

STUDY THEME 2025-26

"Love is much more than love"

Texts by Fr. Henri Caffarel

ERI

February 2025

INTRODUCTION

For the second year of the 2024-2030 period, the International Leading Team is proposing to all worldwide Teams a study theme based on the essential texts of Father Henri Caffarel. Fundamental writings on human love and marriage that he published in the form of articles in the magazine *L'Anneau d'Or* and at conferences, and which have been compiled in an anthology on love and the sacrament of marriage, in the book entitled "Le mariage, aventure de sainteté".¹

We are faced with an immense opportunity to go to the roots of the profound thought that revolutionized the concept and ideal of sacramental marriage in the Church, and which remains more alive than ever today. Team members cannot be content with rereading a few sentences or paragraphs isolated from their context, which constitute extracts that we cut up as we please. If we are to be faithful to our vocation as Christian couples united by the sacrament of marriage, we need to be well trained and able to give an account of the richness of our sacrament. We might think that we've dealt with this theme many times in the history of Teams. But we assure you that working for a whole year with these texts will place us at the deepest root of our conjugal vocation. And it will also enable us to emphasize the orientation of this second year: **Called to live in communion with our spouse**. A life of full conjugal communion strengthens us for our mission as a Christian couple in the world around us, making us more solid as a couple to be a sign of God's presence in a world that needs us.

We invite you to welcome with absolute respect and admiration these texts, which are suitable for everyone, from newlyweds to those who have already been married for a long time. It will also help spiritual counsellors and guides to penetrate to the very heart of sacramental marriage. We need to be aware of the language Father Henri Caffarel used at the time, which we cannot betray, and of his style, with constant references to French literature, which may require us to make an extra effort in reading. It's true that this won't make for quick, last-minute reading, but it's no less true that it would be a real shame to avoid a thoughtful study of the theme, rather than savor it, ruminate on it, keep it in our hearts.

Only a few chapters of the book have been selected, which have in turn been subdivided to adapt them to the format of a study theme. The majority of the texts have been preserved in their entirety; if a passage has been cut, this is indicated by the symbol (...). We have also respected certain

¹ Henri CAFFAREL, *Le mariage, aventure de sainteté*, Parole et silence, 2013

neologisms that Father Henri Caffarel liked to invent from existing words in order to better express his thought; these neologisms are indicated between quotation marks.

Each chapter is finished with a series of guidelines for the Sit Down, which will be given priority this year, based on the suggested questions, in addition to the proposed questions for the team meeting. These materials do not come from Father Henri Caffarel's texts, as we will explain below, but constitute a real descent into depth, which will require us to make an effort to be honest and truthful about our life as a couple. We therefore invite you to make the effort to Sit Down every month, even if it means, from time to time, supplementing it with other questions that are useful to address for your couple's equilibrium.

Father Henri Caffarel, "prophet of marriage", can really help us, in this year 2025-26, to renew our "yes", to better understand the springs of human love enlightened by our Lord Jesus Christ, while granting us new graces for our sacrament of marriage. In so doing, as Father Caffarel writes, this study theme will also increase our love of God.

STUDY THEME STRUCTURE AND CHAPTER ORGANIZATION

The first three chapters of the study theme form a block that corresponds to the chapter entitled *L'amour est bien plus que l'amour* (Love is much more than love). This is a text published under the same title in the magazine L'Anneau d'Or in May-June 1964, in a special issue with 8 articles by Father Henri Caffarel; it is taken from a lecture given to catechists, lay people and religious who were training or accompanying catechumens in the Paris diocese.

The first chapter of the theme presents sections on :

- Happiness and the gaze of love.

The second chapter corresponds to the section on :

- Conjugal communication.

The third chapter corresponds to the other sections and deals with what Father Henri Caffarel calls

- Incompleteness

"A word that designates the union of two incomplete beings in need of each other and of grace".

The fourth chapter of the study theme corresponds to several parts of the book chapter entitled *La Vocation de l'Amour* (The Vocation of Love). It was published in L'Anneau d'Or magazine in July 1945, under the title *Le Mystère de l'Amour*

- The Mystery of Love.

The fifth chapter corresponds to several sections of the chapter entitled *Aux foyers qui souffrent*, devoted to general proposals to help avoid resignation to estrangement between spouses. It was published in L'Anneau d'Or magazine in May-August 1947, under the title *Amour et souffrance (aux foyers qui souffrent)*

- Love and suffering (for suffering households).

Chapters six and seven of the study theme correspond to the text of the book entitled *Le foyer et le commandement du Christ* (The Home and the Commandment of Christ), divided into two parts:

- Cultivate married love and
- Conjugal communion. This text was published in the magazine L'Anneau d'Or, entitled *Mariage, chemin vers Dieu*, May-June 1964.

The eighth and final chapter of the study theme:

- The witness of the couple

corresponds to the final part of a conference entitled *Face à l'athéisme* (Facing atheism) given by Father Henri Caffarel on May 5, 1970, after Paul VI's speech.

At the end of each chapter is a short summary of the essential and fundamental content followed by questions and introductory texts to help you prepare for the sit-down. The introductory texts come from the book "*L'amour conjugal, chemin vers Dieu*", produced by a group of couples who formed the Marriage Workshop in 2015. The texts that make up the guidelines for the first seven chapters come from chapter 2 of this book, corresponding to the Anthropology of the couple, and that of chapter 8 are two paragraphs from chapters 5 and 6 entitled: *Morale et éthique dans la vie conjugale, familiale et sociale* (Morals and ethics in married, family and social life), and the *Place et le rôle du couple dans la vie de l'équipe, de la famille, de la société et de l'Eglise* (Place and role of the couple in the life of the team, the family, society and the Church). A series of questions to prepare for the sit-down assignment follows. It is not necessary to answer every question. For the team meeting, text from the Word of God was provided to guide our prayer, and questions to share during the meeting. As with the couple and the questions for the Sit Down, the team can decide which questions will be the focus of the exchange on the theme, and whether it wishes to share some of those dealt with in the Sit-Down assignment, either during the sharing on Endeavors (concrete points of effort) or during the time of the theme discussion.

Chapter 1: Love is much more than love

True love, far from confiscating hearts, frees and expands them in extraordinary ways. I'd go even further: engaged couples and newlyweds experience a kind of state of grace, or at least openness to grace. From love to the Christian life, there is, in a sense, continuity, for "God is love".

The experience of love is multifaceted, and we need to break it down into its essential elements, which I'll arbitrarily boil down to five: happiness, the loving gaze, communication, "incompleteness" and grace. By analyzing each of these elements of the experience of love, we shall see how it is oriented towards the world of grace.

