



TEAMS OF OUR LADY

Satellite Team for Christian Formation



HOSTEL/COURSE N° 6

Spirituality

SPIRITUALITY

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SPIRITUALITY

INTRODUCTION



In the following readings, a general description about what Spirituality means is provided from a Christian perspective throughout the different chapters or tables. A group of selected texts from authors with deep knowledge in theological spirituality from the church and from our movement were therefore selected.

The readings have been separated in sections that will facilitate the understanding of our own spirituality as faithful disciples of our teacher, Jesus Christ.

The methodology of Emmaus will help us to recognize that we are on a path full of questions, like the couple who meet the Risen Jesus on the way back from Jerusalem and were filled with sadness. But that traveler, who joins them, fills them with desires to be in his company and go with him to share the bread that opens their hearts to a new understanding.

Jesus Christ, after his resurrection, is inviting us to accept his company on our spiritual journey, wanting us to go with him on this path and take with him the bread of knowledge gifted to us in the following chapters (or tables).

The first chapter is based on different author's texts that allow us to get an idea of the History of Spirituality.

The second chapter allow us to get an idea of Christian Spirituality and the third chapter describes Marital Spirituality.

The fourth chapter topic is a continuation of the previous chapter, but more specific for to the Team of Our Lady members.

Chapters 5, 6 and 7 reflect on the Gospel, the teachings of the Catholic Church and on the Christian traditions respectively.

Lastly, chapter 8 proposes challenges to improve the Marital Spirituality for the Teams of Our Lady members.

Through the readings we want to contribute to the existing motivation that every Christian in general, and Team member in particular, must have to continue their journey in deepening their faith.

TABLE 1

THE HISTORY OF SPIRITUALITY



When we talk about where Christianity originated, we think of a very simple geographical scheme:

“It begins in Jerusalem; it advances through the northern basin of the Mediterranean, until it finally arrives in Rome. This presents us with a primitive scheme to the beginnings of Christianity, the scheme that historically had most success, and to a greater extent, impacted the history to come, but it says nothing about the Christians that spread through the East and through North Africa.”¹

The above quote makes us realize that although it may seem obvious, it generally is not taken into account, as it is evidenced that although Christianity and its spirituality are spoken of, it is important to keep in mind that one cannot always speak of a single Christianity and therefore of a single Christian spirituality.

Therefore, we want to clarify to our readers, that the history to be presented in the following chapters is not the best story, but it is the one we want to share with all of you interested in gaining deep knowledge in Spirituality, as it relates to the experience of couples seeking similar knowledge. Possibly the story to be presented is not different than any other, but we really liked the way it was described; and that was the reason we choose this story instead of others.

1.1 - How does Spirituality surge in humans?

The creation of Humanity is a mystery that Science, Philosophy and Religion have tried to explain. From a biological point, it is possible to say that

¹ Aguirre, “El proceso de surgimiento del cristianismo”, IN: *Así empezó el cristianismo*, 18.

humans are animals; from a theological point Humans are a different class of animal because they have 3 specific characteristics: Intelligence, Sociability and Spirituality.

Although some researchers have argued that Spirituality may not be exclusive to Humanity, it is accepted that humans are the only animal species who have reflected and socialized about spirituality systematically throughout time. Therefore, any theory, idea or text about the origin of humans, must also explain the origin of their Intellectual, Social and Spiritual capabilities.

Since the beginning of humanity, humans have tried to provide rational explanations to the things occurring in the surrounded world and within their own lives. Where do we come from? Why do we suffer? What is the meaning of life? What happens after death? Why me?

These are some of the many questions that may have once crossed our minds and to which we surely could not give full and satisfactory answers.

In the course of history, these answers have been cataloged according to two basic principles: whether they can be verifiable or not. In the first case, the answers offered are generally located in the field of natural sciences, while the second ones have been presented within the social and human sciences.

In this way, the idea of dualism was created. In other words, there are two principles that are in contradiction to each other and in constant tension: up and down, inside and outside, the sun and the moon or the body and the soul.

The latter is what allows us to understand the development of theories, stories or discourses that speak of opposite situations and that lead the person to choose one or the other, because the tension between them leaves no other alternative.

The most common example is the creation of man. The answer to “where do we come from?” is offered to us by science with the Big Bang Theory and by theology with the Story of Creation.

According to the Big Bang Theory or the Theory of the Big Explosion, cosmology describes the way the universe was created: energy and matter were in a high-density state and from one moment to the next it expanded with a huge force.

On the contrary, the book of Genesis explains how earth was created: In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. Now the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters. (Gn 1,1-2)

If we recall some definitions for the word spirit -which gives rise to the word spirituality-, we must go back to the Hebrew *Ruah*, the Greek *Pneuma* or the Latin *Spiritus*, since some authors translate it not only as Spirit, but also as breath, impulse, courage, strength -like the case of science, or, wind -in the case of theology. In this way, it can be affirmed that the spirit and of course spirituality, are found from the very beginning at the base of human existence itself.

When we hear the word spirit we are met with a feeling of fear. It sounds to us like something powerful that overcomes our strength and in turn become its' slave. It seems that only uttering that sound makes the thunder and the fiercest storm appear in our minds: spirit, therefore, is one of the words of the mysteries.²

1.2- What to understand by Spirituality?

Spirituality is a fairly broad concept, which refers simultaneously to three particular meanings:

- a) In the first instance, it speaks of everything that is related to the spiritual life, "from the ascetic beginning to its development in the mystical experience of God".³
- b) Second, it is applied to any reference to the different teachings about Spiritual Life,⁴ such as the different Catholic Religious orders, for example, Franciscan, Carmelites, and Bethlehemites among others.
- c) In the same way, "it is described as a practical, existential science, of evangelical perfection in its formative-pedagogical itinerary from the Christian ideal of charity to the mystical union of spirit with god the Trinity and god the One".⁵

² Etchebehere, *El espíritu desde Viktor Frankl*, 16.

³ Álvarez, *Diccionario Teológico Enciclopédico*, 333. Asceticism is understood as a reference to austerity, and mysticism as dedication to a spiritual life.

⁴ Idem.

⁵ Idem.

According to some recent studies it is possible to distinguish three aspects in this concept:

- a) The first is related to changing the path of your personal life towards the Holy Spirit, based on the Word of God. In this way, you can live in the Spirit according to the Spirit,⁶ because as “hope does not put us to shame, because God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”. (Rm, 5, 5).
- b) The second is presented by recognizing the diversity of charismata that the Holy Spirit grants to humanity (1Cor 12, 4), with the purpose to succeed in the practice of one evangelical ideal, the practice of charity.⁷
- c) The third shows how Christianity, although divided in multiple churches/sects, is united in many aspects with the mutual benefit of union of the faithful, “so all can be one”. (Jn 17, 21)⁸

In addition, presently, it is no longer possible to associate spirituality exclusively with prayer, with religiosity or with the same piety, because you can find spiritualities that are lived apart from religion, because there are many people who affirm that spirituality is a matter of conscience, that cannot be submitted to clergy, hierarchies, dogmas, traditions or conventions. "Perhaps, because spirituality does not refer to a part of life, but rather it is life itself flowing and happening".⁹

Therefore, we want to outline the following:

Every human being, independent of its culture, religious confession and social status, by the mere fact of its humanity, has the sensitivity to identify and follow what is in its essence as soul, vigor, brio, spirit, and that invites and calls to live in us. In other words, every human being has a spiritual life, a spirituality that, given its condition of totality, cannot be separated from its corporeality. It is a spirituality that puts us in relationship with the world, with others and proposes openness to God.

Therefore, Spirituality is lived on a day by day basis; it is not possible to oppose our spiritual life to our own body, because spirituality

⁶ It is the title of a book whose author is the Brazilian theologian Leonardo Boff.

⁷ Álvarez, Diccionario Teológico Enciclopédico, 333.

⁸ Idem.

⁹ Navarro, Reflexiones sobre espiritualidad, Teología y Docencia, 2.

encompasses all what being human is. Our spirituality manifest in our relationships, showing our true identity; therefore, communication is a sign of spirituality, where we express our own life.

Moreover, Spirituality is a dimension of the human experience, conflicted with questions about the meaning of life and its purpose; to transcend beyond the superficial dimension of things from the external world. It challenges us to have a meaningful life and to confront the stimulus from the outside world.

To live spirituality means to conceive of life as an integral being, deeply body, incarnated, as a man or as a woman imbued with the dynamism of eternity. Only from this personal awareness it becomes possible to undertake an itinerary of spiritual life.

Thus, spirituality refers to someone who carries or owns or cultivates it, as a way of being, of thinking, of looking, of doing, of knowing, of choosing, of loving. It is a trait of the person, as well as dynamism and action of life.¹⁰

We can affirm that Spirituality also reference to the way we express our relationships with others and God.¹¹ A relationship that presents new perspectives as expressed in the gospel reminds us to be the light – knowledge - and salt – flavor - in the world for others (Mt 5,13-16); and for the Christian has the purpose to provide Jesus as the gospel of good news.

1.3 - Principles common to all spiritualities

There are three principles shared in any story of Spirituality that we can easily identify:

- a) The spirit of God is a force that is part of human life and imposes against all experiences that attempt against it. Therefore, the goal of all spiritualities is to humanize and to improve life for all.¹² Because every day we live, we make a difference without being faithful, just by being a good person; however if you want to go further you can do well and be a practicing faithful.

¹⁰ Navarro, El lugar de la espiritualidad en la acción docente del teólogo, 61-62.

¹¹ Espeja, La espiritualidad cristiana, 15.

¹² Cabestrero, ¿Qué es y qué no es espiritualidad?, 13.

- b) An authentic Spirituality looks for the personal growth of individuals, in a permanent transformation that produce individual and collective blessings. This means that Spirituality is beneficial for each person, for everyone and for the entire universe.¹³
- c) A genuine Spirituality positively affects our complete beings, our senses, our desires and actions as we are as individuals, within our dynamic realities and positive tendencies;¹⁴ also assuming our own limitations, weakness, susceptibilities and selfishness inherent to our human condition. Our Spirituality will enable us to know our own limitations, with the purpose to better our life and the life of the people around us.

We can conclude that:

If the spirit is life, then the opposite of the spirit is not matter, but death... (Therefore), spirituality has, consequently, a true project that opposes the logic of death present in the current process of accumulation and total market, organized and supreme expressions of assault on nature and the planetary community. These expressions are (reductionist), excluding and producing a countless number of victims.¹⁵

1.4 - Avoiding the reductionism

When problems arise, we challenge ourselves to provide solutions in timely and effective manner. In the process of implementing a solution, we may not consider the context of the issue or the future repercussions that is why we usually choose the easy solution that has less implication.

For example, if someone tells us that is feeling hungry, our easy response will be to tell them to eat something. However, this solution may not be the ideal if we do not analyze the context of the person experience hunger, as there may be an economic limiting factor to satisfy this need on a daily basis.

Another example is when someone tells us that feel sad, depressed or tired of living; the easy solution may be to tell them to calm down, that those feeling will not last forever. In this way, such a daily experience, such as the

¹³ Idem.

¹⁴ Idem.

¹⁵ Boff, Ecología: grito de la tierra, grito de los pobres, 240.

relationship with another person, can easily lead us "to a narrow and simplistic view, i.e., reductive of reality, a biased and poor interpretation of the complexity of the real".¹⁶

In this sense, we must be careful not to fall into reductionisms that exist in different classes, such as the political, the economic, the philosophical, the scientific and, of course, the spiritual; this consists:

In fully identifying the person with his spirit and reducing his body and his materiality to a pure accident of the arbitrary type. In this reductionism, an implicit or explicit disregard of the body dimension of the human being and, therefore, of his sensitivity, his sexuality, his expressiveness and sign language is carried out. The body is reduced to the vehicle of the spirit.¹⁷

According to Teilhard de Chardin, all beings in the universe have both an interiority and an exteriority that,¹⁸ in the case of the human being from an integral perspective, such interiority is properly understood as spirituality; that is, that sacred land where one enters barefoot to contemplate the profound dimensions of life. (see: Ex 3,5)

Hence the importance of overcoming any reductionist and, in this case, spiritual vision, because this dimension of human experience is what enriches and gives depth and meaning to our experience.¹⁹

FOR REFLECTION:

- 1) Speaking of a history of spirituality, a text by Aguirre is mentioned, in which reference is made to the origin of Christianity. There it is mentioned that the one we know is one of several Christian lines that can be formed. What do you think of this?
- 2) What caught your attention most after reading the item about how spirituality emerged in the human being?

¹⁶ Torralba, Antropología del cuidar, 46.

¹⁷ Idem, 49.

¹⁸ Chardin, El fenómeno humano, 17

¹⁹ Cunningham y Egan, Espiritualidad cristiana, 13.

- 3) In the text, the question of what to understand by spirituality is addressed, from the point of view of some authors. But what do you understand by spirituality?
- 4) What do you think of the pretense of achieving genuine spirituality?
- 5) Why is it important to avoid reductionism, especially of the religious type?

TABLE 2

AN APROXIMATION TO CHRISTIAN SPIRITUALITY



At the previous table it was affirmed that spirituality refers to the way of "expressing the encounter and relationship of human beings with God;²⁰ however, it should be kept in mind that each person could relate this experience, which is always rooted in a particularity: Jewish, Islamic, Christian or of any other kind".²¹

In the case of a Christian spirituality, it should be remembered that:

It is essentially based on the doctrine of Jesus, completed with the doctrine of his immediate apostles. There is no other legitimate and authentically Christian spirituality, nor can there be one. St. Paul expressly warns that "no one can have any foundation other than that which has already been laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1Cor 3,11), and St. Peter bravely affirmed before the supreme Jewish council that "no other name has been given to us under heaven by which we can be saved" (Acts 4,12).²²

And if a truth from Perogrullo is accepted,²³ as it is to affirm that Jesus was Jewish, it is important to remember part of this inheritance, which allows us to speak of a Jewish-Christianity.

