 'educating village' must take important steps forward".

Another step is to find the courage to capitalize on our best energies, creatively and responsibly. (...) This will result in people who are open, responsible, prepared to listen, dialogue and reflect with others, and capable of weaving relationships with families, between generations, and with civil society, and thus to create a new humanity.

A further step is the courage to train individuals who are ready to offer themselves in service to the community. Service is a pillar of the culture of encounter. (...) In serving others, we experience that there is more joy in giving than in receiving (cf. Acts 20:35). In this regard, all institutions must be open to examining the aims and methods that determine how they carry out their educational mission."⁹

Text by Fr. Carlo De Marchi

"Jesus chooses his disciples, in particular those whom he wants to count on as pastors, according to criteria that are not easy to understand. After the great miracle of the multiplication of the loaves, the Lord remains ashore, alone, while the twelve begin a difficult crossing of the sea of Galilee. *"But by this time the boat, battered by the waves, was far from the land, for the wind was against them."* (Matthew 14:24). The disciples felt alone and abandoned and began to forget the great things they had seen: they felt only the threat of the waves and the distance from Jesus.

Storms will always be there, the peace promised by Jesus is not the flat calm of a life without unforeseen events. "You will not succeed," Jesus seems to say, "in mastering the setbacks, persecutions, the many tsunamis which you will have to face personally as well as all together." But at the end of the night, He went to meet them walking on the sea. I do not teach you to calm the storm, but to sail, despite the fear: even if you do not have the situation under control, know that you will never be alone. Seeing Jesus walking on the waves, the disciples shout out: it is a ghost! And the Master reassures them: Courage, it is I, do not be afraid! And Peter, overcoming his fear, jumps over the edge of the boat and puts one foot after the other on the surface of the sea, realising to his great surprise that he is able to walk on the waves. His faith, however, is imperfect, so much so that after a few steps he begins to doubt and sink.

But the first amongst the Apostles was not chosen because he was solid and imperturbable, nor because his trust in the Master was perfect, although it was authentic and generous. These few words from G. K. Chesterton may help us, "When Christ at a symbolic moment was establishing His great society, He

⁹ Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the Launch of the Global Compact on Education, 12 September 2019

chose for its cornerstone neither the brilliant Paul nor the mystic John, but a shuffler, a snob, a coward – in a word, a man.” It can also be enlightening to think of our parents, chosen by the Lord to govern, within the limits of what is possible, the domestic Church made up by each family.

Do not be afraid, says Jesus to every mother and father, if you cannot control the situation: your father-in-law’s health, your daughter’s school results, dialogue with that particular branch of the family where there is great tension... And do not be afraid if your children are aware of your imperfections and weaknesses; Peter also had them, and God chose him, just like you, and He entrusted his sheep, those very creatures you have at home, to you. I only ask you not to doubt my love for you, and that as a family, you advance, make progress, even when everything seems uncertain and unreliable, even when I ask you to walk on the waters...

"Upon this rock I will build my Church." Not on a perfect monolith without fissures, but precisely on you, as you are and as I have called you: I want to build my domestic Church on your married love, which is renewed on a daily basis. ‘More than anywhere else,’ teaches Pope Francis, ‘the family is where we daily experience our own limits and those of others, the problems great and small entailed in living peacefully with others. A perfect family does not exist. We should not be fearful of imperfections, weakness or even conflict...’ There is no need to be afraid to walk on the waters of daily family life." [Carlo De Marchi, in *L'Osservatore Romano*, 5/08/2020]

Testimonials

Education is recognised as one of the noblest missions of humanity, but also one of the most challenging ones. Nowadays, monitoring and using new social media tools, dialogue and parents’ witness within the family are obligatory in order to ensure an adequate level of education for a new attitude and a new lifestyle in our "Common Home." We have three children: Luis 14, Julissa 10, and Julio Luis 4.

Spiritual Background: It is our daily habit of praying at mealtimes and before going to bed, usually in our small prayer corner at home, and Sunday Mass with all in the family.

Educational Context: At the moment, our challenge is Luis, because he is the most "relaxed/laid back", but with our help in organising his daily diary, and thanks to his dedication, he has been improving and evolving well.