Happiness

The emergence of happiness is the first experience of those who encounter love. A new, penetrating, insistent, pure, dilating, delectable happiness. A previously unknown happiness.

"It's true that I'm happy.

In joy I fall asleep, and wake up, and go back to sleep in joy.

May I be full of more joy,

That I may bring more to the one I love!"

These words are from the young girl Violaine; they could be from anyone who discovers love.

And we hear the young lovers speak of "salvation". Yes, they suddenly understand that they were made for happiness and that happiness has just been granted to them. They are delivered from misfortune, from evil, saved. Saved from the absurd, from an existence devoid of meaning. They now know their vocation: happiness!

Another happiness

God is undoubtedly keen that every human being, in the course of his or her evolution, should experience happiness. For it is important to Him that man should have a taste for happiness; and not only that he should have a taste for it, but that, having experienced it, he should believe it to be possible. And therefore that he desires it, pursues it. It's important to God, not only because this belief in happiness contributes greatly to the health of body and soul - to lose it is almost to die - but above all because it directs man towards Him.

When a non-believer encounters happiness in love, he begins to understand the word "paradise", which used to make him smile. For him, paradise, the place of happiness, is perhaps something more than a myth. And the first paradise spoken of by Christians, and the final paradise to which they aspire, become less implausible in his eyes.

But then, how necessary it is that Christian morality not be presented to him in the guise of the morality of Obligation or Duty championed by Kant and adopted, more or less consciously, by so many Christians. After all, we mustn't forget that Christ's great preaching began with these words: "Happy... happy... happy... the poor, the meek, the pure of heart!" Oh, I'm well aware that one can read learned commentaries on the Beatitudes, which leave out no detail of the text, no nuance, but which conveniently neglect the word "happy". And when he addresses his final words to his disciples at the last supper, what does he recommend to them, what does he bequeath to them, if not joy, the fullness of his joy - which they certainly risk losing, but which no one has the power to take away from them.

In a word, God's life is happiness, and so the eternal life he proposes to man is happiness, and so the Christian life on earth is already a pre-approval of this happiness. But how could anyone commit to this religion of happiness who didn't have a taste for happiness? It is the privilege of married love to bring out this aspiration - which in many people is no more than a firebrand under the ashes before the encounter with love - and through it, to set us on the road to God's happiness. But how fragile is this experience of happiness! Ephemeral for many. Very few households agree with Orthodox Archbishop Innocent Borissov's definition of marriage as "what remains of paradise on earth". Nevertheless, even if it's short-lived, it's a vital experience. Fragile and ephemeral are not synonymous with deceptive.

There are many reasons for its precariousness. Some people confuse happiness with pleasure and, in pursuing the latter, lose the former, which they did, one day, discover. Some try to seize happiness with greed and covetousness, unaware that it is reserved for those in whom it finds a willingness to admire and offer. Others seek an absolute: in so doing, they destroy both happiness and the loved one, by demanding of them what they are quite incapable of providing.

The errors are serious. Particularly for those who deny their experience of happiness, who experience the irony, or simply imagine they've been the victims of an illusion. To lose faith in happiness is often to condemn oneself to not finding, or not keeping, faith in God.

But, fortunately, there are those for whom this experience remains the great experience. No doubt, as the years go by, it loses its initial vivacity and alacrity, but this is to the benefit of a lucidity, a

depth, a solidity that love in its springtime could never have known. They know they have not received the absolute of happiness, but they have learned to see, in the happiness born of their love, the promise of another happiness, which they pursue together and of which they already know the foretaste.

The gaze of love

The experience of happiness we've just been reflecting on teaches us a lesson of vital importance: it's from love that happiness springs. Happiness and love are inextricably linked. If man discovers that he was made for happiness, he also learns that he was made for love, and that he cannot hope to find fulfillment outside of love, the demands and riches of love.

The experience of love is a complex one. The dialogue of glances plays a vital role. Those who forego this dialogue for the more tangible benefits of embracing bodies have no idea what they are losing. Suddenly discovering oneself in the eyes of another, as in a *mirror-where one sees oneself seen*, as Lanza del Vasto put it, and discovering oneself worthy of being loved, is no small event. At last you know you have a reason for being, I was going to say you *are*. As long as a person hasn't read in the eyes of another that he's lovable, in the strong sense of the word, that he's loved, he experiences the feeling of unloved or unloved children, which I found strongly expressed by a character in a novel: *"I was outnumbered. I slept in a cage-bed that was randomly placed in a room and could be folded up at any time. When I left, I wouldn't have left an empty space.* But when love comes along, everything changes. You have a value, you have a place in the world, because you're necessary to someone else. "He needs me to be happy", we repeat to ourselves with joyful exaltation. Then you really do feel "justified", in the sense of saying that something is justified. You don't have to despise yourself, you can love and esteem yourself because someone loves and esteems you.

"I remember the thawing of my whole being under your gaze, those gushing emotions, those liberated sources".

At last, you find yourself at peace with yourself.

Love begets love. Being loved leads to loving. A sense of wonder, gratitude and generosity emerges, impatient to be expressed, and unaware that its source lies within us. "It's not funny to at the sight of this beautiful face, without my knowing how, something inside me began to sing, something so sad, so intoxicating, so bitter. A whole part of me that I thought didn't exist, because I was busy elsewhere and wasn't thinking about it. Oh God, it exists, it lives terribly".

And now, through love and gift, we become like the one we had discovered in the mirror-where-we-see-ourselves, who was ourselves and not quite ourselves, for this mirror of a loving gaze has the property of presenting us with the image not so much of what we are today as of what we are capable of.

The gaze of God

Is this experience of love without spiritual significance? To live it faithfully, even for those who have no faith or only an inchoate faith, is to sense that love is more than love, that the source of love may well be higher than the human heart. If happiness is to love what light is to flame, then anyone who has suspected the existence of another kind of happiness through human happiness will be led to believe that this other kind of happiness also presupposes another kind of love, and that he is made for this other kind of love as he is for this other kind of happiness.

If he meets a helping hand on his way to Christ, and feels the Lord's gaze upon him, often evoked in the Gospels: "*He looked at him and loved him*", then, for once, he will discover that he has a reason to exist, since he counts for Someone.

The mirror-where-you-see-yourself-is God's own gaze. How could he despise himself, the one who discovers himself to be precious in the eyes of the Lord? So precious that God did not look at the price: "*I shed so much blood for you*". When Pascal understood this, he was deeply moved. Long before him, Saint Paul had already said: "*He loved me and gave himself up for me*" (Gal 2:20).