2.1- Israel: the chosen people

In the religious Christian context, when we ask who the chosen people were, the answer seems to be, the people from Israel.

However:

²⁰ Espeja, La espiritualidad cristiana, 15.

²¹ Cunningham y Egan, Espiritualidad cristiana, 6.

²² Royo, Los grandes maestros de la vida espiritual, 3.

²³ I mean, one thing is so well known and known that it's silly to say it.

When we discuss Israel, we can describe it in 3 ways: **the first** is like the State created on May 14, 1948 which was accepted by the United Nations (UN) in 1950; Hence the name Israeli for a citizen of the State of Israel.

The second is inside the biblical text, when it is narrated that Israel is the name that Jacob receives after fighting against God ("Henceforth you will not call yourself Jacob but Israel, because you have been strong against God" - Gen 32,29), reason why the Jewish people adopted this name, because it grew and developed basically from the twelve sons Jacob had - the people of Israel - (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun - sons of Leah, with whom she also had her daughter Dinah, Gad and Asher - children of Zilpá, servant of Lia; Joseph and Benjamin - children of Rachel; Dan and Naphtali - sons of Bilhá, Rachel's servant - Gn 46,8- 25).

The third appears as the configuration of three Hebrew words that speak of a particular way of relating to God. The word "Is", that will translate to man, the word "Ra", that is understood as seeing – revelation -, and the word "El", that makes reference to God. In this way, Israel is understood as: "Man who seeks God or also 'God who reveals himself to man".

In this way, the gathering of people who have seen God²⁴ is what can be called Israelites, not because they were born within a Jewish community, but because they are part of a great people to whom God has revealed Himself.²⁵ He has chosen for himself with characteristics that clearly distinguish him from all religious, ethnic, political or cultural groups in history.²⁶

Therefore, we can now affirm, without any doubt, that we are part of the people that God has chosen to save; however, it is also clear that in the two

²⁴ Understanding how a person expresses the way God has revealed Himself to them; because it is not the same to "see God face to face" as to "see the face of God". The first refers to a way of speaking, that calls a personal and intimate relationship, as described in the account when Moses and God meet in the Meeting Tent: "Yahweh (the Lord) spoke to Moses face to face, as a man speaks to his friend" (Ex 33,11a); but the second would be fatal, because the account says that when Moses wants to see God, he answers: "You cannot see my face, because man cannot see me and continue living" (Ex 33,20).

²⁵ "If you hear my voice and keep my covenant, you will be my personal property among all peoples, for the whole earth is mine" (Ex 19,5). It should also be borne in mind that "God does not belong as property to any people. But he has acquired for himself a people from those who were not a people before" (Catechism of the Catholic Church, 186).

²⁶ Mahecha, El Shabat: una estrategia ecológica de Dios, 439.

millennia of the history of Christianity there has been - and still are - enormously different ways of approaching and understanding the figure of Jesus.

So:

The challenge is to present Jesus of Nazareth as Christ, door of salvation, as a proposal and not as a unique and imposed alternative; because isolated from a serious reflection, it apparently invites us to believe only by faith or exclusively by Scripture, forgetting the reality proper to each person.²⁷

In this way, it is convenient to agree at the moment that it is enough to understand that Christian spirituality is the living encounter with Jesus Christ in the Spirit. In this sense, Christian spirituality is concerned with the ways in which these teachings shape us as individuals who are part of the Christian community that lives in this world.²⁸

2.2- The teaching of Jesus

The main teaching that Jesus offers us is the experience of the Kingdom of God. It is a concept that cannot be explained, but that in the gospels He Himself approaches with examples:

- "It is like a mustard seed that a man took and sowed in his field" (Mt 13,31).
- "He is like a man who casts grain on the ground" (Mk 4,26).
- "It looks like the leaven that a woman takes and puts in three measures of flour, until everything ferments" (Lk 13,21).

To fully live in the Kingdom of which Jesus speaks, there are two fundamental and correlative practices, which cannot subsist one without the other, and that must inspire the actions of every Christian: renunciation of himself and the following of Christ, which is made explicit when Jesus says: "If anyone wants to come after me, let him deny himself, take up his cross every day, and follow me" (Lk 9,23). In this way we approach a perfection to which every Christian is called.

²⁷ Mahecha, Aproximación a los rasgos de una espiritualidad ecológica, 67.

²⁸ Cunningham y Egan, Espiritualidad cristiana, 7.

- **The renunciation to yourself**

The requirement that Jesus makes to this aspect is very energetic: to carrying the cross itself. A situation that in Judaism finds sustenance for original sin, which leads man to fight the disordered tendencies of his nature, but also is based on the fact that outside of him must also counteract the suggestions of the devil (1Pe 5,8) and the scandals of the world (Mt 18,7), opposing and resisting them with energy.

Therefore, to reach this demand, Jesus himself proposes: "Watch and pray, so that you do not fall into temptation; that the spirit is ready, but the flesh is weak" (Mk 14,38). An attitude and permanent action of Jesus, which is evident in the text of the Desert Temptations (Mt 4,1-11).²⁹

However, this resignation has different degrees, ranging from compliance with the norm - Law - as a minimum strategy for coexistence - and salvation - to the aspiration of Christian perfection.

The best example of this was presented by Jesus himself when he speaks about his interactions with a rich young man, to differentiate the renunciation that has been imposed on everyone and what is required of those who aspire to perfection in order to attain the Kingdom of God:

Now someone approached him and said: "Teacher, what good must I do to gain eternal life?" He answered him: "Why do you ask me about the good? There is only One who is good. If you wish to enter into life, keep the commandments." He asked him: "Which ones?" And Jesus replied: "You shall not kill; you shall not commit adultery; you shall not steal; you shall not bear false witness; honor your father and your mother; and 'you shall love your neighbor as yourself.'" The young man said to him: "All of

²⁹ Then Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. After fasting forty days and forty nights, he felt hungry. The tempter came to him and said, "If you are the Son of God, command that these stones be turned into bread. But he answered, "It is written: Man lives not by bread alone, but by every word that comes out of the mouth of God. Then the devil took him to the Holy City, placed him on the pinnacle of the temple, saying, "If you are the Son of God, throw yourself down from here, for it is written: He will command his angels, and they will sustain you in their hands, that you should not stumble upon any stone. Jesus answered, "It is also written: You shall not tempt the Lord your God. Again, the devil took him to the top of a mountain, showed him all the kingdoms of the world and his glory, and said to him, "All these things I give you, if you fall down and worship me. Then Jesus said to him, "Go away, Satan, for it is written: You shall worship the Lord your God, and you shall worship him alone. The devil has finally left him. Then some angels came to him and began to serve him.

these I have observed. What do I still lack?" Jesus said to him: "If you wish to be perfect, go, sell what you have and give to (the) poor, and you will have treasure in heaven. Then come, follow me." (Mt 19,16-21)

It must be understood that wealth in itself is not bad. In fact, the possession of the property of the land, maintained within the limits of justice, is legitimate. However, the Christian, who like the young man of the Gospel, feels higher aspirations and a special divine call, is invited to renounce to all of them; as Jesus already knew per what was written in Psalm 23,1: "The Lord is my shepherd, I lack nothing".

Evangelical perfection is so demanding that not only is it required to renounce richness, but also renounce to have a family. Hence the invitation to take and carry the cross itself, to walk over the footprints of Jesus; until death if necessary as He did himself. This is what it means to give up our own life.

This is what Jesus refers when he states:

Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. (Mt 5,11-12).

This resignation is summarized in the phrase he said to James and John while they were on their way to Jerusalem: "The foxes have dens, and the birds of the sky have nests; but the Son of man has nowhere to recline his head" (Lk 9,58). And who knows the story of Jesus, knows that these are not just words, but concrete facts that are evident from his birth in a manger until his death on the cross on Calvary.

- **Following Jesus Christ**

Following Jesus Christ is no less demanding than the renunciation to ourselves, which is requested by Jesus to his disciples, precisely as a requirement to follow him.

Jesus said to another man: "Follow me". But he replied: "Let me go first to bury my father". Jesus replied: "Let the dead bury their dead. You go to announce the Kingdom of God". There was another one who said: "I will follow you, Lord; but let me first say goodbye to those in my house". Jesus

replied: "No one who puts his hand on the plow and looks back is fit for the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9,59-62).

Although for some people, this call seems very rigorous and strict; stories such as the call of the first four disciples gather the testimony of those Christians; followers of Christ who because of their attitude of truly living their faith, was not difficult to respond to Jesus' call to live the Kingdom of God.

Walking along the shore of the Sea of Galilee, he saw two brothers, Simon, called Peter, and his brother Andrew, setting out the nets in the sea, for they were fishermen. He said to them, "Come with me, and I will make you fishers of men." They left the nets at once and followed him. He kept walking and saw two other brothers, Santiago the one from Zebedeo and his brother Juan, who were in the boat with their father Zebedeo arranging their nets; and he called them. They immediately left the boat and their father and followed him (Mt 4,18-22).

This testimony makes it clear that the call to follow Jesus Christ is not something for a few, but is open to those who really want to reach the Kingdom of God.

A good example is found within the same Jewish community of the time, who could not believe that it was possible for a publican, a tax collector like Levi, to respond to Jesus' call: After this, Jesus went out and saw a tax collector by the name of Levi sitting at his tax booth. "Follow me", Jesus said to him, and Levi got up, left everything and followed him. (Lk 5,27-28).

That is why many people, in their desire to achieve a true following of Christ, have achieved holiness and practiced self-denial in an effective manner.

This is the case of Saint Anthony Abad, who after hearing casually in a church the text of the rich young man (Mt 19,16-21), sold all his goods, gave his money to the poor and retired to the desert.³⁰

In fact, great teachers of the spiritual life like Saint Francis of Sales, teach that whatever the state and condition of our life, religious or secular, single or married, "we can and should aspire to the perfect life".³¹

³⁰ San Atanasio, Vida de San Antonio Abad, 4. To consult the original text: http://www.documentacatholicaomnia.eu/03d/0295-0373_Athanasius_Vida_de_San_Antonio_Abad_ES.pdf

³¹ San Francisco de Sales, Introducción a la vida devota, 3.

Even the Second Vatican Council has expressed it with all clarity and energy:

It is, therefore, clear to all the faithful, of any state or condition, called to the fullness of the Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness arouses a superior human life even in earthly society. In the attainment of this perfection the faithful commit the forces received, according to the measure of the gift of Jesus Christ.³²

After all, we are invited not to mention obligated by all Christians to proactively seek Jesus Christ, in order to achieve holiness and perfection within their own society.

2.3- The importance of prayer

The renunciation to our self and the following of Christ are a combination which undoubtedly will lead the Christian to attain the Kingdom of God, announced by Jesus. And this is when the importance and power of prayer for the Christian who aspires to achieve holiness and perfection becomes evident.

This was the formula recommended by Jesus, which he put into practice on several occasions and which places the Christian in intimate communication with God.

“So, I say to you: Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; the one who seeks finds; and to the one who knocks, the door will be opened. “Which of you fathers, if your son asks for a fish, will give him a snake instead? Or if he asks for an egg, will give him a scorpion? If you then, though you are evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!” (Lk 11,9-13).

In fact, "shortly after the death of Jesus, the existence of different groups of his disciples, who coincided in claiming his memory and feeling attached to him, even with different forms and characteristics",³³ begin to witness that

³² Lumen Gentium, nº 40.

³³ Aguirre, Así empezó el cristianismo, 41.

Christian spirituality is not simply an abstract philosophy or a code of beliefs, but that it presupposes a way of living, where prayer is a nuclear element.

The V General Conference of the Latin American and Caribbean Episcopate held in May 2007 in Aparecida, Brazil, expressed the following:

In a world thirsty for spirituality and aware of the centrality that the relationship with the Lord occupies in our life as disciples, we want to be a Church that learns to pray and teaches to pray. A prayer that is born from the heart and is the starting point of participative celebrations that animate and nourish the faith.³⁴

But it is to be bear in mind that even though the Gospels narrate that Jesus called many disciples individually, the concrete follow-up experience always took place in a community that walked with Him.

Therefore, although each person must respond individually to this call, the answer implies joining a community that bears witness to the salvific facts of the Lord in his life, death and resurrection.

In this way, renouncing to our self and following Christ is a call to belong to a community, because:

It is in the assembled community, in which the word is preached and the bread is broken, where the memory of the life, death and resurrection of Christ is remember, represented and proclaimed. Luke gives a brief outline of this community of disciples: "They devoted themselves to the apostles teaching and to fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer" (Acts 2:42).

The spirituality of Christians, even when it poses great individual demands to each person, is not expressed completely in the life of any individual. Authentic Christian spirituality must have an ecclesial character.

One of the multiple functions of the Eucharist is to configure the community that confesses that Jesus is their Lord.

Christian disciples gather to participate in the Lord's Supper in order to represent their saving acts at a time and place, and in order to affirm that they have a common purpose.

³⁴ Aparecida, 28.

In fact, we could say that one way of understanding the missionary nature of the Church is to hold that, as disciples of Jesus, our task is to invite others to participate.³⁵

FOR REFLECTION

- 1) What is the difference between a Christian spirituality and any other spirituality?
- 2) Do you remember how to understand Israel? Which one do you identify with the most and why?
- 3) The main teaching of Jesus focuses on the preaching of the Kingdom of God. How do you understand the Kingdom of God?
- 4) Jesus' renunciation of himself is an important reference for every Christian. To follow Jesus the Christ, what have you renounced or are you willing to renounce to reach the Kingdom of God?
- 5) It is affirmed that in order to renounce oneself and follow Christ, prayer is very important. Have you thought that your prayer, both personal and spousal, contributes to this purpose?