Domestic context: during the lockdown due to COVID-19, we worked out a family rota where everyone had tasks, so that the cleaning, dishes and meals are always done, and everyone participates.

[Louisa and Julio]

So far, we have not really been tested. Our children are aged 5 and 11, but we see that in our consumerist society educating children, who respect each other and know how to think for themselves, without stepping on anything or anyone, is a challenge. We have assumed from the beginning that our children are not ours, they have been given to us by God to raise; and if this is true, then we have to do so with Christian love, with His rules and values, even if it is a difficult task. We believe that Christ does not abandon us and that there are other families on the same path. The secret is to live and pray as a family. Scouts and catechism are a great support. Knowing how to hug when necessary, not being afraid to rebuke when necessary, and above all to talk, explain, set an example, show the good side of things even if they seem bad. We insist on attending Sunday Eucharist. And when they tell us, "We don't want to go! It is stupid! We do nothing there," we reply that if we visit our grandparents, we also visit Jesus, our friend, and they accept this with a smile in their eyes. In a few years' time they may not want to go any more or they may want to go more enthusiastically than we do. Only God knows! What we cannot do is to settle for less, just because it is easier.

[Ana and Edgar]

Meeting 9 Beyond the Sun ... the Infinite Beauty of God

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Contemplate** the universe, **give** thanks and **praise** to God for everything and for everyone.
- **Root** our faith in the Risen Jesus and find the grace and strength for life in Him.
- **Spread** Christian hope through our welcome, our smile and our loving ways.
- **Surrender ourselves**, as a couple to God, guided by the example of Our Lady.

Supporting Texts

"For Christians, believing in the one God who is Trinitarian communion suggests that the Trinity has left its mark on all creation." [LS, 239] And "also to discover a key to our own fulfilment. The human person grows more, matures more and is sanctified more to the extent that he or she enters into relationships, going out from themselves to live in communion with God, with others and with all creatures." [LS, 240].

We find all the beauty of God's love for the world, his creation, in the Most Holy Trinity. We are "fascinated by the beauty of God, beauty, goodness and inexhaustible truth. But also, beauty, goodness, and humble and close truth, which became flesh in order to enter our life, our history, my history, the history of each one of us, so that every man and woman may encounter it and have eternal life. And this is faith: to welcome God-Love; to welcome this God-Love who gives himself in Christ, who moves us in the Holy Spirit; to let ourselves be encountered by him and to trust in him. This is Christian life. To love, to encounter God, to seek God; and He seeks us first; He encounters us first." [Pope Francis, Angelus, 7 June 2020].

The Lord finds and calls each one of us to participate in his creative work, contributing to the common good, based on our capabilities. This missionary vocation is always achieved in service to others. In fact, our life on earth reaches its fullness when it is transformed into a total and entrusted gift. And we are certain that we will always be surprised. "God surprises us whenever he calls and asks us to put out into the sea of history not only with our nets, but with our very selves. To look at our lives and those of others as he does (...)." [Pope Francis, Homily, Knyaz Alexandar I Square (Sofia), Sunday, 5 May 2019].

We will find God's loving gaze in eternity, recalls Father Caffarel, but with his grace we can already see it on earth. [Henri Caffarel, *Aux Carrefours de l'Amour*, p. 66/67]. " 'I seek your face', sang the Psalmist. He knew very well that his God is a person, and not an anonymous sun which shines its light indifferently on all things. 'I seek your face' - a face, that one person turns towards another person in a dialogue of love. Personally, I prefer to say, 'I seek your gaze,' because our God is a gaze. He is a lingering gaze. (...) But what makes a man noble is the fact that already here on earth, in moments of grace, he can perceive the luminous and ardent intensity of the divine gaze, and that one day, when the great door is opened, he will know perfect happiness in the sight of that Gaze."

Although He calls each one personally, He intends us to walk together within the Church. "If we journey together, young and old, we can be firmly rooted in the present, and from here, revisit the past and look to the future. To revisit the past in order to learn from history and heal old wounds that at times still trouble us. To look to the future in order to nourish our enthusiasm, cause dreams to emerge, awaken prophecies and enable hope to blossom. Together, we can learn from one another, warm hearts, inspire minds with the light of the Gospel, and lend new strength to our hands." [CV Christus Vivit, 199].