Discovering that you are loved is both exhilarating and terrible. If we give in to the call of love, we no longer belong to ourselves... That's what faith is all about, saying yes to God. Perhaps days will come when we'll reproach ourselves for this imprudent gesture, but it'll be too late, and we'll be glad it's too late. As Jeremiah expresses it in unforgettable terms :

You seduced me, LORD, and I let myself be seduced

you were too strong for me, and you prevailed.

All day long I am an object of laughter;

everyone mocks me.

*Whenever I speak, I must cry out,
violence and outrage I proclaim;
The word of the LORD has brought me
reproach and derision all day long.
I say I will not mention him,
I will no longer speak in his name.
But then it is as if fire is burning in my heart,
imprisoned in my bones;
I grow weary holding back,
I cannot! (Jer 20:7-9)*

The ultimate reason for existence of love between man and woman is to evoke another love and to lead to it. What is already true of any marriage is even more true of the union of married Christians, which the Church teaches is a sacrament: a human reality that not only symbolizes a divine reality, but leads to it.

This Love, to which the spouses are drawn by their love, is now radically transformed in their union by a return shock. From now on, they love each other with a love that is an extension of God's love.

If they open St John's first epistle, they will be overjoyed to learn that their love for one another and God's love are one and the same: "*We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love... if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us.*" (1 Jn 4, 16, 12)

Summary

True love leads us to a kind of state of grace that can be summed up in five essential elements. In this chapter, we'll look at the first two.

1. **Happiness:** we feel freed from sadness, saved by our spouse in a way that gives meaning and joy to our lives. And that's what God wants for us: to be happy, because happiness brings us closer to Him.
2. **The loving gaze:** discovering that you are being looked at with love is one of life's most beautiful experiences. Recognizing that we are loved in the eyes of others, without this love needing to be expressed in any other way, makes us feel valued, needed, expected... This gaze gives meaning to our lives. This experience of feeling loved leads us to love and express the best of ourselves in ways we could never have imagined. And in this gaze of love, we can

recognize the gaze of God: those who love each other come to intuit that love, that wonderful source of happiness, must have a spiritual dimension that goes beyond the human heart. Feeling that God, who lives in each of us, is looking down on us with love drives us to evoke this perfect love and to desire to attain it:

"We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us. God is love... if we love one another, God remains in us, and his love is brought to perfection in us." (1 Jn 4, 16, 12).

It is here that we, married Christians united by the sacrament of marriage, find what the Church defines as a sacrament: a human reality that symbolizes a divine reality and leads us to it.

THE SIT DOWN

Tracks for the sit-down assignment

If we think back to the early days of love, we perceive the memory of the other as enveloped in a kind of clarity because, in the beginning, there was always a dazzle. Something unique and miraculous was happening between us with the exchange of words, gestures and glances. Everything that the interplay between the two could give of itself was already there, in the immaculate precision of that which is initial. The world was filled with signs, and fragmented life regained its unity. Loneliness, insecurity, uncertainty about the future were gone, because someone had chosen us, loved us, given us the fragile consistency we needed to face life, to heal ourselves from the past. This prompted us to explore ourselves in depth, in search of all that we were and had been, with the desire to offer the other our authenticity. For his part, he offered us his time and his thoughts, and this coincidence of love seemed like an undeserved gift.

It's an intuition, then, because there's nothing calculated about it, because the mutual attraction can't be reasoned out, because the whole relationship between the two is there in germ. But this intuition, so beautiful and poignant, needs to be qualified by the adjective "intelligent". In spite of our youth and inexperience, we should also, in a way, make a lucid assessment of the other's person; discover with joy the values we share and the obscure points that will be sources of suffering. If we are keen to get to know each other better in the various circumstances of life, and to communicate with each other in a true and profound way, we can discover whether it is possible for the two of us to create a common life project. Our starting point will be a spontaneous and considered yes.

Questions for the Sit Down

Turn your gaze to the beginning of your love...

- 1. Let's talk together about the emergence of happiness, new, penetrating, insistent... unknown until now. About this discovery that you, I, we, are made for happiness, for love.**

Let's try to remember what moved us in each other, what I admired in her, in him. Let's immerse ourselves in that moment of discovery of each other, the outings, the discussions, the writings...

- 2. It's from love that happiness springs: let's share experiences from our married and family life that confirm this statement.**
- 3. Our eyes on each other, for each other:
-Let's remember our first glances, the first time I felt loved by you: what did it change in me, in you?
-and today: what do our eyes say?**
- 4. Let's go back to the moment when we understood, felt that this faith in happiness was pointing us towards God, towards God's happiness, towards eternal life and eternal happiness.**
- 5. Let's remember the moment, the circumstances, God's gaze on me, on our couple, on my partner. Let's talk together about this search for God's love, for happiness in God, which transcends our married love.**

We finish our sitting assignment by spending a few seconds looking at each other as if for the first time. Now let's hold hands tightly and look at each other as if it were the last time we were together.

THE TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word: 1 Jn 4 : 16-19

We have come to know and to believe in the love God has for us.

God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him.

In this is love brought to perfection among us, that we have confidence on the day of judgment because as he is, so are we in this world.

There is no fear in love, but perfect love drives out fear because fear has to do with punishment, and so one who fears is not yet perfect in love.

We love because he first loved us.

Questions for the meeting discussion

- 1. Recalling a period in our history allows us to relive some of the same emotions we experienced back then. During the Sit Down we took a journey back to the first moments of our love. Share about how we felt when we met and discovered each other.**
- 2. Father Henri Caffarel speaks of emptiness, loneliness and a lack of meaning before this loving encounter. The other person confirms that I have a high value, that I finally exist for someone. What is our experience on this subject?**
- 3. How did we become aware or feel that this human love was bringing us closer to God, or even being nourished by God's love? We've joined Teams of Our Lady: we can talk about the decision we made together and the path we've travelled.**
- 4. Marital love is a second chance for "healing" in our lives, and healing past wounds. What does this reflection inspire in us?**

Chapter 2: Communication

Love between man and woman, that love which expresses itself in happiness, is reciprocity, dialogue, exchange, total communication. This, too, is very new to those who are experiencing young love. For them, it's all the more admirable and delectable because for years they've been plagued by a painful feeling of solitude. Sometimes drowsy, sometimes aggressive, often desperate, he was always there like a strange companion whose presence they couldn't explain. Sometimes they rebelled against it, at other times they imagined they had taken its side: "We have no choice: we are alone," wrote Rilke. It's permissible to delude oneself, but I prefer to look the thing in the face, even though it makes you dizzy."