³⁵ Cunningham y Egan, Espiritualidad cristiana,13.

TABLE 3

MARITAL SPIRITUALITY



When the subject of marriage comes to a conversation, jokes and negative allusions are often made to it.

Some people speak of their marriage as one who tells an anecdote of a night of bingo: "I had the luck, bad luck, to marry ...". So, it seems that all the vicissitudes of a long life of marriage are definitively clarified, as if the happiness of your partner was pending the situation of a star. It is always the "other" who traces the destiny of their marriage.³⁶

For examples like the previous one, it is justified to speak of conjugal spirituality, because it is necessary to understand marriage as a sacrament, since the union of man and woman by the Catholic Church, is not something accidental that it happens in life due to fortuitous causes.

On the contrary, understanding marriage as a sacrament allows us to understand that this is the field - the fertile ground - in which God sows the seed of his love so that it germinates and of abundant fruit.

Therefore, marriage is a way to seek holiness and it is presented as a vocation for the majority of God's children.

It can be said then that marriage is a special sacrament, as affirmed in his brief pontificate John Paul I:

In the last century there was a distinguished professor in France, Federico Ozanam; He taught at the Sorbonne University, he was eloquent and great. His Lacordaire, a Dominican priest, used to say: "This man is so great and so good that he will become a Priest and eventually a Bishop!" However, He found an excellent young lady and they got married. The

³⁶ Navarrete, Para que tu matrimonio dure, 13.

marriage did not sit well with Lacordaire, and he said: "Poor Ozanam! He too has fallen into the trap! Two years later, Lacordaire went to Rome and was received by Pio IX; Pio IX told him", I had always heard that Jesus instituted seven sacraments: now you come, stir up my letters and tell me that you he instituted six sacraments and a trap. No, father, marriage is not a trap; it is a very important sacrament.³⁷

3.1- The foundation of marital spirituality

The revelation of the Trinitarian reality of God in Jesus is in itself an invitation to find the answer to the greatest desire of human beings: to feel loved, to have a place for the realization of that love, and to transcend in time giving meaning to his life. Desires are as old as humanity itself.

The prominent Greek philosopher Plato, famous for his sharp way of understanding human nature, presents in his dialogue "Symposium or of the erotic"³⁸ a story in which he states that former humans were composed of androgynous beings, male and female at the same time, provided with 2 heads, 4 arms and 4 legs, who possessed a huge strength and pride that went against their gods.

As a result of this, the gods, with the specific help of Apollo, separated the androgynies into males and females, leaving the navel as evidence of this operation. Life then become impossible for each gender; because each one has experiences that can now be live without the other. This is why, Zeus, takes pity and allows the mating and satisfaction of their desires. As a consequence of this and of the relationship of the parties, love arises and is perfected, which is nothing more than the search for the lost unity and the vital strength.

This mythical story presents a wonderful metaphor of the striking reality of human beings, they are incomplete by themselves and in need of others; and yet, foolishly self-sufficient, selfish and easy to find reasons for happiness.

A human being who falsely believes that he will be happy only with the satisfaction of his desires, primary impulses, with the poor compensation of being a possessor of objects, properties and/ or titles, or seeking prestige and fame,

³⁷ João Paulo I, Audiencia General, 13 de septiembre de 1978.

³⁸ Platón. Diálogos, 382.

comes to experience paradoxically even more emptiness and unhappiness, as expressed by the famous humanist psychologist Viktor Frankl:

Pleasure is not the primary goal of human actions, only exceptionally. Human actions aim primarily for the fulfillment of the meaning of life by the practice of the core values. Pleasure can only occur, when the meaning of life has, and its values have been realized... In a word, its existential fullness... The opposite would be the existential emptiness.³⁹

Humans continually struggle between these forces that put us in tension. On one hand, we experience the need to have a loving presence of the special someone in our life, which emerges in our life like magic. When we experience love, we feel that we must fight for that love, so that as in the Greek myth, we can feel that we are finally complete.

On the other hand, the other side of the tension is really problematic. It is the search for our individual identity; of the selfness; the need for self-affirmation; of I can do it on my own.

This side is what can lead us to think about the popular proverb exalted by modern society: better alone than in bad company.

This is what leads us to a deep selfishness and negative self-sufficiency, which does not allow us to recognize that:

Men and women form a couple and get married to satisfy the individual needs of humans, to love and be loved, to have children and to form a family, to grow as people, to feel safe, recognized, to have sex, and to finally leave the house of the parents. With a lot of diversity, we can describe the beginning of the romance of a couple.⁴⁰

However, in this reality, not everything is fullness; many homes are shaken by stress and uncertainties arising from major economic, social, political and cultural changes. In addition to living in the midst of high levels of aggressiveness, that often ends in verbal or physical violence.

In this context, life as a couple is a space of tension between different sides, where conjugal spirituality arises as the path of harmony between them, so that the couple achieves that transcendent realization that we all want.

³⁹ Frankl, *El hombre doliente*, 29.

⁴⁰ Navarrete, *Para que tu matrimonio dure*, 50.

We understand then, because we have experienced it, that it is not easy to achieve this goal of spiritual development as a couple; it is also not about suppressing the tensions of marital cohabitation, since that is impossible. Rather a proposal to live as a couple in a spiritual world, is an invitation to walk towards a full sense of human fulfillment.

God, led by his Love, thought to reveal his being in many ways to us: in the nature, where we discover the abundance of life; by his protective presence, as the people of Israel felt; clearly with Jesus Christ, the loving presence of the Father. Moreover, the abundant gifts that we receive in union with the Holy Spirit.

God in his Trinitarian unity invites us to fully live our conjugal relations and to be supporters of life, thus giving testimony of the life God has provided us.

Seen things this way, conjugal spirituality puts us in syntony with our loving God. It allows us to discover each day his invitation to be part of a community, a Reflection of the Trinitarian community of God. Only in this way will we discover that we are responsible for each other, because these ties are God's gifts.

3.2- Marital spirituality: a dynamic process of encounter with God

The spirituality lived in a couple is a path that is done step by step; It is not something magical or a capacity to pray that you have or do not have, but it is the fruit of a process, a that starts from a seed. It is a continuous approach that allows us to know that loving will of God for me and for my partner.

A wonderful example of this search for God is always found in the text of the prophet Elijah when he goes to meet God on Mount Horeb:

He said to him, "Go out and stand on the mountain before Yahweh". And behold, Yahweh was passing by. There was a hurricane so violent that it split the mountains and broke the rocks before Yahweh; but Yahweh was not in the hurricane. After the hurricane, a tremor of earth; but Yahweh was not in the tremor. After the trembling, fire, but Yahweh was not in the fire. After the fire, the whisper of a gentle breeze. When Elijah heard it, he covered his face with his cloak, went out and stood at the entrance to the cave. A voice was directed to him and he said: "What are you doing here, Elijah?" (1Kings 19,11-13).

God asks the prophet a fundamental question: "What are you doing here?" And paraphrasing the question, we could pose the following question: What are

you doing here with your partner? What are you doing here? We are looking for you Lord. This will surely be the answer of many of us.

And we should also ask: and where are we looking for God? In the violent hurricane that sinks mountains and breaks rocks? Or in a tremor of earth? or in the devouring fire?

It is possible that these are the searches of many people in our current world, where to compete and win at all costs, to be recognized as the absolute leader, to be the first and not to leave anybody, are the wrong searches, based on having, power or selfish pleasure.

But what does the text say? Yahweh was not in the hurricane, not in the trembling, not in the fire... but in the gentle breeze.

Meaning that God is in a spirituality that is cultivated little by little, gently. Like those fields full of beautiful colorful flowers, which grow no noise and yet are full of life and transformation, unlike the rocks that roll down a hillside making a lot of noise and causing destruction and death.

The love we share, the acceptance of the weaknesses of the other, the loving attention to the needs of our children and a thousand other details, is that soft and daily breeze where God manifests its presence.

There is also where we are cultivating our conjugal spirituality; we are called then to be contemplatives of the action of God, in the midst of our daily actions.

3.3- Marital spirituality lived in its sacramental dimension

Marital spirituality lived not as a civil contract, or as an institution of a social type, but as a sacrament, gives four graces or gifts to be used as a couple: irradiation, elevation, healing and fertility.

Irradiation is the grace we receive to illuminate with our own light, first to my partner and then to others, the path of a life where the love of God becomes transparent.

Elevation is the grace we receive to help the other when for some reason he feels tired, unmotivated, about to fall. It is the opportunity to intervene and raise it - raise it with and towards God.

Healing is the grace we receive to relieve the other in the daily discords, were we get hurt. No one else can do it, but someone who has been hurt and decides to forgive.

And, finally, *Fertility* is the grace we receive not only to procreate, but also to accompany and take care of us, so that when the children leave us, some without saying goodbye, we can prevent the cold of loneliness from hitting our hearts.⁴¹

This way, it is verified that all Christian spirituality, due to the Holy Spirit actions in us - has to be incarnated in ourselves.

Therefore, in the relationship of the couple, this requires the other, not in terms of a business purpose, but in pursuit of a common purpose. Hence, in order to understand the sacrament, it is necessary to materialize it; that is, to represent it in some way.

Just as in baptism, immersing oneself in water means immersing oneself in Christ, or the surrender of Christ is observed in the Eucharist in the bread and wine. Likewise, in marriage the faithful love of the couple that is exclusivity of the delivery, expresses of the faithful love of God for each human being, reason why all the manifestations of this Love sanctify him.

Based on what St. Paul says about the relationship of Christ with the Church - and therefore of Christ with humanity - which is like a betrothal: once and for all.

This is a confession of faith of the Church, where it is evident that there is no imposition of one over others, from which Jesus invites us to live that dimension of incarnation; that historical reality, led by prayer, confronting what God wants and discerning in the midst of the concrete reality of men, to continually make decisions.

Following Jesus both individually and as a couple: we have in one hand, the reality of the prayer of discernment, and on the other hand the Holy Spirit transforming us, giving more room to the feeling than to the rationality.

⁴¹ Part of the song *El camino de la vida*, by Colombian composer Héctor Ochoa Cárdenas; a work elected by national vote in a contest called by RCN Radio, such as the Colombian song of the 20th century.

The idea is to be able to become more and more like Jesus, who had a great sensitivity, expressed in an authentic way. This is the joyful dimension that daily life is expressed, the simplicity of life in our day to day.

We must be aware that seeking the will of God brings conflicts; but we must also know that we are not alone when facing them; the hand of God -will helps us-, so they can be solved. In this way we can celebrate the action of God in our lives. And discover it through its free and generous delivery of love, to have a full life.

It seems a truism,⁴² but conjugal spirituality occurs when there is conjugality. That is, when the spouses are found. But there are at least three ways to live it:

- a) Free union.
- b) Civil marriage.
- c) Marriage as a sacrament

Any of these types of union will generate and strengthen conjugal spirituality; but only the last one, was based on the presence of God at the moment of being called to share our mutual love.

It must be clear that we do not want to affirm that God is not present in the life of the other types of unions, but we suppose that is different than inviting him explicitly, which is what was done through the Marital sacrament.

Therefore, it is important to recognize that the marriage assumed as a sacrament, is not different from another marriage, but the faith is what configures it as the most perfect reality, revealing the truth of the single marriage inscribed in the plan of God to whom bridal couples are called to live.⁴³

Every sacrament implies an act of faith. That is, an act of will. A willingness to have God present. Acts that exceed the limits of reason and become an experience of life - e.g. learn to swim or verify the germination of a seed.

This is something that is marvellously experienced at the moment of marriage, because not only is it part of the concrete fact of a personal decision at

⁴² I mean, one thing is so well known that it's silly to say it.

⁴³ Ver Larrabe, El matrimonio cristiano en la época actual, 34.

the time of giving the yes, but it is also the two, male and female, who celebrate this sacrament.

Therefore, although the priest is only a witness of that union, he becomes by faith the most exceptional witness; because in exercising his priestly ministry, he becomes the presence of the living God who commits himself to us as a couple.

The sacrament of marriage does not end with the rite, when the priest - God himself- tells us: I declare you husband and wife. On the contrary, it is at that moment that the sacrament begins to be lived and celebrated, to become alive and current with our daily yes.

In order to achieve this spiritual growth as couples that will allow us a true understanding, it is important to dedicate a real time to pray as a couple on a daily basis. One's effort is not enough; prayer is the raw material of conjugal spirituality.

FOR REFLECTION

- 1) The first part of the reading refers to everyday situations that all of us have heard about marriage. You, what anecdotes, jokes or situations do you remember about it?
- 2) When reference is made to the foundation of conjugal spirituality, a text by Plato is addressed. What does this mythical story invite you?
- 3) With marriage, a common life project is developed. How do you propose to live the tension that this generates, with respect to the search for an identity and full development of the individual?
- 4) It is affirmed that conjugal spirituality is a step that is carried out step by step. How was that walking with your partner?
- 5) The requirement to belong to the Teams of Our Lady is to have a Catholic marriage. However, is it clear to you what the experience of this union as a sacrament means?

TABLE 4

MARITAL SPIRITUALITY: THE HEART OF THE TEAMS



Álvaro and Mercedes Gómez-Ferrer Lozano, are a couple from Valencia-Spain- that belongs to the Teams of Our Lady since 1966. They are recognized not only for their dedication to the Movement, witnessed in the various services they have provided, but also for the fortune to have met Fr. Henri Caffarel. This fact allowed them to speak with authority of a subject as important as the title that will guide this chapter. The title of this chapter is one of the many talks that they have shared with team members from around the world.