It is the same when a couple commit themselves to grow together in and through marriage. A growth that overflows in a fruitful and responsible way for everyone and everything around them. "When couples

exercise their fraternal love, little by little their hearts expand. And, step by step, their love conquers the home, the locality, the country." [Henri Caffarel, L'Anneau d'or, May 1956].

And so, it is also in Teams of Our Lady: couples, widows and widowers, counsellors and spiritual companions, together, in a team, walking towards holiness. Many generations of team members, coming from many different regions, are present in the Movement, and they are eager to move forward within the demands of true love. But they are also ready to dream, bear witness and propose a model of a renewed family, which will change society itself and contribute to a better future.

This is an immense and often difficult task, especially in times of crisis, because in family life not all moments are peaceful ones. We have all had and will have moments of crisis: family crisis, marriage crisis, social crisis, labour crisis, many crises Even the pandemic itself of 2020 was also a time of crisis. The moments of crisis are moments of choice when faced with decisions to be taken, but they are, *par excellence*, moments of fidelity: fidelity to God, fidelity to people and to the commitments that we have made before.

Moments of peace and moments of crisis, moments of light and shadow, moments of pain and joy, moments of mourning and life, moments of persecution and celebration. As Christians, we must learn to always face up to our family mission. "With faith in the Risen Jesus, (we) can confront (these challenges) with creativity and hope, ever ready to be of service, like the servants at the wedding feast, who unknowingly cooperated in Jesus' first miracle. They did nothing more than follow the order of his Mother: 'Do whatever he tells you' (Jn 2:5). Mercy, creativity and hope make life grow." [CV Christus Vivit, 173].

The Risen Lord is the basis of our faith. He is the contagion of hope: "This is no magic formula that makes problems vanish. No, the resurrection of Christ is not that. Instead, it is the victory of love over the root of evil, a victory that does not "by-pass" suffering and death, but passes through them, opening a path in the abyss, transforming evil into good: this is the unique hallmark of the power of God." [Message Urbi et Orbi, Pope Francis, Easter 2020]. Therefore, following the way of Jesus Christ is always a source of joy, true happiness and great reward in Heaven.

"In the heart of the Church, Mary shines forth. She is the supreme model for a youthful Church that seeks to follow Christ with enthusiasm and docility. (...) We are always struck by the strength of the young Mary's 'yes', the strength in those words, 'be it done', that she spoke to the angel. (...) Hers was the 'yes' of someone prepared to be committed, someone willing to take a risk, ready to stake everything she had, with no more security than the certainty of knowing that she was the bearer of a promise. [CV, 43-44]. Her "Behold the handmaid of the Lord" (Lk 1:38) is the most beautiful example of what happens when mankind freely surrenders themselves into the hands of God. May this example enchant and guide you! "Mary is the Mother who watches over us, her children, on our journey through life, often weary and in need, anxious that the light of hope not fail. For that is our desire: that the light of hope never fails. Mary our Mother looks to this pilgrim people: a youthful people whom she loves, and who seek her in the silence of their hearts amid all the noise, the chatter and the distractions of the journey." [CV, 48].

Text by Fr. Henri Caffarel

The solemn declaration to be vigorously defended, despite anything we may hear around us, is "GOD GOVERNS THE UNIVERSE HE CREATED. Nothing escapes His attention; nothing escapes His care." It seems that this is what we learnt when we were children. And we would have to be among the very "clever" people not to know what to think of a truth that is so obvious, from the moment you believe in God, of course! Moreover, if there is a place where this truth is expressed and re-expressed, it is indeed in the

Bible. Even if we are only a little familiar with the Bible, then we will recognise that this truth is expressed within it in an absolutely unquestionable way.

It is just that sometimes, we only believe things theoretically, so when these situations arise in our lives that disconcert us, we are tempted to think that it is bad luck, that it is really difficult (as our ancestors used to say - and why should we not say it like them) to see the "hand of God" behind every event.