The significance of this feeling of solitude is now clear to them: it prepared them for love and communication. How, indeed, would they have desired and welcomed love and communication if they hadn't had the hard experience that it's not good for man to be alone (Gen 2:18)? Solitude told them in negative what love teaches them today in positive: that communication is the profound law of being, that the human person is "relational". Man exists with a truly personal existence only insofar as he exists for another - in the strong sense that contemporary philosophers give to this expression exist for... From now on, they know it, everyone says it: "I exist, now that I exist for you!"

To communicate, to communicate in spirit, from spirit to spirit, is a prodigious experience. But man is spirit incarnate. This communication takes place through bodies. A look, a smile, the pressure of hands, the gift of bodies - everything becomes a means of communication. Attitudes and gestures, like words, are charged with meaning. But the spirit has to be present to all these bodily activities, slipping into them to transfigure them, ensuring that they don't degenerate into habits, automatisms or, what would be worse, the expression of bodily instinct alone.

Engaged couples and newlyweds are right to rejoice in the wonderful deliverance they owe to love. Thanks to love, they've just escaped from themselves. It's a marvellous deliverance indeed, but let them beware: it's also a merciless demand. It's not just during the hours when it's easy and charming to put everything in common that we have to communicate, but all through life. And if at first nothing seemed simpler - it was like a relief - we soon realize that the communication demanded by love goes much further than we thought. It's not just a matter of conjugating the verb "to love", of exchanging emotions, feelings and facile thoughts; it's a matter of revealing one's innermost being, one's most intimate self, and discovering it for what it is, with all its riches and miseries.

And it's not only at times when it's delightful to receive, but at every moment, that we must welcome the presence, the words, the gift of another.

Yes, communication, even between those who love each other, is difficult, sometimes cruel. But its cruelty is that of the educator who forces a being to surpass himself, to deliver all his virtualities. Whoever accepts to communicate emerges into being. Those who refuse to do so condemn themselves to asphyxiation. In fact, only love can perform the miracle of making these walled-in people communicate, ever since Adam sinned and cut himself off from creation by cutting himself off from God.

It's worth noting that true communication with one being brings us into relationship with the whole world: "*Ah! I've found something so great, it's love that should give me the keys to the world, not take them away from me*". There are so many moralists who fail to understand this "miracle", who are constantly urging husbands and wives not to let themselves be captivated by love. True, we can love badly, and false love binds us, but true love frees the human heart.

In dialogue with God

The great teacher, the Holy Spirit, to whom love offers a particularly favorable field of action, works to help those who love each other move from communication with each other to communication with God. If they are already familiar with this, their love will greatly help them to live it more perfectly. All the laws of communication, which they discover day by day in their mutual relations, will soon appear to them as secrets for going further into the intimacy of their God.

To those who have not yet learned to live with God but aspire to do so, how important it is to make them understand that the Christian religion is communication between man and God, between every man and God. Communication in love. In other words, we need to present God's plan to them as a great enterprise driven by God's will to communicate with each of his children, as God's call to man - to all men - to enter into a personal relationship with him. Then, on the level of faith as on the level of human love, and much more profoundly, man, in responding to God's call of love, acquires the feeling of opening out into being, of discovering true life. Until then, he sometimes wondered whether his existence was real and not just a dream. Now he knows, he is, he lives. He exists, now that he exists for God, and because he exists for God.

Refusing to communicate is already self-destructive on a human level; on a religious level, it's tantamount to death. We cut ourselves off from God - which is why moralists speak of mortal sin.

Just as human love, far from isolating us, gives us the keys to the world, so communication with God achieves the paradox of detaching man from all of creation, and bringing him into communication with all beings, but in God. Listen to Francis Jammes: "It seemed as if a new world opened up before his eyes. The bird, the tree, the stone had a clarity he had never known, and the tile struck by the falling sun was deep and clear. It was no longer that crazy, grotesque nightmare where things seem surprised to exist: now everything was as it is..." Reading these lines, one imagines that the author wrote them during his engagement; in fact, it was the day after his conversion. What makes it so easy to misunderstand is that all authentic love, and even more than conjugal love, God's love, makes us a brotherly heart for all beings in the universe.

A new solitude

So the Spirit of God learns to communicate with God from this experience of communication in human love. He has another, even more powerful resource at his disposal. He brings back the feeling of loneliness at the very heart of love. Engaged couples and spouses panic: were they mistaken in thinking that love and solitude are incompatible, contradictory, that love had definitively eliminated the feeling of solitude? Could it be that Paul Valéry was right: "*God created man, and not finding him lonely enough, gave him woman to make him feel his solitude*"? Let them not be troubled, let them not imagine that their love is at fault, let them not hasten to think : It's my fault, it's her fault...

Instead, let them question their experience of solitude. It will remind them that this feeling that burned their adolescence had a meaning: it warned them then that man was not made for tête-à-tête with oneself, but for communication in reciprocal love. Their solitude today, and precisely within love itself, is of an entirely different order. It's a warning too, but whereas for the teenager it was an invitation to dialogue with the woman, today it's an invitation to dialogue, to communicate with God. They may have believed that their human love was enough to fill their hearts... God couldn't let them stay in error for long. They were made for another kind of love, so let them not delay in responding.

Would Christians be preserved from this new intervention of the feeling of solitude? Doubtless, if their union with God were deep enough, if their human love were free of all illusion, they would not experience the bite. In fact, this feeling often appears in them too. One wrote: "*Is life nothing*

but the apprenticeship of solitude, and marriage the subtlest means of achieving it?" No, not the most subtle way to solitude, but life with an Other who puts an end to all solitude.

And in the Christian home, this Other is not far away. It's in the conjugal dialogue itself that we can meet him. Did he not say: "*For where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them.*" (Mt 18:20)? But the spouses are worried: isn't this call of another love to be feared? Will conjugal love not be offended? The answer was given to me one day by a friend who told me of his deeply religious wife: "*When she has prayed, her tenderness for me is renewed.*"

Summary

Father Henri Caffarel identifies communication as an essential element of the state of grace that emerges with love. He emphasizes that this communication not only sustains the conjugal relationship, but also influences our relationships with others.

The path to true communication begins with the experience of solitude, a sensation that can be distressing, but which reveals an essential truth: the human being exists to enter into relationship, to say "I exist because I exist for you". This discovery pushes towards love and constant communication, whether verbal, gestural or even spiritual, leading us towards a higher dimension of happiness, always accompanied by the Spirit.

God wants and rejoices in our happiness. However, spouses need to recognize that communication is not limited to the good times, but needs to be nurtured in the bad too. Sometimes, it can seem as if we've lost something of what captivated us in the other person. At such times, communication becomes a call to share what's deepest and most intimate within us, always open to listening and being listened to. This effort to maintain authentic communication takes love to a deeper, more spiritual level.