For the reasons above, we want to take the text prepared by them, to have it as a guiding thread, together with some selected texts of Fr. Caffarel. As discussed in the previous chapter, understanding marriage from its sacramental dimension is what consecrates the relationship between man and woman in their conjugal form and reveals it as a sign of Christ's relationship with his Church.

This relationship contains an important teaching for the life of the Church, which must reach through the world of today; all relationships between man and woman must be inspired by them. The Church must learn how to capitalize on this wealth even more.⁴⁴

4.1- Marital Spirituality

The love of God and marital love comes from the same source, as they are part of the same Love. It is impossible to think that each one of us will discover what is the love of God, due to the attitudes of love that the other has towards him. Of course, the love of God surpasses our love as a couple. Always leaving

⁴⁴ Juan Pablo II, *Christifidelis Laici*, nº 52.

a small gap, a yearning for more, in the depths of our marital relationship. That emptiness is not the other's fault. Only the final encounter with total Love will fill this insatiable hunger for love that, inevitably, and no matter how much they love us, we all drag.

On the other hand, at the time of our sacramental marriage, we decided to walk together "a path of holiness, necessary to create manhood, more like true brothers".⁴⁵

Maybe we did not decide all consciously, it is possible that there was a lot of naivety on our part but there was also a lot of generosity. Manifested and developed from an initial attitude of trust. It is like someone who has a treasure chest, from which he can bring wonderful things throughout his life, but if he is not aware of having it or if he does not want to make the effort to open it, he may never discover that treasure.

The marital spirituality that we discover in the Teams of our Lady, is therefore the sense that we give to our daily life, the direction we take thru the events presented to us in our life, the options that we take, that we can simplify as the project of life that we build together. As a Christian couple we are contrasting that project with what the Word of God tells us.

That Word helps us to mold and purify our project to accommodate it more to God's will. Secondly, conjugal spirituality pushes us to seek the truth about ourselves and about our significant other. The fact of our extensive conversations when dating does not mean that we already live in the truth forever and that we already know each other completely.

The search for truth is a lifelong effort, we individually change in the process and our relation also changes over the years. The other is an invaluable point of reference for us, is sometimes the interpellant who unmasks so many self-justifications, is always the partner that is there in the self growth process, which helps us understand ourselves better and approach the Truth together.

The marital spirituality goal is to provide a greater communion, to a renewed encounter between us, done in equal parts of effort and creativity. Love

⁴⁵ Iceta, Vivir en pareja, 54.

is not just a feeling; it is also an adhesion of the deep will. Sometimes we do not feel that we love, but we know that we love and above all, we want to love.

We want our love to last, we want to overcome crises, we want to be faithful, and we want to live our sexuality, with quality and not in dissatisfaction or routine.

Marital spirituality is also embodied in all the simple and daily relationships that are established between us by the fact of being a man and a woman. "Marital spirituality receives its specificity from the sexual character of the sacrament of marriage."⁴⁶

Marital spirituality is therefore not something extraordinary in our life, but life in itself with a new focus.

The focus is to seek together the will, the truth and the communion with God. It may sound a bit scary, but everything is reached by successive steps, the important thing is that the ultimate goal is clear, and the pedagogy is appropriate. The orientations that the Movement proposes every 6 years, for example, point us to successive attitudes to understand spirituality.

All the spiritualities that exist in the Church ultimately have the same objective: to live according to the Spirit of Christ.

The specificity of each spirituality resides in the particular strength which it emphasizes this or that aspect, this or that attitude, and above all in the pedagogy, the methods that it uses. There is a close relationship between spirituality and pedagogy.

According to the pedagogy chosen, a different type of spirituality is created. The same type of spirituality is not obtained with an individualist pedagogy that with a community, inductive or deductive, oriented to communication or internalization.

Marital spirituality has a pedagogy based on communication, prayer, forgiveness and celebration.

This pedagogy that has been discovered by the Teams, has resulted in a proposal known as the Concrete Points of Effort –CPE-

- a) Listening to the Word of God.

⁴⁶ The Second Inspiration, nº 2.1.

- b) Personal prayer (meditation).
- c) The conjugal prayer.
- d) The sit-down.
- e) The rule of life.
- f) The annual retreat.

This pedagogy allows the couple to discover the conjugal spirituality, which is the heart of the Teams of Our Lady; its own essence.

The organization could be different, the pedagogy, the functions of its structure, the rules could be modified and the Teams of Our Lady would not be radically transformed; but if Marital spirituality was suppressed or replaced by another type of spirituality, for example one leave in a monastery or in celibacy. The Movement would be finished. Everything would lose its meaning: pedagogy, framing, obligations..., because the only meaning that all this have is its relation to Marital spirituality.⁴⁷

As stated above, we must be aware and convinced on the importance of marital spirituality, we will not embody it in our life as a couple, if we do not use the concrete points of effort suggested by Teams of Our Lady assiduously.

Without a method we will lose ourselves in the looseness of everything and we will remain in a declaration of good intentions.

Practicing as couples the teachings of the Teams of our Lady, we will understand the deep intention of each concrete point of effort, and it will make us grow as a couple.

The concrete points of effort require, from each of the spouses, as well as from the couple, a commitment that is sometimes difficult to acquire. They are not something that is imposed; and each one commits to practice them voluntarily. An individual alone would be tempted to abandon the effort; and this is why each one asks for the help and encouragement of their spouse and their respective team.

The specific points of effort are an invitation to:

- Listen assiduously "the Word of God".
- To meet daily with God in a meditation: "personal prayer".

⁴⁷ ENS - Padre Henri Caffarel: Destellos de su mensaje, 62.

- Pray as a couple, husband and wife each day: "marital prayers" and, if possible, as a family: "family prayer".
- Find each month the time to make a true conjugal dialogue: "the sit-down".
- Fix personal efforts: "the rule of life".
- Take "a retreat" every year.⁴⁸

All these concrete points of effort have a common denominator that underlies all of them to communication.

We often talk about what we do, seldom about what we think, and rarely about what we feel.

Learning to listen and to dialogue is an art that demands from us commitment, perseverance, and to follow certain rules etc. It also requires us to bring another spirit to begin our 'sittings', realizing that, even though we do not invoke it, the Lord is present between us. He helps us discover what we had kept in the depths of our hearts, what gives us strength to not let our hearts have rotting resentment and silence that causes us harm. It also gives us the tenderness to maintain a dialogue in which there is no lack of 'affection' – no lack of a loving look full of admiration and love for the other, with words that highlight all the good in our relationship.

The communication prepares us to better approach the prayer subject, because prayer is also a person-to-person dialogue with Jesus Christ. More important than the fact that we speak, is that we welcome and listen to the words of the One who loves us.

Marital prayer is not so much meditating on lofty themes or reading magnificent spiritual texts, but above all, going together to God and reflecting together before Him on the most important questions around our life and our marriage. Forgiveness by itself does not constitute one of the teachings of the Teams of Our Lady, but all the others concrete points of effort prepare us and bring us to it.

We have wounds in our life, made by the evil done unintentional, wounded by the inevitable crisis in our relation... We have to learn to forgive and ask for

⁴⁸ ENS, Guía de los ENS, 23.

forgiveness. Forgiven is also 'bringing the good' in our life. Many times, we tell the other what they have done wrong; conveniently to compensate for our own faults from time to time... The sacrament of reconciliation has little success today. However, our Catholic Church knows human nature well. Why not resort to that total certainty of feeling forgiven that the priest assures us on God's behalf?

The teams of Our Lady, by marking concrete times for the duties of sitting, praying, etc., point out how the importance of remembering those moments full of words, events and places. We forget to remember everything that the other has done for us and everything that has showed us his or her love.

How many times have you blocked feelings of withdrawal from our spouse by remembering moments of true union? Remembering is also to find ourselves with a greater intensity to compensate for the daily life that pushes us to carry out parallel activities, to propose a conversation, a date, an appointment, a walk, a small trip.

4.2- Give reason to other couples

Despite our lack of action and our passive character, God has chosen us to be the living presence of his love. Each Christian is a chosen to give testimony of the mission of true love.

Through baptism a Christian becomes an envoy to make salvation present among men.

The sacrament of marriage allows Christian couples to penetrate more deeply into the meaning of existence. The married couples are the seeds of transformation, the reference point of the encounter of men with everything as God has chosen them to be his image in the life journey searching for answers.⁴⁹

It is not about disseminating the Teams of our Lady so as they grow up as an international movement, nor about giving a moral or theological "guidance" about Christian marriage in the current time, but about giving a reason for what we live thanks to the Teams.

⁴⁹ Sarrias, Dios y Jesucristo en la literatura actual, 89.

To show that, despite our weaknesses, setbacks and falls as couples, marital spirituality has been fundamentally a source good news and union, making us happier and aware of our faith and closer to the others.

Our conjugal love can be "a witness to men, giving evident proof that Christ saved love".⁵⁰ We cannot give knowledge to other couples with the same words that are so often used in clerical documents and texts. These words and arguments give us security, but they neither convince nor attract us.

For many young and not-so-young couples it sounds like "the same as always". Nothing replaces our own reflection on what we have discovered, learned, lived, avoided, suffered and found.

Nothing should convince more than personal, free, and sincere, expression of authentic love. When a couple shows true love between them, gives an example of their goals; inviting others to imitate them.

We cannot be happy with what we have received since we are in the Teams and we think of ways to improve. Progressing as couples is already a lot. The law of the spiritual life is to give what has been received with the same measure which was given.

Let's not fool ourselves. The possibility of keeping to ourselves what we have discovered, what we have received in the Teams, does not exist.

Either we share it or we lose it. Only by sharing, we will continue to be a source of life to others and the movement.

If some other couple had not done the same with us, we would never have discovered the Teams of our Lady, neither the marital spirituality nor the tool that helps us to grow as couples.

Can we be reassured when there can be so many couples close to us who seek what we are living, so many couples to whom no one will give knowledge, if we do not do it ourselves?

⁵⁰ Carta fundacional, em: ENS, Guía de los ENS, 50.

4.3- Marital spirituality: the charisma of the Teams of Our Lady

The word 'charisma' comes from the Greek '*charisma*', which means 'free gift' and has the same root as the word '*charis*' which means 'grace', which is understood as a gift of the Spirit.

There are also exceptional graces, called charismas, gifts, that should be used for the common good.

As presented in the previous chapter:

In a Christian marriage, the life of the couple bears the mark of the sacrament, a profound sign of the reciprocal commitment of the spouses and a sign of the grace of God. Marital love finds its source in the love of God. Marital spirituality is born in the center of these two loves.

The desire to know and to do God's will in all the daily circumstances of life, and the search for his presence help to develop a deep marital spirituality. Divine love is expressed through human love in the daily life of the spouses, full of attention, care, fidelity, understanding, respect and harmony. When the simplest activities are impregnated with love, the Lord is there in the heart of the couple; Spirituality is then a live reality.

The married couple wants to live this spirituality day by day. However, it can be difficult at times, to live up to the daily demands of love. Couples make mistakes, cause injuries to the other spouse, and they need to move closer towards each other. It is precisely in those moments when Jesus is found.⁵¹

It is important to remember what Fr. Caffarel says: "The reason of the Movement, and its purpose, is to lead its members to the knowledge of marital spirituality and to practice it".⁵²

FOR REFLECTION

- 1) Almost all the team members, we recognize, remember having read or have referenced Alvaro and Mercedes Gómez Ferrer. What do you know about them?

⁵¹ ENS, Guía de los ENS, 14.

⁵² ENS - Padre Henri Caffarel: Destellos de su mensaje, 62.

- 2) Álvaro and Mercedes invite us to live the conjugal spirituality in everyday life. Is that how you live with your partner?
- 3) The pedagogy of the Teams of Our Lady, to live an authentic conjugal spirituality, is translated into the CPE. What are they for you and how do you live them?
- 4) The practice of the CPE is what allows the couple to give life to their relationship and the team itself. How much life do you give to your marriage and the team?
- 5) The charisma of the Teams of Our Lady is to live a conjugal spirituality. Do you consider that you are in the Teams of Our Lady or are you a team player? That is, do you really give testimony of the value of living the proposal of the Teams of Our Lady?

TABLE 5

MARITAL SPIRITUALITY IN THE GOSPEL



Christian spirituality is the set of inspirations and convictions that internally animate Christians in their relationship with God, as well as the set of reactions and expressions, both individual and collective, that concretize this relationship.

"Holy Scripture is the source of Christian spirituality and on it is based both the teaching of the Church and the liturgy. Thus, the Gospel is the cornerstone of all Christian spirituality".⁵³

It is important to remember that Christian spirituality is one, but as Christians are conditioned to particular or concrete circumstances, their experience of the Gospel will be made with a different mentality and modalities. Example: a spirituality of the middle age is identical to the one that is lived nowadays, only that it is announced in a different way to the people of today. (See: Table 2)

There is not and cannot be another legitimate and authentically Christian spirituality, if it is not inspired by the words and actions of Jesus and is complemented by the testimony given by the apostles.

St. Paul expressly warns that "no one can lay another foundation except that which has already been laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1Co 3,11), and St. Peter boldly affirmed before the Jewish Sanhedrin that "no other name has been given to us underneath from the heavens by which we can be saved" (Act 4,12).⁵⁴

⁵³ ENS, Camino de la vida espiritual en pareja, 22.

⁵⁴ Royo, Los grandes maestros de la vida espiritual, 3.