It is here we see a certain weakness of our faith. It should be noted, however, that there are Christians who see the "hand of God" behind great events. But in the face of the thousand and one disappointing circumstances of life, they dare much less to see this "hand" of the Lord. Job wrote, "*The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.*"¹⁰ This is a phrase of profound faith in the truth that the Lord is present in his universe, and that he is actively present - he is not simply an observer. Moreover, Christ said it in a very explicit way when he said that "*even the hairs of your head are all counted,*"¹¹ and when he said that "*the little birds of heaven will not fall to the ground apart from the will of your Father.*"¹² Really, it could not be clearer.

Christians who understand this fundamental truth belong to two favourable environments, and these environments sometimes coincide:

- a) There is no doubt that in certain family environments, where the sense of Providence is very profound, all education takes place in this context: parents often turn their children's eyes to this God who guides everything, to this God who loves his own and who misses nothing.
- b) other favourable places to make this truth of faith flourish and grow are the circles where the Bible is honoured.

And sometimes the two coincide. Often in families where the Bible has a place of prominence, a sense of God's providence is also present.

Perhaps there are those among us who have not had the grace to grow up in any of these environments: neither in a family where there was a sense of divine providence, nor in an environment where the Bible was the centre of attention, where the Bible was read frequently. Moreover, this notion of God's providence is not acquired intellectually; it is truly by learning from events that God instils this truth in us.

Therefore, "no small or important event occurs in my life that is not an expression and intervention of God's Love" and, consequently, that is not for my good... Obviously, since we do not always have the same idea as Him as to what our true good is, and our true happiness, we can have the feeling that our good and our happiness are more or less compromised by these events, but there is where it is important to have the vision of faith proposed here.

Beware! It is not just a matter of believing, 'God wants my eternal happiness'! No! He wants me, in the very details of my life, to be this being who accesses this fullness that he has destined for me and that perhaps I misunderstand. [Henri Caffarel, *The Virtue of Abandonment*, undated]

Testimonials

During our courtship we started building our relationship, certain that God wanted us to be together and to be happy. This certainty made it clear to us that marriage would only be meaningful if the horizon was eternity, and it is this dimension of eternity that has guided our married life for the past 34 years. When we were preparing our wedding Mass, the priest suggested that we explain our story. This challenge made us examine in depth the marvellous experience of love that the Lord, our God, had placed in our hands. Since we believe that it is in details that we can always show God's way of looking at things, our love story permeated our invitations, wedding rings as well as the souvenirs for the guests. On the invitation, we

¹⁰ Job 1:21

¹¹ Luke 12:7

¹² Matthew 6:26

included the words from the Entrance song, "Simple and true is the story that was born between us one day"; on our wedding rings, we had "Until eternity" inscribed; and on the souvenirs, we put "We believe in Love." And today, after so many years of joy, sorrow, and surprises, these remain the key points of our love and we feel that God continues to work wonders in us.

[Margarita and José Alberto]

The relationship with mortality and immortality is probably the most important issue in anyone's life. It is for me too. Is life a small breath, the result of chance or, on the contrary, the consequence of a will?

The grace of having been born into the bosom of the Catholic Church gives me the answer, appeases my heart. I am God's plan, his son, loved by him. The more I pray and meditate, the more signs I receive of his love. What joy! Thank you, my God. Thank you, Father.

This certainty in my heart motivates and gives meaning to my life, especially in those moments when the "logic" of the Father's love is not obvious. Nathalie, the woman of my life, left for the Father a year and a half ago. Our three children, João Maria, Magdalena Vitoria and Maia Ana, are suffering. We miss her very deeply. They miss their mother. I miss my wife.

I'm sure that one day, not here, but "up there," I will understand the reason why Nathalie left so early. Until then, the Eucharist, the Bible, Father Paulino Mulamba, my Team's Spiritual Counsellor and my Team, look after and accompany us and give us much hope.

[João Pedro]

Meeting 10 Review

Objectives - Challenges and Attitudes

- **Look back on** the year that is ending and **reflect deeply**, individually, as a couple and as a team, on the Way travelled towards **Holiness** through the **Care** of our **Common Home**.

Supporting Texts

"Abandonment is the response of our love to the advances of divine Love, which we gradually learn to decipher through events. But we must live this virtue in the present moment. It is to the extent that we live it in the present moment – on not being held back by the past nor projected into the future, nor projected to the right and left – that we practice this virtue of abandonment of which we speak. The present moment is the only place where we can find God. The present moment is the only place of encounter with God.