Conjugal love, moreover, reflects our relationship with God. In Christianity, religion is conceived as a loving communication between God and each person. By discovering our divine purpose, we can say: "I exist because I exist for God". This bond with Him becomes the model for our human relationships, where we also feel called to love, share and relate.

Although the feeling of solitude can arise even in the midst of love, it need not frighten us. It's an invitation to remember that we're not made for solitude, and that God will always be at our side, helping us to find comfort and fulfillment both in our human relationships and in our connection with Him.

THE SIT DOWN

Tracks for the sit-down assignment

The couple's relationship is a complex and multi-faceted one, embracing all the strands of reality, and not always played out in total and happy intimacy or in privileged and perfect moments. By living together, the couple gets to know each other so intimately that the weaknesses and idiosyncrasies, the "shadows" that were already creeping in when they first got to know each other, and which each had disguised at the start, become all too obvious. Day by day, and by power of repetition, these flaws become so present that they often mask everything else. Exceptional traits are reduced to rubble in the face of the little pitfalls of everyday life. This attractive person, so eagerly discovered at first, is finally very close, too close even, to continue to arouse the same admiration.

There's a widespread belief that when you fall in love, you develop an ideal vision of the person you love, and when that fades, you come face to face with the truth. But it's not exactly like that. What the beginning of love reveals about the other does not belong to the genre of illusions. On the contrary, it's the door that opens, allowing a glimpse of what's truer and better in the other, provided that the participatory exercise that engenders love in the early days remains active between the two. So it's an exercise; you have to get involved, it's participative, so it's up to both of them. If only one is involved, the exercise becomes almost impossible.

If we use the intelligence of the heart, that capacity to understand and accept life, we can discern whether, despite the obscure and contradictory points we have revealed in him or her, the positive points compensate for that other negative side we know to be a source of suffering. And above all, cultivate a heart full of mercy, which understands and accepts, which is patient and knows how to excuse, which rests its gaze with love on the person of the other, which stops criticizing and learns to express praise, which recognizes the need it has for the other and tells it so. It's very easy to feel attracted by what we can receive; it's more difficult to ask ourselves what the other needs

Suggested questions for the Sit Down

1. As we begin our Sit Down, after placing ourselves under God's gaze, take some time for individual reflection, equipped with pen and paper, and make an effort of memory and insight to answer the following two questions:
 - a. What did I like about the other person when we first met?
 - b. Can I name all the qualities and beauties that I still discover in my partner?When we've had enough time, talk about what we've written and talk to each other.
2. As a teenager or young adult, did I feel loneliness before I met my future spouse? Talk about this state of loneliness, its evolution at the beginning of our relationship and after several years of marriage.
3. What is the relationship between solitude and closeness to God? Has a certain solitude brought us closer to God? And in what way?
4. What are our preferred modes of communication? Have they changed over the years? How do we take into account our own body language and that of our partner? Let's talk about the place of tenderness in our relationship?
5. To love is to get to know the other more each day. And we'll always have to find out by listening and sharing. Can we identify what stands in the way of communication with our partner? Can we take stock of every obstacle to communication, and work together to find ways of removing them.

THE TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word : Ephesians 4 :29-32

No foul language should come out of your mouths, but only such as is good for needed edification, that it may impart grace to those who hear.

And do not grieve the holy Spirit of God, with which you were sealed for the day of redemption. All bitterness, fury, anger, shouting, and reviling must be removed from you, along with all malice. [And] be kind to one another, compassionate, forgiving one another as God has forgiven you in Christ.

Questions for the meeting discussion

1. The Christian religion is man's relationship with God. God's purpose is to establish personal relationships with his creatures. How do we live out these two loves - the love of God and the love of our spouse? How can we help each other in our relationship with God?
2. God has given us our spouse to love. Father Henri Caffarel writes that it is in conjugal dialogue that the Holy Spirit teaches us to communicate with God. How do we organize our Sit Down? How do we prepare for it? What do we put in place so that our hearts are ready to welcome this time of adjustment to love each other better, and to experience in our love, the divine love of our God?
3. Share how marital communication, in love and in truth :
 - brings us into communication with God Himself,
 - makes us aware that we exist, not just for my partner, but also for God.
 - opens us up to otherness - God's otherness, but also the otherness of all human beings.

Chapter 3: Incompleteness and grace

Incompleteness

Through the varied experiences of budding love, each partner gradually comes to realize that, prior to meeting the person he or she loves, he or she was an incomplete being, but suffered little for it. He lived as if he were self-sufficient. However, he felt the need to increase his assets in order to complete himself. In reality, he lacked a complementary being. Not someone to help him fill his gaps, or to provide him with some additional being or having, but someone to bring him what he could never have on his own: the other half of the world.

This other half of the world - whether male or female - is not received like a commodity that you come into possession of once and for all. A thing is acquired, but a person is received, in the measure of the gift you make of yourself; and as soon as you close your arms to appropriate her, she escapes you or leaves you nothing to embrace but a thing, the thing she has become by abdicating her freedom.

The discovery of one's incompleteness in relation to the other sex is an important spiritual event, because it's the realization of a radical, indisputable poverty. It's true that most people make this discovery in love: they learn of their poverty while being delivered from it. Delivered, yes, but on condition that the spouse remains present, given.

No one is exempt from reacting to the discovery of this incompleteness. Consent or revolt: the only alternative. The only explanation for so much behavior, not only sexual behavior but also social behavior, is the rejection of this poverty. Psychologists have stressed how important it is to accept one's sex; have they sufficiently pointed out that it is no less important to be only one of the two sexes, and therefore to consent to the incompleteness and poverty that follow?

And also to dependence, because the poor are necessarily dependent. Rejecting this dependence is the reaction of a shy adolescent. In his case, it's understandable: he doesn't want to sacrifice his autonomy, and in a way he's right. Later, but only later, he will discover that in love, human beings can become dependent without this dependence being "alienation", an abdication of their human dignity. The adult, in fact, finds in this consensual dependence the maturing of his personality, the exaltation of his freedom.

Far more radical poverty

In following me, you've no doubt already caught a glimpse of how God uses this awareness of man's and woman's incompleteness in relation to each other to His own ends. He wants to lead them to discover a much more fundamental incompleteness, and to consent to it. *"Indeed, the love of God appeals in us to the same faculty as that of creatures, to the feeling that we alone are not complete, and that the Supreme Good in which we will reach completeness is someone outside of us."* It's ridiculous for man to pretend to be self-sufficient and to ignore the other half of the world; but it's even more grotesque and tragic to pretend to do without God. In fact, this is the primordial sin: "You will be like gods", Satan whispered in Eve's ear, autonomous, independent, sovereignly free!