5.1 - The synoptic Gospels

The word Gospel, which translates as good news - from the Greek εὐ, "good or true" and ἀγγέλιον, "message" -, contains, according to the Christian faith, the narration of the words and actions of Jesus; that is, the life that is constituted in the good news of the fulfillment of the promise made by God to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob: the redemption of sin for all mankind through the death of his only Son: Jesus Christ.

Each one presents Jesus - the Christ - from a different point of view: Matthew to the Jews as their King, Mark to the Romans as a servant, Luke to the Greeks as the son of man and finally John to the believers, as the incarnate Word for all mankind.

The first three gospels - Matthew, Mark and Luke - are called synoptic, because they present the same general perspective of the life and preaching of Jesus - the Christ - from a common point of view. That is to say, they relate almost the same facts, coinciding in their narrations.

5.2 - Marital spirituality in the Gospels

Spirituality is to have God present in our existence, is to know ourselves driven by him to exist happily. It is an experience of shared life, of shared feelings and thoughts. It is discovering that we are not alone, that we have his help.

For us Christians that higher being with whom we can relate to make the existence is not an anonymous force or energy, but is a personal and concrete being that we know for its multiple manifestations of love in the history of its people and to our own personal story.

Through the Word of God and our prayers, is how we can know him. God told us "because I appreciate you, you are of great value and I love you. To have you and to save your life I give men and nations. Do not be afraid, for I am with you" (Is 43,4). His Son who is his visible image (Col 1,15) and has fully revealed it to us: "If you know me, you will also know my Father; and they know him from now on, since they have been seeing him" (Jn 14,7).

God is also a personal being who knows us because he is the creator of our life, and we believe that he created us in his image and likeness: "*Lord, You*

have examined me and you know me; you know all my actions; even from a distance you realize what I think. You know all my adventures; you know everything I do!" (Ps 139,1-3).

In this order of ideas, for us Christians, spirituality is to let that self that infinitely transcends itself to fill us with his presence and allow us to open ourselves totally to live in communion with him. Spirituality is living open to God who is love (1Jn 4,8) and who therefore wants the best for us.

To live the spirituality in marriage is to live fully open to the God of life, is to let him be present in our union, as the result of our decision and feelings.

To live the spirituality of marriage is to live surrendering ourselves to our spouse and trying to grow mutually in daily routine; it is not to lose sight of the fact that in the life received and given by the two of them, Christ's love for his Church is present, in the context of faith and of the relation with God on a daily basis.

It is important to insist on this way of understanding marital spirituality, so as not to confuse it with religious acts only and exclusively, since not infrequently these do not have a spiritual attitude.

In other words, by going to church a couple is not spiritual, but the need to make the center of their life and actions the love of God. Given God the power to transcend in our life, in a divine sense, to what seems ordinary and mundane. It is to elevate to the divine sense what is extremely human: un-selfishness.

The spirituality of the sacrament of marriage is to make us understand that this relationship of the husband and the wife, and vice versa, places us in the first vocation of man: to love.

The ritual of the celebration marriage in one of his prefaces says:

The man, created by your kindness, dignified him so much, that you have left the image of your own love in the union of the man and the woman. The one you created for love and you call for love, you allow him to participate in your eternal love. And, thus, the sacrament of this betrothal, sign of your charity, celebrates human love, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Love is the origin of man. Love is a constant call. Love has its

fullness in heaven. The love of man and woman is sanctified in the sacrament of marriage and becomes the mirror of eternal love.⁵⁵

That is why a couple who wants to have a full life cannot ignore the presence of God in their life and in their marriage. When a couple evades the spiritual aspects, ends up drowning in the sparing human possibilities; ends up failing before the inescapable presence of the disagreements, the anguish of the problems of the daily life; attached to the limiting conditions of their instincts and impulses.

Many of the negative marital experiences can only be overcome if they are brought to the action of God that motivates forgiveness, devotion and generosity. Spirituality manifests as a “plus” that helps couples to move past bad experiences. Not to supplant the daily struggle, but to give a vivifying impulse.

Therefore, spirituality is expressed in the whole life, in the most common daily actions and in the sublime moments of the Church's liturgy.

The Teams of Our Lady invite everyone to listen daily to the word of God, devoting time to read a passage of the Bible, in particular of the Gospels and to meditate on it in silence, in order to better understand what God has says through the Scriptures.⁵⁶

The spouses are invited to take time to pray not only individually, but also as a couple to ask for help and blessing for each other in their daily life. In this way, prayer as a couple becomes powerful, because it is the “domestic Church” celebrating its existential liturgy and allowing itself to be filled by the healing presence of God.

In fact, a prayer is built from unity, forgiveness, where different opinions are understood and lived and accepted; new perspectives are received to develop new projects; the heart is nourished with new strength; the serenity and patience to be able to live together is received. Hence, the Christian couple has to make prayer one of their best daily practices.

The assiduous listening of the "Word of God" allows the members of the teams of our Lady, not only to know God, but mainly to take guidance in the Gospel. The Word makes each member of the couple come into direct

⁵⁵ Jiménez, Matrimonio: comunidad de vida y amor, 31

⁵⁶ ENS, Guía de los ENS, 24.

contact with the person of Christ. This personal contact is the pillar of all spiritual life since "Ignorance of the Scriptures is the ignorance of Christ" (John Paul II).⁵⁷

Therefore, it is evident the relevance of reading and revising some biblical texts, to clarify some central elements of the spiritual experience of marriage. And although there are many texts that can help understand the spirituality of the Christian couple, only three will be addressed, addressing their existential aspect.

- **1Corinthians 13,1-8a**

I could already speak the tongues of men and angels; if I do not have charity, I am like bronze that sounds or cymbal that retires. I could already have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all science or have a faith capable of moving mountains; if I do not have charity, I am nothing. I could already distribute all my goods, and even give my body to the flames; if I do not have charity, nothing benefits me. Charity is patient and kind; charity is not envious, it is not boastful or proud; it is decorous; he does not seek his interest; do not get irritated; he does not take evil into account; he does not rejoice in injustice; he is happy with the truth. Everything excuses. Everything he believes. Everything waits. Everything supports it. Charity will never end.

The context in which this text is found, allows us to understand that the central idea that governs it relates to the Gifts of the Spirit. In the text, you can see how Paul has been doing an exposition highlighting some of the gifts from the Spirit of God to man; and how despite diverse gifts, unity is not lost.

In this sense, spiritual love, if it is a gift from God, which must be requested by the couple prayers to the Owner of our lives.

However, this does not rule out that it is also considered a task for each of the spouses, who will have to give their best to perform it and thus be able to build a love with the characteristics proposed in the text.

It is important to highlight the need to ask for the gift of love to the Spirit of God, because many times we believe ourselves alone in the task of loving and we forget that the Lord can give us a hand.

⁵⁷ ENS, Guía de los ENS, 24.

That should be one of the reasons for the couple's prayer: ask the Lord to provide them with its loving presence.

In a couple's experience, they are both those who love and those who are kind, humble, fair, sincere, patient and therefore able to excuse everything, believe everything, wait for everything and endure everything endures. That is why "charity will never end".

And for that reality, love to reach its fullness, one needs the decisive and dedicated commitment of both. And it is very important that this is in the daily sharing of the couple, where there are so many difficult situations with which you have to live.

- **Romans 12,1.9-18**

I urge you, then, brothers, by the mercy of God, to offer yourselves as a living sacrifice, holy and pleasing to God... May your charity not be feigned; stop evil and adhere to good; Love each other cordially, esteeming each other more. Be diligent and avoid negligence. Serve the Lord with fervent spirit. Rejoice in the hope you share; do not give up before the tribulations and persevere in prayer. Share the needs of the saints and practice hospitality. Charity with all men, even if they are enemies. Bless those who persecute you; do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Have the same feeling for each other. Do not be arrogant; lean rather on the humble. Do not be complacent in your own wisdom. Do not return to anyone evil for evil; seek well for all men. Whenever possible, and as far as you depend, live in peace with everyone.

This text is found in the exhortatory part of the letter that Paul sent to the Christians of Rome. It contains very precise advice for all Christians and that can be applied in a particular way by the spouses.

For example, in order for our life to be a pleasing offering to God, the apostle invites us to convert, to change the paradigms of the old man, that is, those of the world, into assume those of the new man, that is, those of Jesus - the Christ: "Do not be complacent in your own wisdom", because in many marriages today there is a lack of spirituality, because their members behave in

a selfish, utilitarian, offensive and even humiliating way, because they keep their own interests and seem to be the criteria of the present.

These criteria clash with the essence of being a sacramental couple, which ends in the end, ending with it, because they are criteria that run contrary to the nature of the human couple.

To live in the manner of Jesus, supposes a total change, a transformation of the whole man, of his thoughts, of his words, of his actions. That is, an integral transformation. Hence the importance of prayer, which allows both the individual and the couple, to find the impulse given by the Spirit to achieve the much longed for holiness. But as long as the heart of man does not change, it is very difficult for the life to be better.

That is why anyone who wants to live spiritually their relationship, the first thing they have to do is convert their heart to God, because only God influence in to our hearts to do his will, which is good, perfect and pleasant.

Undoubtedly, what Paul says in this text, it serves every human who wants their relationships with others to be healthy and prosperous; but for the couple's relationship, it is very precise, because it insists on a positive and constant attitude which you have to live with. An attitude that loathes the bad and pursues the good is without a doubt a quality that allows many conflicts to be resolved, especially when by habit we act without thinking causing discomfort to the other.

Whoever says he loves us should give clear signs that he does not want to harm us and that he does not want anything bad for us, otherwise it will be very difficult to believe him. The respect that the apostle proposes is very important in any relationship, but much more within the marriage, because nobody wants to feel mistreated or humiliated.

Being optimistic and positive in the face of painful situations of the present life and the difficulties that may arise in the future, is an invitation to believe in the Lord and not to doubt his Words, in which he promises to be always with us and act on our behalf.

- **Ephesians 5, 21-32**

Be submissive to one another, out of respect for Christ: a woman to their husbands, as to the Lord, because the husband is the head of the woman, as Christ is head of the Church, the savior of the body. Since the Church is submissive to Christ, so must women be to their husbands in everything. Husbands love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself for her, to sanctify her, purifying her by the bath of water and the strength of the word, and presenting her resplendent to himself, without spot or wrinkle or thing similar, but holy and immaculate. This is how husbands should love their wives, as well as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. Because no one ever hates his own flesh; rather, he feeds and cares for her with love, as does Christ to the Church, since we are members of his body. That is why the man will leave his father and mother and will join his wife, and the two will become flesh. Great mystery is this; I say it about Christ and the Church.

In any sacramental celebration, this reading is generally proposed. It emphasizes how the relationship should be. In it, Paul insists on practical questions of the daily life of a community. For him it is very important that the believer shows in his life what he believes. And in this context, what is related to the family duties of the Christian and more specific to the spousal duties.

From the relationship of Christ with the Church, the relationship between spouses is understood. The human relationship of a couple is assumed as a sacrament (see Table 3) of the relationship of the Lord with his body, which is the Church.

That is to say, that the spouses with their love make present the divine love of Christ. It is in this context of intimacy, of immense love, of reciprocity, that we must read the text to avoid any unrealistic view.

It is necessary to read taking into account the requested reciprocity: "Be submissive to one another, out of respect for Christ". In this way women will be subject to their husbands, as to the Lord, while husbands should love their wives as Christ did with the Church. It is a two-way relationship, of shared commitments, of a double invitation.

It is not possible that society has to be founded in the quicksand of ephemeral and unstable relationships, because without true and happy marriages that live their sacrament, we will not reach the healthy and just society that humanity longs for.

FOR REFLECTION

- 1) Christian spirituality has as its main reference Jesus, the Christ. How much do you know about Him through assiduous reading of the Word?
- 2) A good reference of conjugal spirituality is the Emmaus story. That shared experience of realizing that the Lord accompanies us, how does it appear in your life?
- 3) The text of 1Corinthians 13,1-8a, invites us to reflect on the importance of charity. How did you experience this in your marriage experience?
- 4) The text of Romans 12,1.9-18, invites to reach what by definition should be a human. What do you still need to work to achieve this goal with your partner?
- 5) The text of Ephesians 5,21-32 has raised controversy in various areas. How do you understand what Paul describes here?

TABLE 6

MARITAL SPIRITUALITY IN THE CHURCH TEACHING



Teaching is defined as the "teaching and government that the teacher exercises with his disciples"⁵⁸ and, in the context of the Catholic Church, is understood as the "authority in matters of dogma and moral exercise the pope and bishops".⁵⁹ Hence the importance of addressing the topic of conjugal spirituality from this perspective.

Because as it was seen in Table nº 5:

It is indisputable that the life of the Church is moved from its beginnings by the Spirit of God who animates, gives life to his Word and works; This Spirit has allowed the Church to remain alive and strengthened despite the passage of time as the definitive presence of the Risen One in the world.⁶⁰

It is precisely from this experience that the Church has the mission to teach and accompany permanently the life of faith of believers and those who have made the decision to become Christians. Because "all the faithful, Christians, of any condition and state, strengthened with so many and so powerful means of salvation, are called by the Lord, each one on his way, to the perfection of that holiness with which the Father himself is perfect".⁶¹

⁵⁸ Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy. Website of the Royal Spanish Language Academy. Consultation held on 28 July 2016. <<http://www.rae.es>>.

⁵⁹ Idem.

⁶⁰ Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 16.

⁶¹ Concilio Vaticano II, *Lumen Gentium*, Nº 11.