The most sacred hours I have lived in the past are no longer a place for me to meet God. The most sacred hours I will live in the future are not yet a place for me to meet God. The only place where God is, where he is waiting for me, is the present moment. Hence the importance of living in the moment... God loves us (each one of us) with an infinite love which has all its strength and which, therefore, cannot fail to offer us the best at every moment. And we must learn to discover what he wants to offer us, to understand, to respond to it.

There is at every moment a communion with God to be realized, somewhat more important than Eucharistic communion, because the most intimate communion of man with God is the adherence of man's will to the will of God, of my will to the will of God. And at any moment I can adhere to this manifestation of God's will. That is charity, love. Charity is not saying to God: "I love you", but affirming within myself: "I want what you want". I want what you want from this event, I want what you want from this prayer. In the final analysis, the most fundamental act that must be done when praying is to say to God: "Lord, I want this half hour, this hour, what you want". This is the act of charity, of love, by which my will embraces the will of God as two hands joined together.

Until now we have spoken of this virtue of abandonment as that which leads us to carry out acts of abandonment, but the day must come when abandonment no longer consists of transitory acts, but becomes a permanent state. This is the state of the saints and, above all, of Jesus Christ.

It is no longer just a question of performing acts of abandonment, but of living continually in this state of abandonment: "Lord, You have me, All is Yours, All is Yours". This state of surrender is not only a disposition in us but is a flexibility for the action of the Holy Spirit. "The true child of God is one who is moved by the Spirit of God." [2 Co]

Abandoned in the sense that the body is abandoned to the soul, where it is docile to the soul, where it is moved by the soul. It is in this sense that we must abandon ourselves to the Holy Spirit, at the end of a life of love for God; abandoned to the Holy Spirit: just as my body is entrusted to my soul, my whole being is abandoned to the Holy Spirit.

When we read (Jn 21:18): "When you were younger, you used to fasten your own belt and to go wherever you wished. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go", we understand that this other is an executioner. But we have to understand that Another will take us: God. And we must say this prayer: "Yes, Lord, I have much more confidence in this Other than in myself!"

And to this God who watches over everything in our lives, we must respond. God acts, but he expects our response, our collaboration, our cooperation. [Fr. Henri Caffarel, *The Virtue of Abandonment*, undated].

Text of Pope Francis

“In order to be filled (with the Spirit) it is necessary to make room, to empty oneself, to step aside. Just as Mary did, she who knew how to listen to the Word of God and trust totally in his will, accepting it unreservedly in her own life. So much so that the Word became flesh in her. This was possible thanks to her “yes”. To the Angel who asks her to be ready to become the mother of Jesus, Mary replies: “Behold, I am the handmaid of the Lord; let it be to me according to your word.” (Luke 1 :38).

Mary does not lose herself in reasoning, she does not place obstacles in the Lord’s way, but she promptly entrusts herself and makes room for the action of the Holy Spirit. She immediately makes her whole being and her personal history available to God, so that the Word and the will of God may shape and bring them to fulfilment. Perfectly corresponding to God’s plan for her, Mary then becomes the “all beautiful”, the “all holy”, but without the slightest shadow of complacency. She is humble. She is a masterpiece, whilst remaining humble, small, poor. In her is reflected the beauty of God, which is all love, grace, gift of self.

I would also like to underline the word with which Mary defines herself in her surrender to God: she professes herself “the handmaid of the Lord”. Mary’s “yes” to God takes on from the beginning the attitude of service, of attention to the needs of others. The visit to Elizabeth which immediately follows the Annunciation testifies this concretely. One’s availability to God is found in one’s willingness to take on the needs of one’s neighbour. All of this without clamour and ostentation, without seeking places of honour, without advertising, because charity and works of mercy need not be exhibited as a trophy. Works of mercy are done in silence, in secrecy, without boasting of doing them. Even in our communities, we are called to follow the example of Mary, practicing the style of discretion and concealment.

May the feast of our Mother help us to make our whole life a “yes” to God, a “yes” made of adoration of him and of daily gestures of love and service.” Pope Francis (Angelus, 8 December 2019)



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