In relation to God, man's poverty is absolute: this is the basic truth to which your catechumens must accede. Without God, man has neither beginning nor end, so to speak. Indeed, he exists only through God's intervention. This "I", master of itself, which affirms: I am, I will, I do, has not brought itself into existence: it is of God, it has been given to itself by God. But there's more: man receives his being from God at every moment. Just as the spot of light on my bedroom wall derives all its reality from the sunbeam filtering through the shutters, so my being has consistency and duration only through the creative word that brought me into existence and keeps me there.

But there's a more dramatic kind of poverty: the poverty of existing and not being able to reach out and embrace that for which we were made, that in which we would find fullness of being and happiness. And so it is with man in relation to God. Deprived of God's friendship, he is the living dead, for he is made for God, to know him, to love him, to possess him, just as the eye is made to see, the intellect to understand, the heart to love, the man for the woman and the woman for the man.

If the experience of human love can lead us to understand and accept this fundamental poverty with regard to God, it must also reassure the man who, having reached the threshold of faith, is panic-stricken at the thought of consenting to God, of throwing himself into the abyss of total dependence on him. He fears sacrificing his human greatness. In a way, it's a respectable sentiment: a just idea of his nobility; but from whom does he derive this nobility, if not from God? God is even more jealous of it than he is of himself; he cannot ask man to deny it. The experience of love is very enlightening: giving oneself, making oneself dependent out of love, does not make us fall into the possession of another, like a slave, that thing in the hands of the master, but on the contrary brings out our personality in all its splendor. Difficult to grasp by reason, it's an obvious truth for the one who loves.

But it has to be said: just as the union of two beings requires that the love between them remain alive, otherwise it will resemble the bondage of two convicts, so faith in God imperiously requires, to be lived in all its truth, a love of God that is fervent, alive, each day new and each day truer. Because they have this experience, mystics sing enthusiastically of their joy at having discovered radical poverty and absolute dependence on God. They are the free beings.

Grace

A man who suddenly realizes that he's been waiting for a woman all his life, that without her he's incomplete and can't accomplish his work, first steps forward as a conqueror. But he soon realizes his mistake.

Until then, he felt he could acquire everything through money or conquer everything through intellectual, moral or physical force. When he failed, he blamed himself, his lack of money or strength. But now he's discovered another world, where wealth and strength are disqualified: the world of love. He would be laughed at if he claimed to obtain love for money! As the Song of Songs put it some twenty-five centuries ago: "*Were one to offer all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly despised.*" (Ct 8, 7) And if he resorted to force, he would prove to be a brute.

In this other world, the world of love, the world of the person, of the mystery of the person, the person is not a thing to be seized, but a freedom to be given. And this gift of love is a kind of miracle, unpredictable and always free. But how do we get it? There are only two ways. Or seduce, in the true sense of the word, i.e. to love, to love with such a love that it brings out love in the heart of the other person. Or sigh. The word sounds ridiculous, yet it covers a great reality: the humility of a being who both confesses his love and acknowledges that he in no way deserves this priceless gift: the love of the one he loves.

So when the two lovers, having called each other, respond, it is in an attitude of amazed gratitude that each opens to the gift of the other:

*"Get down on your knees and I'll get down on my knees!
And consider my soul and, marvelling, I'll take yours in reverence
In my arms, having knelt, for it is God's creation,
And I will protect it, holding it close to my heart."*

Those who have received this priceless gift should not imagine that they have acquired it for ever. Every day we must wait with humble reverence for the gift of the beloved, every day we must

welcome with the wonder and gratitude of the first day a gift that is new every day. Woe to anyone who indulges in a possession mentality, who excludes himself from the world of love.

The kingdom of grace

This experience of gratitude casts an admirable light on man's relationship with his God. Through it, the Lord wants us to be led to an understanding of the world of grace. Grace and gratitude are the same word.

Even more monstrous than the ambition to buy human love, the Song of Songs stigmatizes the pretension of obtaining God's gifts for money. Such a claim aroused the Apostle Peter to violent anger: "*When Simon saw that the Spirit was conferred by the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money and said, "Give me this power too, so that anyone upon whom I lay my hands may receive the holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "May your money perish with you, because you thought that you could buy the gift of God with money."*" (Acts 8:18-20)

Less crude, but of the same order, is the error of all those who expect salvation from their observance of a law, their moral prowess, their merits. They too ignore the grace and transcendence of Christian salvation. If salvation were a kind of paradise on earth, they'd be excusable, but the salvation God offers us is something quite different: it's Him, known, loved, possessed by a possession of love. As we have seen, the gift of love cannot be bought or deserved. All the more so in the case of God.

And so, before God, man must understand that God's gift can only be pure divine initiative. If there is one point of dogma that theology has long pondered and fiercely defended, it is the absolute gift of grace. All man has to do is accept it, and this act of opening himself to God's gift is itself a great gift from God.

So we have to give up trying to conquer God the hard way. But how then can we obtain his love, which we have discovered is more precious to us than anything else? Between man and woman, I was talking about seduction; here, it's out of the question: who could love God enough to wrest love from his heart? Then all that's left is to become a "suitor". This is the profound meaning of prayer. And we need to understand that prayer is not pressure on God, but an expectation, a hope, a breach in our being, through which God will invade us.

When, for his part, God wants to conquer man and unite him in love, he can only respect the great law of love that he himself promulgated and that I defined above: "*Man is not a thing to be taken but a freedom to be given.*" It remains for him to seduce man. And it is in this light that we must understand all of Holy History. Through his miracles, his great works and his confessions of love, God first won over a people, one of the poorest and smallest, just as a man conquers the heart of a woman. He spoke to her like an enamored husband: "*And as a bridegroom rejoices in his bride so shall your God rejoice in you.*" (Is 62, 5) And when, like an adulteress, Israel betrays the man who called himself her husband, he, each time, sets out to win her over anew: "*Therefore, I will allure her now; I will lead her into the wilderness and speak persuasively to her.*" (Hos 2, 10)

Finally, the hour came for God to make the supreme attempt at seduction, to win over not just the hearts of one of the peoples of the universe, but the whole of humanity. And the Son of God became flesh, and dwelt among us, and gave mankind the most indisputable proof of love: "*No one has greater love than this, to lay down one's life for one's friends.*" (John 15 :13)

But the vast majority of people don't understand the language of love! Nevertheless, over the last twenty centuries, millions of people have let themselves be seduced, given themselves to Christ, opened themselves up to the gift of Christ. And they remain in him, and he in them.

Summary

1) Incompleteness: the loving relationship reveals our radical poverty by making us aware of our incompleteness. This spiritual discovery shows that we depend on the other to achieve wholeness, and accepting this lack leads us to a personal maturity that makes us freer, while its denial leads us to dissatisfaction and unhappiness.