6.1- The vocation of man to holiness in marriage

Holiness is a theme that displeases in the extreme. Some even refer to it with contempt and disdain. The last thing they would like to be is "a saint" or a "sanctified" man. However, the issue does not need to be treated in this way. He is not an enemy; he is a friend.⁶²

Holiness is not a privilege of a few chosen, but a quality that distinguishes not only God, but the man who is called by God to fulfill his will. "Be holy in all your conduct as the Scripture says: You will be holy, because I am holy" (1Pet 1,15).

Holiness is a path proposed to the believer who does not live in an extraordinary way, that is, outside the everyday life, but at work, at home, in the small and simple life, or requires great work to achieve holiness. It is in the midst of daily life that the life of the Son of God, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, becomes present; the trinity in the life of men is present in the service and docility, even in the difficulties of living.⁶³

With the purpose of reaching, as Fr. Henri Caffarel said: "Holiness, neither more nor less"⁶⁴ through marriage, it must be cultivated, with the guidance of the Holy Spirit, living the four graces or gifts given to the couple married in the sacrament: irradiation, elevation, healing and fertility. (See Table nº 3)

In the particular case of a Christian couple, the spouses:

Following their own path, through fidelity in love, they must sustain each other in grace throughout their lives... in this way they offer to all the example of a tireless and generous love, contribute to the establishment of fraternity in charity and they become witnesses and collaborators of the fecundity of the mother Church, as a symbol and participation of that love with which Christ loved his Bride and gave Himself for her.⁶⁵

The Christian vocation to marriage can be lived from the call that God makes to man to listen to his Word to do his will, from the response of man to this call and the ability to live this community response in practice. Each of these

⁶² Ryle, Santidad, 39.

⁶³ Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 20.

⁶⁴ ENS, Guía de los ENS, 8.

⁶⁵ Concilio Vaticano II, *Lumen Gentium*, nº 41.

shapes the way of being saints from marriage and makes holiness visible in the life of the spouses.⁶⁶

The man completely open to holiness is able to discover that the Christian vocation is a call to love, but that it is not only or exclusively human but divine. Marriage is part of this reality and from there it is possible to consider the relationship that exists between love of Christ and conjugal love. This dynamic understanding allows the exercise of an apostolate that enriches the sacramental dimension of marriage and makes it possible to recognize the delicate and loving step of God in the midst of the couple.⁶⁷

As proposed by Saint John Paul II:

The Second Vatican Council has pronounced highly enlightened words about the universal vocation to holiness. It can be said that precisely this call has been the fundamental slogan entrusted to all the sons and daughters of the Church, by a Council convened for the evangelical renewal of the Christian life. This slogan is not a simple moral exhortation, but an irrefutable demand for the mystery of the Church.⁶⁸

It can be considered then, that holiness has one of its most sublime expressions in marriage, especially when the couple who live the sacrament, is aware that:

They are mutually for themselves, for their children and for the rest of the family, cooperators of grace and witnesses of the faith. God calls you to father and care. For this reason, the family "has always been the closest hospital". Let's heal, support and stimulate each other, and let's live it as part of our family spirituality. Life as a couple is a participation in the fruitful work of God, and each one is for the other a permanent provocation of the Spirit. The love of God is expressed "through the living and concrete words with which man and woman declare their conjugal love". Thus, both are reflections of divine love that consoles with the word, the look, the help, the caress, the hug. Therefore, "wanting to form a family is encouraged to be part of God's dream, is encouraged to dream about him,

⁶⁶ See: Miranda, *Espiritualidad Matrimonial y familiar*, 107.

⁶⁷ Aristizabal, *Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II*, 20.

⁶⁸ Juan Pablo II, *Christifideles Laici*, N° 16.

is encouraged to build with him, and is encouraged to play with him this story of building a world where no one feels alone".⁶⁹

For the Church, holiness is not an element that adds to the Christian vocation; it is at the root of all human experience when it is on its way to God. For this reason, it is important to emphasize its value within the experience of the sacrament which has the requirement of a life willing to live the ineffable, the transcendent.

Christian marriage as all the sacramental life of the Church is called to holiness, in such a way that those who want to unite through the sacrament are deeply challenged to live holiness radically for their good and that of the whole Church, bearing witness to the love of God as couples and likewise they respond to the most original of their Christian vocation.⁷⁰

The Second Vatican Council invites us to live holiness from the person of Jesus, which is, in an incarnated way, never separated from the world, immersed in the history of each man and woman believer, with the purpose of living holiness with the concerns and the joys that are experienced in everyday life. This new way of understanding the Christian life does not distinguish between the sacred and the profane, with which the neo-testamentary character of the call to a life immersed in God and his mercy is recovered.⁷¹

Hence:

When the Second Vatican Council referred to the apostolate of the laity, it highlighted the spirituality that springs from family life. He said that the spirituality of the laity "must assume peculiar characteristics due to the state of marriage and family" and that family concerns should not be something alien to "their spiritual lifestyle". Then it is worthwhile to pause briefly to describe some fundamental notes of this specific spirituality that develops in the dynamism of the relationships of family life.⁷²

Such a disposition of the Council about Christian holiness motivates the construction of a more human world, in which the life of the human being

⁶⁹ Francisco, *Amoris Laetitia*, N° 321.

⁷⁰ Aristizabal, *Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II*, 22.

⁷¹ See: Vigil, *Vivir el Concilio*, 49.

⁷² Francisco, *Amoris Laetitia*, N° 313.

responds to their deepest and most fulfilling desires and demands, making it possible to visualize that the couple can preserve their lives by allowing them to receive of holiness.⁷³

6.2- Marital spirituality from the Second Vatican Council

The Second Vatican Council gave priority to the view of the relationship of man with the Church and the world, as the basis for the experience of faith; for this reason, when addressing the question of conjugal spirituality within the magisterium starting from Vatican II, it can only be understood from the human being to understand the way such spirituality contributes to an intense and dignifying experience of the sacrament of marriage.

Marriage spirituality is associated with the values and aspects that constitute the plot of married life, at the same time that assumes the duties and obligations of the spouses among themselves, as well as the relationships between them, where conjugal love is found in the concrete life, is incarnated and manifested in different moments and aspects that form the life and history of the couple, making this a genuine reflection of the love of Christ.⁷⁴

It is then seen that the sacrament of marriage cannot be separated from the spiritual experience, since it is inserted in the daily life of the couple. This is what the Council points out when expressing that each couple wishing to live the marriage as a sacrament, should give testimony of their experience of love and life before the Church and society.

The spirituality lived by the spouses is marked by the realization of their personal projects that tune in with the will of God, making real experiences such as achieving professional studies, sharing with friends, having moments of recreation, among other aspects that are part of the sacramental life.⁷⁵

It should be noted that for Saint John Paul II:

The human body, with its sex, and with its masculinity and femininity, seen in the very mystery of creation, is not only a source of fecundity and

⁷³ Idem, 50.

⁷⁴ See: Miranda, *Espiritualidad Matrimonial y familiar*, 50.

⁷⁵ Aristizabal, *Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II*, 24.

procreation, as in all natural order, but includes from "the beginning" the attribute "nuptial", that is, the ability to express love: that love precisely in which the person-person becomes a gift and - through this gift - realizes the very meaning of his being and existence.⁷⁶

In this sense, the Council presents marriage as an intimate community of life and love created by God and guided by his will, having as a principle and central axis personal and irrevocable consent.

In this way, marriage as a sacrament is not motivated by a human act, but it is God who gives it origin and who has allowed the existence of goods and ends that enable well-being both in the couple and in the family, so that a couple united by the sacrament, is constituted by extension, a source of hope and faith for a society increasingly convulsed and complex.

Prior to the Council, the development of the person that is achieved within the sacrament of marriage, was considered as a purpose, but now two fundamental connotations that are the delivery and mutual acceptance of the spouses,⁷⁷ with which:

It is recognized that the sacred bond is possible from the human freedom that God accompanies and has its manifestation in the firm desire of the spouses to give their consent to want to live as an authentic community of love in the daily life of the home, a place to give gifts deposited in the marriage and taking it to the human fullness of the couple.⁷⁸

In this way it is understood that the stability of marriage is not only God's responsibility, it depends on each spouse the daily review of his response to love, if it is possible to conclude that the dignity and stability - desired by God - that is reached between a Man and a woman, materialized in concrete acts of conjugal love, because that is where you can find the maximum expression of the union between a man and a woman.

That is why Christian spouses, in order to fulfill their state duties with dignity, are fortified and consecrated by a special sacrament, by virtue of which, in fulfilling their conjugal and family mission, imbued with the spirit of Christ, which saturates their whole life of faith, hope and charity, come

⁷⁶ Juan Pablo II, Audiencia general del miércoles 16 de enero de 1980, Nº 1.

⁷⁷ See: Kasper, Teología del matrimonio cristiano, 24.

⁷⁸ Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 25.

more and more to their own perfection and to their mutual sanctification, and, therefore, together, to the glorification of God.⁷⁹

The conjugal sacramental union brings together the desire for the union of the couple, which is materialized in a clear decision to deliver and share life with that of the spouse and that is where the search for God becomes real, because the fragility begins to be discovered before the adversities of life or enjoying the spiritual and material well-being of it, but always ready to be welcomed in the encounter with God.

Hence:

Love is expressed and perfected singularly with the action proper to marriage. For this reason, the acts with which the spouses are intimately and chastely united to each other are honest and worthy, and, executed in a truly human way, they mean and favor the reciprocal gift, with which they mutually enrich themselves in a climate of joyful gratitude.

This love, ratified by mutual fidelity and, above all, by the sacrament of Christ, is indissolubly faithful, in body and mind, in prosperity and in adversity, and, therefore, all adultery and divorce are excluded from it.

The obligatory recognition of the equal personal dignity of man and woman in mutual and full love also clearly demonstrates the unity of marriage confirmed by the Lord.

In order to face the obligations of this Christian vocation with constancy, an outstanding virtue is required; That is why the spouses, invigorated by grace for the life of holiness, will cultivate firmness in love, magnanimity of heart and spirit of sacrifice, asking them assiduously in prayer.⁸⁰

For the above, it is highlighted that the encounter in married life where mutual donation, gratitude and joy are not an ideal but are characteristics that preserve the unity of the couple in a solid way, even within the disagreement of each spouse.

Hence, marriage to be honest, whole and exemplary, must have real problems before which the desire to maintain unity and fidelity becomes evident, as virtues that enable them to live a holy life that responds to this sacrament of Christ.

⁷⁹ Concilio Vaticano II, *Gaudium et Spes*, N° 48.

⁸⁰ Concilio Vaticano II, *Gaudium et Spes*, N° 49.

The Second Vatican Council opened the horizon of the sacrament to be lived as a profoundly human experience far from the reductionism of a juridical view "sustained by a contractual relationship in which those involved in such a relationship, man and woman had already defined and delimited all their roles, that is, rights and obligations",⁸¹ a circumstance that impeded the integral comprehension of the conjugal reality in which the experience of mercy must overcome any precept or norm that consigns and regulates it.

In this way, the marriage covenant is oriented towards the formation of a community of life and love, which for the Council are the foundation and soul of married life and its spirituality.

Therefore, it can be affirmed that love is the good of the whole person, who, associated with both the human and the divine, leads the spouses to a mutual and free donation of themselves expressed in acts and affections.

This love is perfected in the exercise of sexuality, where the self-donation and the event that nurtures and enriches spirituality⁸² and is presented as an occasion for sanctification.

FOR REFLECTION

- 1) When speaking of teaching, it is understood as the authority exercised by the Pope and the Bishops in matters of dogma and morals. In this regard, about the sacrament of marriage, what do you think it is they who offer such a teaching if they have never been married?
- 2) The Pope and the Bishops are people who have had family experience. His closest referent of marriage is that of his parents. Do not you think this could be a good argument to be able to exercise your teaching?
- 3) It is clear that God makes a call to man and woman to reach holiness. Have you thought about how your marriage experience helps the priest to also live his sacrament and reach holiness?

⁸¹ Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 27.

⁸² Caravias, Matrimonio y familia a la luz de la Biblia, 60.

- 4) One of the priorities of the Second Vatican Council is the strengthening of the Church. How do you contribute to this purpose from the experience of a conjugal spirituality that allows the construction and strengthening of a domestic Church?
- 5) The text states that the love expressed by the spouses is strengthened by the exercise of their sexuality. How do you understand that this intimate encounter is presented as an occasion for the sanctification of the couple?

TABLE 7

CONYUGAL SPIRITUALITY IN OUR TRADITIONS



When reference is made to tradition, those elements that have been conserved and transmitted through generations between parents and children are thought. A definition that is not very different from a religious perspective, since it is understood as "each of the teachings or doctrines transmitted orally or in writing from ancient times, or the set of them."⁸³

It is noteworthy that this concept is found on many occasions, linked to the authority, because the so-called 'argument of authority', "is based on the prestige and credit of another person, instead of resorting to facts or reasons";⁸⁴ in this way, authority is based on tradition.

And "although authority and tradition are elements that are closely linked in reference to the idea of heteronomy, which contradicts the ideal of an experience of freedom such as autonomy",⁸⁵ however, these concepts are presented as necessary at the moment of to approach the topic of conjugal spirituality from the perspective of the sacrament of marriage, because in this case the tradition offered by the Church is not only an authority "but an authority from which we cannot emancipate ourselves, because it is the land on which they are rooted our roots. The consecrated to the tradition has an authority that has become anonymous, an authority that determines our historical and finite being".⁸⁶

⁸³ Dictionary of the Royal Spanish Academy. Website of the Royal Spanish Language Academy. Consultation held on 29 June 2016. <<http://www.rae.es>>.

⁸⁴ Idem.

⁸⁵ Mahecha, Teología y educación ambiental: invitación urgente a un nuevo dialogo, 71.

