

Study Topic for June



Conjugal Spirituality and Holiness

Introduction

Father Caffarel told us “**The Teams of Our Lady have as their essential aim, to help couples to strive for holiness, no more, no less.**” (*The Charter of Teams of Our Lady*). To complete our study topic, let us reflect on how the framework which we have in Teams of Our Lady can be the framework which helps each of us individually and as a couple to grow in holiness.

Holiness

The Prophet Micah gives us guidance to holiness in the Old Testament: “***This is what Yahweh asks of you: only this, to act justly, to love tenderly and to walk humbly with your God.***” (Micah 8: 8)

Paul exhorts us to holiness in Romans, “***Think of God’s mercy and worship Him, I beg you, in a way that is worthy of thinking beings, by offering your living bodies as a Holy Sacrifice truly pleasing to God.***” (Rom. 12:1.)

Pope John Paul II told us as we entered the new Millennium: “**This ideal of perfection must not be misunderstood as if it involved some kind of extraordinary existence, possible only for a few ‘uncommon heroes’ of holiness .**” (NMI)

“**Married Christians are called to sanctity. They do not answer this call as individuals – although each retains his or her individuality – but rather they walk the road to sanctity as couple. This great revelation of the spirituality of marriage is this: conjugal love and love of God are not mutually exclusive. On the contrary, they go hand in hand. Husband and wife can follow in the demanding footsteps of Christ, as couple.**” (Second Wind, chapter 1)

“**Is it a way of living with the mind of Jesus, is it holiness, is it wholeness?**” (The Spirituality of the Couple – John and Elaine Cogavin – Rome 2003.).

If our conjugal spirituality is a path to holiness, a path to wholeness, a way of living with the mind of Christ, how do we capture and visualise this role model which Jesus presents for us as **‘the Way, the Truth and the Life’?**

PRACTICAL APPROACH

Peter Van Breemen, in his book 'As Bread that is Broken' tries to portray an image of this wholeness of Jesus as a model for each of us as individual or as couple to follow. He uses a Greek word '**prautes**' that is non-translatable into any of our modern languages because of its fullness in describing the virtues of Jesus and the wholeness of His Human Person. This same wholeness is attainable by each of us with the grace of God for any who choose to follow Jesus.

Prautes reflects:

the self portrait of Jesus in the eight Beatitudes. Matt. 5: 1-10. The Beatitudes reflect the mentality of Jesus, His lifestyle and that of anyone who believes in Him.

the nine fruits of the Spirit: "**What the Spirit brings is very different: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, trustfulness, gentleness and self-control.** Gal. 5:22 .

'with a still heart.'

Jesus' human wholeness, His humility- when He rode down from the Mount of Olives on a donkey.

Learn from me for I am gentle and humble of heart, and you will find rest for your souls." Matt. 11:29.

If holiness is living with the mind and heart of Jesus, we must first listen to His Word; to be aware of the loving creation of the Father and be guided by the Holy Spirit. To achieve this in today's busy world and to grow in holiness and to follow Jesus' model, we too must '**be still.**' We must be a person with a still heart. Such stillness of heart comes from silence. We experience God in silence. Jesus Himself often searched for a quiet place where he could be still. He renewed His strength by spending time in silence with the Father. We too must have our time in silence.

Another way to grasp the meaning of '**prautes**' is to: "***Love one another as I have loved you.***"

When Jesus was in Nazareth attending the Synagogue on the Sabbath, as He usually did, He read what could be His mission statement from the words of Isaiah:

"The spirit of the Lord has been given to me, for he has anointed me.

He has sent me to bring the good news to the poor

To proclaim liberty to captives and to the blind new sight,

To set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord's year of favour!"

Luke 4:18-19

'**Prautes**' is more than a virtue. It is the summation of all the virtues of Christ. It is difficult to define, yet it can be explained by our lives. We need to live our lives with absolute trust in God. This involves having Christian Hope.

"Christian Hope is based on Jesus' promise for us all." 'He who believes will have eternal life.' (John 6:47) -Hope acts in us like an 'engine' that propels

us towards love in the service of our brothers and sisters.As long as we maintain a living Hope in ourselves, we seek to imitate Jesus who is the source and object of this Hope, this will lead us to listen frequently to his Word and Teaching, as well as to imitate his way of life. All this sustains us, animates us and keeps us away from sin so as to dedicate ourselves to others.”(Hope – Andres and Sylvia Merizalde – Heuston 2001.)

The framework of our Movement is a means to sustain us. Our Team Meeting is a learning environment of awareness, of dialogue, of meeting with Jesus, through our encounter with other Team couples and spiritual counsellors and a loving interaction with all present. Our pooling and our study topic educate us in matters of faith, relationship, social awareness. Our study of Scripture helps us to know the person of Jesus and presents to us the challenges of the Christian life. The Endeavours help couples to grow in Christian life, through taking concrete steps towards this goal, and supporting each other on our journey through sharing on these steps.

TEAMS OF OUR LADY

Our Movement is a movement of Christian initiation and also a movement of Christian perfection. The attendance at our meetings and the adherence to its rule, will guide us in our lives. We need to look at the Charter of Teams, not as a ceiling but as a springboard into the fullness of Christian life. It should lead us to respond to the will of God in different ways according to our gifts. These will most certainly create a **“Chosen Race, a Holy People, a Nation set apart.”** This is what we need to be, to fully respond to our Baptismal vows. We have been given the direction by Jesus and the power by the Holy Spirit, it only takes our will to decide this is how we wish to live.

OUR VOCATION

To achieve the essential aim of our Movement – to strive for holiness, we can take our guidance from sources such as these -

“Marriage is at the service of sanctity. This without doubt is the most specific vocation of Teams; not only to call lay people, married lay people to holiness but to affirm that human sexuality can be a path to holiness. This is still a new path in the Church ...” (The Second Wind – Fr. Caffarel in 1987)

“But I have another, even more fundamental reason for thinking that movements of perfection for married laity correspond to an urgent need in the Church. It is important today that the holiness of Christ be present in all sectors of modern life. Our world has an urgent need for holy laity. By that I mean, men and women who are completely given to Christ, filled with his charity and guided by his Spirit. Sainly workmen, farmers and company managers, saintly artists and scientists, saintly politicians. They must be saints, missionaries, and perhaps even martyrs. We must not expect them to appear by magic. They will spring forth only from deeply Christian families; they will be educated and strengthened only by these movements of perfection we are speaking of.” (Fr. Caffarel speaking in Rome in May 1959)

3. Pope John Paul II speaking on a qualitative renewal of the Church said:
“These new movements, instead, are oriented, before all else, toward the renewal of the individual.....These movements are made up for the most part of lay people who are married and have professions. The ideal of the world’s renewal in Christ springs directly from the fundamental duty of baptism”. (Pope John Paul II – Crossing the Threshold of Hope – p. 168 English edition.)

To return to our Charter – the bedrock of our Movement: **“Couples founded the Teams of Our Lady, with the first objective being: They intend to fulfil their baptismal vows.”**