As he does throughout this chapter, Father Henri Caffarel transposes this awareness of our lack in the relationship of love to our relationship with God. God gives us existence and wholeness, and understanding our absolute dependence on Him enables a more authentic relationship. Mystics celebrate this radical poverty by acknowledging their total dependence on God and the fullness He offers.

2) The grace of love: Love cannot be bought or obtained by merit, as the Song of Songs illustrates: "*Were one to offer all the wealth of his house for love, he would be utterly despised.*" The virtues that accompany it are humility, expectation, self-giving and selflessness. In the relationship with God, this means that His grace is a free gift that is not obtained by achievement or merit. This divine love is generous and abundant, and our task is to open ourselves to receive it.

All we can do is pray, meeting Him to give ourselves the opportunity to welcome His grace, generously poured out and which we often miss. Prayer is the language of our love for God, of our encounter with and receptivity to Him, who is always waiting for us.

THE SIT DOWN

Tracks for the sit-down assignment

We need to find a balance between the roles traditionally assigned to women, based on the "sacred" nature of their nature, and the rigid force of feminist ideology, which presents them as the pure and simple product of a macho "culture" that has nothing to do with their biology.

When we see young couples living together, we recognize that they are the heirs of this indisputable feminist struggle. Women have finally been recognized, at least in one part of the world, as equal to men in dignity, intelligence, organizational capacity and responsibilities, but all these external achievements must not cause them to lose their deep-rooted identity. Women can do the same things as men, but they do them differently.

Within the couple, this change in the woman's role has been a great source of enrichment, but also of conflict. How do we manage work at home? How much time will each of them devote to the children? Will it always be the same person who gives up higher professional positions?

If young couples experience this as an ongoing struggle for equality, it will be difficult to achieve a climate of balance and peace. One thing is to reach a fair compromise between the two to share the burden of family and professional life, and another is to be aware of those differences in male/female approach that will nuance all their relationships. If they don't accept that the different gendered condition of men and women is not limited to their biological organs, but affects all aspects of their lives, they won't experience it as an asset, but as a perpetual cause of conflict.

If the balance we seek is based solely on justice and never on the gratitude of love-charity, it will always be in jeopardy. The goal of male-female union is to enter into the fullness of the male-female relationship, and above all to become more of a couple.

Suggested questions for the sit-down

1. The love of our spouse makes us fully woman and fully man. Adam was the first to experience incompleteness, that feeling of sadness in the face of the reality of lack, of absence.²

Are we each aware of our own incompleteness? At what point in our personal history did we realize it? How would we define it? What is *this "other half of the world"* that our partner brings to us ?

2. *"A thing is acquired, but a person is received, in the measure of the gift you give him of yourself..."* What does this phrase inspire in us?

We all experience the grace of God's love, God's gift. How does this inform the way we live married love? In our daily lives, how do we live out this reciprocal gift, this grace, through the various tasks at the service of the conjugal or family community?

3. To what extent does our married love make us aware of our poverty? Of our dependence on love? How do we live it? What would you say about Father Henri Caffarel's idea that loving dependence sets us free? Let's look together for concrete examples.

4. How and when did we discover our incompleteness in relation to God? To what extent has our incompleteness in relation to our spouse enabled us to discover and consent to a much deeper, more fundamental incompleteness? Let's name these discoveries.

5. How do our marital poverty and our absolute poverty in relation to God illuminate each other? Are we convinced that we were made for God, that without God's friendship we'd be dead and buried? How do we conquer and nurture conjugal love and God's love, day after day?

² Genesis 1, 26-27: God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness (...) God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them."

Genesis 2, 20: "So the man gave names to all the animals, the birds of the air and all the beasts of the field. But he found no helper to match."

Genesis 2, 22-23 : With the rib he had taken from the man, he fashioned a woman and brought her to the man. The man said, "This time, this is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh!..."

THE TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word : Gen 2:18-23

The Lord God said: It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suited to him.

So the Lord God formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds of the air, and he brought them to the man to see what he would call them; whatever the man called each living creature was then its name.

The man gave names to all the tame animals, all the birds of the air, and all the wild animals; but none proved to be a helper suited to the man.

So the Lord God cast a deep sleep on the man, and while he was asleep, he took out one of his ribs and closed up its place with flesh.¹

The Lord God then built the rib that he had taken from the man into a woman. When he brought her to the man, the man said: “This one, at last, is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; This one shall be called ‘woman,’ for out of man this one has been taken.”

Questions for the meeting discussion

- 1) What discoveries have we made, what confirmations have we received from reading these texts by Father Henri Caffarel? Both for our married love and for our personal relationship with God as a couple.

- 2) What fruits of the Sit Down could we share?

- 3) A gratuitous love of our spouse and of the Lord is built day by day. How is it a source of grace? Please explain.

Chapter 4: Vocation of love

The source of Christian love is not in the human heart. It's in God. To husbands and wives who want to love, who want to learn to love more and more, there is only one good piece of advice: seek God, love God, be united to God, give Him all the space.

The more they open themselves to the God of love, the richer the exchange of love between them. Before them lie infinite prospects: their love will never cease to grow, as they open themselves ever wider to God's gift. If they want their love to be a living flame, ever higher, let them love God more and more every day.

The decline of so many loves can be explained by forgetting this fundamental principle: to turn away from God and sin against him is to sin against love by cutting oneself off from the source of love. To refuse God is to refuse your spouse his daily bread: love. He who claims to esteem love when he despises Love is lying.

Love comes from God

Those who separate themselves from God do not lose the capacity to love, but they do abandon the best of their love. On the other hand, the capacity to love grows, as love for God grows. The conjugal union is worth, in human quality and in the quality of eternity, what the union of the spouses with God is worth. The more they open themselves to the God of love, the richer the exchange of love between them. Before them lie infinite prospects: their love will never cease to grow, as they open themselves ever wider to God's gift. If they want their love to be a living flame, ever higher, let them love God more and more every day.

It is through prayer and the sacraments that spouses draw on the sources of divine grace. Penance maintains the transparency of the spouses' hearts, and this seed of fire, which the Eucharist deposits in each of them, illuminates and warms married life. Confession before marriage, and communion during the Mass that follows it, take on a magnificent meaning when seen in this light.

The decline of so many loves can be explained by forgetting this fundamental principle: to turn away from God and sin against him is to sin against love by cutting oneself off from the source of love. To refuse God is to refuse your spouse his daily bread: love. He who claims to value love is lying when he cuts himself off from love

Love goes to God

God is at the origin of love, but he is also at its end. Love comes from God, it goes to God; God is the alpha and omega of love.