⁸⁶ Alcaín, La tradición, 104.

However, when we talk about tradition here, it should not be understood as synonymous with an uncritical compliance of expressions and behaviors to be repeated, but rather that of what has been given to us over time, as a valuable heritage "whose identity has been challenged, to assume the commitment to understand themselves and again to themselves, achieving something more in line with the way of existing of the human being",⁸⁷ as is the case of Christianity that is legitimized by recourse to a tradition that was developed from the key reference to Jesus of Nazareth.⁸⁸

One example is the evocation of Holy Week, which recalls not only the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, where he celebrated the Last Supper with his disciples, but also recalls the great event of the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. This is a special and representative sample of the Christian tradition, which is kept alive thanks to the Word that is incarnated in the customs of a community.⁸⁹

However, the traditions are not kept complete and are adapted to the needs, interests and / or convenience of some people or communities, generally imposing the history of the winner.

A sample is what was proposed in Table nº 1, when reference was made to the version of Luke who tells the geographical outline of the expansion of Christianity. He states that

It begins in Jerusalem; it advances through the northern basin of the Mediterranean, until it finally arrives in Rome. In this way he presents us with a line of primitive Christianity, the one that had the most historical success and that, to a greater extent, conditioned the later history, but he says nothing about the Christian lines that extended to the east and to the north of Africa.⁹⁰

Likewise, other examples could be pointed out where the first Christians assume the rites of fasting and prayer - which currently begin with Ash Wednesday - suggested for Lent and that constitute requirements for the

⁸⁷ Mahecha, Teología y educación ambiental: invitación urgente a un nuevo dialogo, 71.

⁸⁸ Aguirre, Así empezó el cristianismo, 14.

⁸⁹ Mahecha, Teología y educación ambiental: invitación urgente a un nuevo dialogo, 71.

⁹⁰ Aguirre, El proceso de surgimiento del cristianismo, en: Así empezó el cristianismo, 18.

celebration of Holy Week,⁹¹ which had their origins in the Jewish practices expressed in the case of fasting in Deuteronomy 14,14-21 and Leviticus 11,1-47 and of the prayer in Deuteronomy 8,10.

In some Latin American countries, until about 40 or 50 years ago, it was traditional for houses and mirrors to be covered with a purple or black canvas, while people dressed in dueling clothes.

Even, inspired by the Jewish tradition of Shabbat, the work related to the cleaning of the house and the preparation of food was made in advance with the purpose of dedicating themselves to the rituals of the so-called Greater Week.

This implied a moderation in the behavior of people, who through recollection and prayer, avoided even such daily activities as listening to music, attending movies or going for a walk.⁹²

For the Judeo-Christian tradition, conjugal spirituality is inspired by texts such as the letter sent by Saint Paul to the community of Ephesus, where "women are subject to their husbands" (Eph 5:22). However, it is clear that

Saint Paul expresses himself here in cultural categories typical of that era, but we must not assume that cultural garb, but rather the revealed message that underlies the whole periscope.

Let us return to the wise explanation of St. John Paul II: "Love excludes all kinds of submission, by virtue of which the woman would become a servant or slave of the husband... The community or unity that they should form through marriage it realizes through a reciprocal donation, which is also a mutual submission". That is why it is also said that "husbands should love their wives as their own bodies" (Eph 5,28).⁹³

This allows us to understand the need to accompany this particular experience, as is the experience of a conjugal spirituality, for which we will turn to the way it has been done from a pastoral perspective.

⁹¹ Refraining from eating red meat was one of the most deeply rooted traditions within Christianity. However, nowadays it is something that is not only left to the conscience of each one, but also that one no longer knows why such a practice of yesteryear.

⁹² Currently, there is talk of a Holy Week vacation in reference to the Major Week. This implies a different way of thinking and relating to God, which surely will not be against rest, because "on the seventh day God ceased every task he had done" (Gen 2,2), but he also calls for a time to love him "with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your strength" (Deut 6,5).

⁹³ Francisco, *Amoris Laetitia*, nº 156.

7.1- The pastoral of the sacrament of marriage

Today we are faced with a generational change of which the marriage dynamics are also participants, because they are immersed in the innovative challenges that come with the new compositions of society, the role of children within the home, the new possibilities given to the woman, the structural changes of the family at demographic, political, religious level.

It requires a greater dialogue on the part of the Church in order to be able to discern between these and many changes that are taking place, sometimes in an accelerated manner and that affect marriage positively or negatively.⁹⁴

This is a reality, experiencing the change that has brought about a new system of premarital relationships in which spontaneity and freedom predominate, love and eroticism, pleasure and immediate enjoyment, intimacy and affection, equality and the interchangeability, which has produced a change in the way of understanding and living the marriage.⁹⁵

Marriage is deeply challenged by novelty, that is, new conceptions about the life of courtship, couples who live together before marriage, the vulnerability of a couple's life, the culture of the renewable, of the interchangeable, they make the genuine sense of fascination and admiration for the other as well as the sense of freedom and commitment lose their meaning and be replaced by these distortions of love.⁹⁶

However, in many couples the desire to join the sacrament through marriage persists, even though their faith formation is very precarious, causing couples to seek the sacrament without having sufficient conviction to live a union in the Lord through the Church, situation that shows that despite the profound changes in society and secularization has not been able to denaturalize, distort or eradicate the institution of marriage.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 74.

⁹⁵ See: Borobio, La pastoral de los sacramentos, 262.

⁹⁶ Idem, 264.

⁹⁷ Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 75.

In this way, marriage understood not as a concrete and limited event in time, but as an experience that lasts as long as the couple wants, has had to face not having to abandon the "marital signifier";⁹⁸ that is, that understanding that the couple has about corporeality and humanity, sex and Eros, passion and love, the mystery of freedom and generative capacity.

However, with the passage of time, new generations have anticipated marriage the experience of their sexuality, and even their generative capacity, so that sometimes opens the way to debauchery.⁹⁹

However, despite this panorama of profound changes in marital signifiers, we can appreciate the 'experiential permanent' from which couples cannot escape, as is all that is part of a conjugal experience that contains a series of elements such as dissatisfaction in the relationship that always motivates a creative capacity in terms of dialogue and sexuality, the recognition that the couple hides a mystery, being attentive to both life and death, open to family relationships that generate uncertainty but also hope and in turn the recognition of frailty, because we enjoy both health and illness, joys and sorrows.¹⁰⁰

On the other hand, it is necessary to keep in mind the necessary contents for the preparation to the sacrament of marriage, which is in tune with both the Code of Canon Law, the Catechism of the Church and the rituals prepared for the experience of this sacramental experience. This makes it possible to take into account the need for formation in the couple, on the eve of the communal celebration of the sacrament, because it is evident the lack of sense of union with God that couples who wish to marry have lost, especially in these last times.¹⁰¹

Marriage pastoral is sustained from evangelization and must start with the kerygma -first announcement-, from a personal and living encounter with Jesus Christ, through the experience of the Spirit; the radical change of life and the effective and affective feeling of belonging to the Church.¹⁰²

⁹⁸ See: Borobio, La pastoral de los sacramentos, 265.

⁹⁹ Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 75.

¹⁰⁰ See: Borobio, La pastoral de los sacramentos, 265.

¹⁰¹ Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 75.

¹⁰² See: Borobio, La pastoral de los sacramentos, 273.

Likewise, a catechesis is required on the Christian doctrine about marriage, where a creatural foundation is incorporated, that is, to look back to the origins, where God the Creator is the foundation and origin of the community of life and love.

In this way, a view from Christology allows us to identify Jesus as a foundation within the paschal covenant; from the perspective of Ecclesiology, it can be approached from the community sense of the celebration of the sacrament; and also from the Pneumatology, through the bond of love and unity.¹⁰³

7.2- The importance of preparation for the sacrament

The time of the courtship is considered as a moment of reciprocal discovery, in which a deepening in the experience of faith is experienced both personally and interpersonally, which promotes all human dimensions and structures the actions of couples from love in all the areas where it occurs, be it home, work, school, among others.

This is a very delicate stage, since it can be affected by the misuse of corporality, where pornography, prostitution and other human experiences do not favor the maturation of a love that makes the mutual promise to accept their union through the Sacrament of marriage.

For this reason, it is that in the stage of courtship an authentic deepening in the faith is necessary, which allows experiencing the future of the spouses.

Preparation for marriage is a providential and privileged moment for those who are oriented towards this Christian sacrament and a Kairos, that is, a time in which God interpellates the couple and leads them to discernment about the married vocation and life in which it introduces. Courtship enters the context of a dense process of evangelization.¹⁰⁴

Therefore, the help of the respective families, as well as of the entire ecclesial community, is required so that the couple, supported in prayer, can grow

¹⁰³ See: Misioneros del Sagrado Corazón. "Praenotanda: La importancia y la dignidad del Sacramento del Matrimonio", en: <http://www.mscperu.org/liturgia/praenotanda/prenMatrimon.htm>. Consulta realizada el 6/07/2016.

¹⁰⁴ López, Preparación al sacramento del matrimonio, nº 2.

in the faith and discover the different gifts given through the sacrament (Table nº 3) and thus be able to recognize that the commitment they face is not something superfluous, or transient, but on the contrary, it is the fundamental element that constitutes all the matrimonial reality that will later be celebrated and live throughout life.

The wealth of marriage acquires a decisive prominence from the period of courtship, hence a particular strength in the formation and maturation of the faith at this stage is required, as well as the evaluation of programs, policies, plans among others that are organized for the formation in the faith of the couple that will favor a suitable human climate for the preparation of the couples to the matrimonial sacrament and first of all the service and the help to the others.

For this, it is important to observe at least two important stages, which, although not properly classified, constitute the essential nuclei of the preparation for the matrimonial sacrament: remote preparation and close preparation.

- **Early preparation**

The early preparation is linked to the constant attention in the formation of human and Christian values within the family, that is to say, the human value is estimated, the strengthening of the self-esteem, the character formation, the self-control and the management of interpersonal relationships, as well as the time to train in values, among which we can highlight the one of chastity.¹⁰⁵

It is important to note that chastity is not related to the cancellation of sexual life, but on the contrary, the discovery and appreciation of our feelings and our body.

Think, for example, of a couple who due to an accident, illness or simply to reach an age where physiologically the body does not respond in the same way as in youth, but where love, love and respect become protagonists of the relationship.

Seen in this way, the early preparation:

Covers childhood and adolescence and takes place above all in the family and also in the school and training groups, valuable help from the former.

¹⁰⁵ See: Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 81.

It is the period in which it is transmitted and how the esteem of every authentic human value is recorded, both in interpersonal and social relations, with what it entails for the formation of character, self-control and self-esteem, the straight use of inclinations and respect for people also of the other sex. In addition, especially for the Christian, a solid spiritual and catechetical formation is required.¹⁰⁶

- **The Interim preparation**

The interim preparation is located at the time of the engagement and aims to affirm the proper values of a relationship of friendship and dialogue that should exist in the couple. Therefore, it is an opportunity to deepen the faith of the Church, worrying about the integral development of the human being.¹⁰⁷

The interim preparation will have to rely above all on a catechesis nourished by listening to the Word of God and interpreted with the guidance of the Magisterium of the Church, so that they may understand the faith more fully and bear witness to it in concrete life. The teaching should be offered in the context of a community of faith among families that, according to their charismas and functions, take part and collaborate - especially in the area of the parish - in the formation of young people, extending their influence to other social groups.¹⁰⁸

This is a prime time to recognize the need for the presence of God in the midst of the couple and thus discern aspects of sexuality that is translated into body language, the richness of seduction and eroticism, as a fundamental part of conjugal symbolism which refers to all capacity for love, donation and fertility.¹⁰⁹

FOR REFLECTION

- 1) When reference is made to Tradition, it is understood as those teachings that are transmitted from generation to generation. Regarding the

¹⁰⁶ López, Preparación al sacramento del matrimonio, nº 22.

¹⁰⁷ See: Aristizabal, Aproximaciones a la espiritualidad matrimonial a partir del Concilio Vaticano II, 81.

¹⁰⁸ López, Preparación al sacramento del matrimonio, nº 34.

¹⁰⁹ See: Azpitarte, Amor, sexualidad y matrimonio, 110.

- experience of a conjugal spirituality, what references do you have about it? Do you remember how your parents, uncles, grandparents lived it?
- 2) The way in which Christianity is born according to Aguirre's reference, can now be read in parallel with the manner of conjugal spirituality. Can you identify how your line has been? Is it the same or different from your partner's?
 - 3) The importance of a pastoral ministry that accompanies and encourages the experience of the sacrament of marriage is very important. The Teams of Our Lady are testimony of this, when we find couples willing to serve. Have you rendered any service? Whatever your answer, what has been the result of this experience?
 - 4) There has always been talk of the importance of preparing for the sacrament of marriage and criticizing the option that most make "very short" premarital courses. In your experience, was it worth it to take this course? What changes would you make to a course of these?
 - 5) With your experience within the Teams of Our Lady, could you say that this is a "post-marriage course"? What are the difference and the value that this can have with respect to the pre-marital stage?

TABLE 8

CHALLENGES FOR SPIRITUALITY IN THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY



It is said that on a beach where many people drowned every year, someone had the idea of creating a first aid brigade. The need to solve this problem together with the initial enthusiasm of the idea, allowed that with the help of several people interested in the matter, the project could be concreted and the number of deaths reduced.

However, in view of the security offered on the beach, tourists' confidence increased, so the need to increase and improve the proposal arose, which is why cabins were installed to keep guards 24 hours a day.

And the project was so successful that it grew into a private beach, around which it established a flourishing Club, in which everything worked so well, that the time came when nobody wanted to risk it for themselves or for others, so the entry was prohibited for bathing and notices were placed everywhere reading: "if you enter the water do it at your own risk". This situation caused people to move to neighboring beaches, where there were no signs, no lifeguards or anyone who was attentive to people entering the sea, so deaths by drowning began to increase.

In this scenario, new people thought it was necessary to implement a first aid brigade and other enthusiasts believed it was important to create cabins to keep guards 24 hours... however, these proposals always ended in the same, to the point that currently, the Beach is full of Clubs each one better ... but where people cannot bathe and have to go to nearby places, where by the lack of vigilance they continue to be cases of drowning.

This story may reflect what has happened in the Church since its inception. People convinced, enthusiastic and with spirituality to all test, have encouraged

different charismas and often we focus on these. The invitation is to be vigilant not to create new “clubs”, forgetting the most important thing that is Christ.

8.1- Challenges for the future

"He who puts his hand on the plow and looks back, does not serve for the Kingdom of God" (Lk 9, 62).

These words of Jesus have become a lapidary phrase and of indisputable application for those who choose to follow Jesus and his cause, because the task that he left entrusted to those of us who become his “disciples” is immense. It is about understanding what He calls “Kingdom of God”.¹¹⁰

Therefore, freely accepting to join him, that is to say following him, implies assuming the task of implanting and extending that Kingdom throughout the world, in all dimensions of life and human history, and particularly in the dawn of this new millennium. It is a mission that does not allow us to take some time to look back or to withdraw our hand from the task; we are only given the time to live to continue that mission, that work of being laborers in the Vineyard of the Lord, where "the harvest is great, and the laborers are few" (Lk 10,2).

The feeling of many is that it seems that materialism and indifference are winning the game, even among those who were previously considered "Militants of Christ",¹¹¹ probably because we have concentrated on doing the work with our own strength, forgetting that this it must be with God's help. That God acts through us and we are not letting him be the one who works, but striving to carry out enormous efforts that remain as beautiful clubs on needy beaches.

We have to recognize that one of the most important challenges that we must assume not only as Christians but as couples united by the sacrament of marriage, is the 'taking us seriously' the fulfillment of the concrete points of effort.

In this sense, we have to be aware that there is not enough prayer or personal and conjugal. And although meetings, talks, retreats, courses and workshops are organized where we are told about the importance of prayer, however, we still do not learn to pray the way Jesus taught.

¹¹⁰ Gallo, Matrimonios: Hacia el Tercer Milenio.

¹¹¹ See: Salesman, Militantes de Cristo.

Because as Luke says (11,5-13) it is convenient to ask for his Spirit in that prayer with insistence in such a way that God ends up listening to us even for the persistence of our supplication.¹¹²

Our time is one of great challenges that require us to always look forward. Globalization, the free competition economy in a market where the only rule is to win and gain at any cost, the progress of new scientific and technological discoveries that are continuously developed, they are all so ambivalent that you do not know if they are older the benefits that bring us or the evils that bring us, both materially and spiritually, on a personal and community level.

Consequently, the different activities proposed by the movement, from the team meeting to an international meeting, could easily lose their purpose, if we are not attentive to understand that we are not part of a club, because our efforts could remain in sterile activism and exhausting.

In a “doing to do”, forgetting that we must look before “the being” that “doing”, and before “the quality” that “the quantity” of what we do. It is about living our mission with joy and achieving holiness through it, neither more nor less.

We must remember the reproach that Jesus made Martha determined to leave satisfied the Lord who has deigned to come to eat at home. Her sister Mary is leaving her alone with homework, sitting at the feet of Jesus and listening to her words. Could Jesus be happy as a guest with the delicious food they were going to give him, if in the meantime they left him alone, without even giving him a conversation, or even listening to his words as a Master? That is why she tells Martha, when she asks her sister to help her: "Martha, Martha, you work hard on many things, while only one is necessary", to have me happy; "Mary has chosen the best part, and I will not take it away from her" (Lk 10, 38-42).¹¹³

We cannot forget and that is the challenge that, in following Jesus the Christ, our task should be to announce and make live his Kingdom.

You can not admit anything else or do it in any way. Because so that Christ can be considered well served and in the end He tells us: "Well, good and faithful

¹¹² Gallo, Matrimonios: Hacia el Tercer Milenio. In the normal recitation of the Our Father, the Hail Mary or the Holy Rosary, we repeat the same prayer so many times in an empty and boring way without being aware of what we are doing or asking for, which is bothersome and ineffective.

¹¹³ Gallo, Matrimonios: Hacia el Tercer Milenio.

servant... enter into the joy of your Lord" (Mt 25, 21 and 23), it is necessary to put your hand in the plow without looking back.

Therefore, faced with the difficulties that are presented daily as couples united by the Sacrament of Marriage, we have to face the challenge of living 'as God commands' our conjugal spirituality, so it will be necessary to rethink it, ask each other and dialogue a lot about it.

Already in 1962, on the eve of the Second Vatican Council, Father Henri Caffarel did not hesitate to write in a number of *The Golden Ring* devoted to the theme "Marriage and Council":

The Church cannot be content, therefore, with thinking of the "laity" as if they were all single, as if they lived in isolation; he also needs - and in a certain sense, in the first place - to question himself about Christian homes, about the way in which Christian marriage is understood and lived in the catholicity of our day.¹¹⁴

Have things really changed almost half a century later? Where does conjugal spirituality continue to appear, as well as the poor relative of Christian spirituality?

Apparently, the Church has had difficulties over the centuries to recognize in marriage an authentic Christian vocation, in the full sense of expression, capable of leading those who respond to it to a true secular holiness.

And perhaps one of the most important challenges that couples will have to overcome is to demonstrate the true meaning of human sexuality lived within a couple united by the sacrament of marriage. In this regard, we must recognize that:

Although Christianity -religion of the body, since it is a religion based on the incarnation of the Word of God- cannot despise the body without denying itself, "everything happens as if Christianity had more easily integrated the suffering body, the body that works, the body that celebrates and the body that enjoys."¹¹⁵

¹¹⁴ Cafarell, *L'Anneau d'Or*, 179.

¹¹⁵ Lacroix, *L'avenir, C'est l'autre*, 145.

The theology of the body of Saint John Paul II does not hesitate to proclaim on this point unequivocally: "the body and sexuality constitute... for Christianity... a 'value not quite appreciated'".¹¹⁶

It is not enough to remind the world in general and married Christians that marriage is not a state of imperfection. It is necessary to present a spirituality that values asceticism and mysticism, but not from the monastic life, but from their state of life, their demands, their difficulties, their graces and everything that competes.¹¹⁷

It is necessary to show humanity that the sacrament of marriage has models of figures of saints who have become saints through the very fact of the perfection of their life in the marital state. This is one of the legacies of Saint John Paul II when he beatified on October 21, 2001, the spouses Luigi and María Corsini Beltrame Quattrocchi.

The first couple of Christians who have been beatified in the history of the Church because of the same sanctity of their married life and that, for this reason, their celebration is celebrated on the anniversary of their marriage - 25 November -, with which it is clear that one can be holy, not in spite of being married, as was thought in another era - with too much ease -, but precisely because of and thanks to it.

Here lies the commitment of what St. John Paul II tries to express to the Church of the 21st century through the celebration of the vocation of the human body: "In effect, the body, and only he, is capable of making visible what is invisible: the spiritual and the divine. It has been created to transfer to the visible reality of the world the mystery hidden from eternity in God, and thus be its sign".¹¹⁸

This vocation of the body is a mission that corresponds to the Christian spouses, more than to the other members of the Church, to reveal and prophesy it. It is a mission endowed with immense nobility and total urgency in a world that considers the human body as a simple usable material.

¹¹⁶ Juan Pablo II, Audiencia general del miércoles 22 de octubre de 1980, Nº 3.

¹¹⁷ Cafarell, *L'Anneau d'Or*, 186.

¹¹⁸ Juan Pablo II, Audiencia general del miércoles 20 de febrero de 1980, Nº 4.

In conclusion, it is possible to visualize that:

There are many emergencies before which the spirit of today's Christian cannot remain insensitive. We cannot lose sight of the vilification of the most sacred rights of the people, mainly of the destitute, abandoned in the marginal zones of the cities, in the villages lost in the poor subsistence of the forgotten "peasantry", and even in inhuman fields of refugees, or in prisons. We hardly even take into account the millions of children who are killed before they are born "because they get in the way" without being born yet; and if they come to life, they are condemned to hunger and misery in this world where they will not be given a decent place to live.

The new potentials of science at the beginning of the third millennium can be used in favor of human life; but also against that life and its quality, until the planet becomes uninhabitable due to the ecological imbalance, the work of a misused science. They can give men greater duration and better quality of life; but, at the same time, they can cause new personal sufferings and social maladjustments that did not exist before. The *Gaudium et Spes* already warned: All people have the same dignity: to be "image and likeness of God". All are called equally to the supreme dignity of being truly "children of God" (1Jn 3,1), as Jesus Christ is. Struggling for this to be achieved in the third millennium must be the first task of all pretended apostolate. The apostolate cause has been placed by God the Father, and his Son the Savior Jesus Christ. If we do follow this path, the Holy Spirit will be with us: to enlighten us and to give us the strength we need to have.

It is for this reason that those of us who believe in Christ cannot remain indifferent to the problems that make that peace impossible, which we all long for, but which we all prevent in so many ways. That peace that we see permanently threatened by an established system of competing human egoisms, the arrogance of the powerful, the irrational rebellion of the weak, the inhuman ideologies, the always cruel and sometimes catastrophic wars, the cowardly terrorism, the kidnappings, the armed robberies, and so

much citizen insecurity from the spirit of violence and the consequent reprisal or revenge.¹¹⁹

It is for the above, that Christians in general and marriages united by the sacrament in a particular way, we are sent to this world to help implement today and now, that Kingdom of God, where the truth surpasses deception, life is imposed on death, holiness triumphs over evil and sin, mercy and grace dominate hatred and revenge, justice privileges selfishness and iniquity, and where love as God has for each one of us, It presents as an anticipation of the eternal joy in the Kingdom of Heaven that Jesus announced to us and with his resurrection he gave us.

8.2- The challenge of being a Teams of Our Lady couple

A traditional couple relationship is constituted between a man and a woman who get married. However, at present there are several types of couples that go from those who live together but are not married; to those who have a distant relations, but live virtual relationships and, of course couples that arise from Lesbian relationships, Gays, Transgender, Bisexuals and Intersex, known with the LGTB acronym.

In any case, all must face challenges such as communication, money management, sexual enjoyment, professional development, rest, children among many others.

This classification of the challenges in many cases is dictated by the social environment with which the couple has previously interacted, before becoming a couple. These same reasons why each couple protests, manipulates, ends a relationship or seeks help with specialists; they are only the disguises in which the true reason of the challenges of a couple is hidden, that are the needs of a person, they are the origin of the communicational, economic, sexual and other difficulties, within the couple relationships.¹²⁰

The tradition has been responsible for presenting that being a couple is a challenge that must be reached.

¹¹⁹ Gallo, Matrimonios: Hacia el Tercer Milenio.

¹²⁰ Rivero, El reto de ser pareja.

Phrases like it is better only than badly accompanied, do not motivate at all the construction not only of a conjugal spirituality, but also hinder the Kingdom. That is why it is very important to talk and ask questions in the line, not why, but why.

To ask oneself about why, is to focus on the qualities and characteristics that we want and expect from our partner, hoping that these characteristics satisfy our needs, while asking ourselves about why, leads us to analyze about what we are going to do with that contribution of skills and special characteristics that has who has been chosen as a couple.

Hence, in order to make the proclamation of the Kingdom a reality and to establish it among men, it is necessary to face one of the greatest challenges that the human being has today, such as going to dialogue. And in the context of the couple, the Teams of Our Lady have proposed as part of their pedagogy: the duty to sit down.

This concrete point of effort is the biggest challenge we have to overcome as a couple, since, in the testimony of the team members, it is the most difficult to fulfill and the one most required by couples to carry out their mission with joy.

The duty to sit helps us to know little by little our spouse. It is a time spent together, husband and wife, under the gaze of the Lord, to dialogue in truth and with serenity. This time of expression of feelings and thoughts between the spouses allows them a better knowledge and mutual help. It allows them to look to the past, analyze conjugal and family life, make plans for the future and see what changes are required to achieve that ideal they have chosen.

The duty to sit avoids the routine of conjugal life and keeps young and alive love and marriage. Its value is recognized by all couples who practice it, who recognize in this meeting the opportunity to love each other more. It is recommended to begin the duty to sit down with a moment of prayer or silence to become aware of the presence of God. The silence deepens the attention of one over the other, brings us closer to God and creates a natural and favorable atmosphere.

FOR REFLECTION

- 1) The Teams of Our Lady have a clear objective, such as helping to live a conjugal spirituality to achieve sainthood as a couple, "neither more nor less", as Father Caffarel said. What do you understand by holiness? How have you contributed to achieve this purpose in your marriage?
- 2) Although many couples choose to separate or live in a free union, so as not to "tie up" with the sacrament of marriage, however, it is observed that many couples continue to be married by the Church. How could you motivate more couples to dare to live the sacrament?
- 3) One of the great challenges of conjugal spirituality is the daily experience in a world that prefers immediate results. What would you say to those couples who believe that holiness is something of people dedicated to prayer and service to others and that it has nothing to do with the sacrament?
- 4) The Church has couples who are witnesses to attaining holiness through the sacrament of marriage. We invite you to look a little more in their biographies and get a better idea about their lives.
- 5) In your experience as a team player, what is the greatest challenge you have within the same Teams of Our Lady?

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