The mistake is to make love an absolute, the last end, a god. No doubt men would not commit this error if love did not speak so well of another love, that Love for which the human heart thirsts.

If simple natural love didn't have a foretaste of this other Love, men wouldn't pin such high hopes on it, and wouldn't reproach it so bitterly for disappointing them.

We'd be at peace with love if it weren't for the fire of God's love, which he invites us to seek, passing through him but not stopping with him. For if he makes a prestigious promise to humanity, it is on behalf of another, and only this Other can fulfill it. Love is but a messenger; God is its master.

Human love is not, however, "*the great deception*". It's not love that deceives, it's men who misunderstand it. If we must speak of deception, it is not love that is guilty of it, but those who turn it into an all-powerful god, capable of satiating the human heart. This is the great lie. Deceived, the human heart demands everything from love, and love disappoints. How could it be otherwise? The creature cannot fill a heart large enough to receive the Creator. This disappointment often causes us to lose faith in love, and this unbelief is as serious as the idolatry of which it is the rotten fruit. Having expected everything from love, the human heart no longer expects what it was designed to provide: a path to God. That's what we should have asked him for from the start. He is a means to an end, not an end in itself; but the means is powerful.

For the human heart, love is indeed the great opportunity. It tears it away from itself and from the unjust grip of creatures. It makes it vacant, free, offered. The visitation of love is an hour of grace. "*This force that calls us out of ourselves, why not trust it and follow it?*" Follow it beyond love, to the author of love.

In happy love, spouses soon find the One who dwells at the center of their union. As one of them wrote: "*I understand more and more that the true marriage is that of the soul with its God.* In painful love, suffering hollows out the place in the heart where God will come to dwell, if the unhappy heart does not give in to the temptation of despair, nor to the even more serious temptation of denying this hunger for love and the infinite in the depths of its being. In these suffering homes, then, it is also true to say that love leads to God.

Throughout the life of the home, a living love never ceases to be a road to God, for it is the great school of giving and detachment.

Love is a means, and more than that. A means is abandoned when the goal is reached, and the now useless boat is forgotten on the shore. Spouses must lead to God the love that has brought them to him. Love collaborates in their salvation: every day, they must work for his. But a change gradually takes place. While at first they took the path of love to get to God, the day comes when it seems truer to say that they pass through God to get to love. Or rather, their love is in God, and there's no need to leave one to go to the other.

Love as a source of grace

God is already present at the heart of simple, natural love, we might say, and those who seek him there find him there. But in Christian homes founded on the sacrament of marriage, his presence is infinitely more real and effective.

It is not love per se that becomes a sacrament, but the contract and the union that follows; but love, the inspiration of this contract and the living soul of this union, participates in the sacrament; it can be said to be not only sanctified, but also sanctifying.

For centuries, people have been asking love for the sweetness and joy of life: they've been asking it for everything, and yet they haven't expected enough. Christ has come, and now love is capable of transmitting divine life to mankind. Love, the cause of joy, has become a source of grace. Men asked him for everything; he gives them more than everything, since he gives the cause of everything: God.

And while it's true that married Christians must have frequent recourse to the sacraments, especially the Eucharist, the greatest of all, it's no less regrettable that they are so often unaware that they can also find grace in their love, at home, where the unquenchable flame of the sacrament burns brightly. At home, in the depths of their union, Jesus Christ is waiting to give himself to them. To help us understand this mystery, Pope Pius XI invites us to compare the sacrament of marriage with the sacrament of the Eucharist. To this end, he recalls the words of Cardinal Bellarmine: "*The sacrament of matrimony can be regarded in two ways: first, in the making, and then in its permanent state. For it is a sacrament like to that of the Eucharist, which not only when it is being conferred, but also whilst it remains, is a sacrament; for as long as the married parties are alive, so long is their union a sacrament of Christ and the Church.*" (Encyclical *Casti connubii*).

Love, God's message

Praise be to God, love must also be a message from God.

The work testifies to the artist's talent: a chorale, for example, gives us access to the profound life of J.S. Bach. Likewise, creatures speak to us of the Creator, revealing his thoughts and perfections. The starry heavens tell us of his science, the ocean shows us his power, the clear eyes of a child give us a glimpse of his purity, but love tells us a much deeper confidence, infinitely more enriching for the human heart: it teaches us the love that lies in the Heart of God.

A great human love proves that love exists on earth - and this is already singularly important news for so many of our contemporaries who have lost faith in love - but above all, it offers us an authentic image of the divine home, of that love of the Father and the Son in the unity of the Holy Spirit: it proclaims that "God is love". Human love is the reference that helps us understand divine love. Through its power to make two beings one, while preserving the personality of each, love enables us to gain insight into the mysterious union of Christ with humanity, and the spiritual marriage of the soul with its God.

This, then, is the message from God that married love is charged with bringing to mankind. And its importance is a measure of the esteem and trust God places in it.

Summary

For Father Henri Caffarel, there is a fundamental difference between the love of Christian couples, especially those united by the sacrament of marriage, and that of non-believers. It's a question of correctly locating the source of this love, which some people think depends exclusively on us. On the other hand, having the certainty that it is in God can give us added depth and quality. Having a clear vision of the origin of this source opens us up to a world of possibilities and growth in this love. On the other hand, the decline of so many loves could be explained by a distance from God, and the sin of separation from the source of love.

To bring us closer to God, we have prayer and the sacraments, which take on a new dimension by becoming the source and nourishment of our love. What's more, this grace, where we find the origin of love, is also the final destination. God is the beginning and the end, the alpha and the omega. Love comes from God and goes to God.

But human love tends to disappoint in the face of the immense thirst we all have for absolute love. And only God can give this absolute love. To make an absolute of human love is a very common mistake, because feelings can be changeable, and we are often unable to satisfy the demands of a love that only God can satisfy.

Throughout the life of a marriage, a living love never ceases to be a path towards God, a tool which, in the path of holiness we follow together, will help us to reach God. For God is already present in human love, but in Christian couples founded on the sacrament of marriage, his presence is more *real*, more sanctifying, because it is a source of grace since this *Love* is capable of satisfying our deepest desires.

The powerful image of a couple who love each other deeply is a true image of God and a powerful testimony. This human love helps others to better understand divine love, because God is love.

THE SIT DOWN

Tracks for the sit-down assignment

Today, we expect too much of married love: that it fulfills, that it understands, that it comes forward, that it expresses itself, that it listens, that it responds, that it holds, that it protects... We expect too much of the other, who is an imperfect and limited person like ourselves. We believe that any solitude will be filled, that any uncertainty will disappear, that any dialogue will reach the depths of the soul, that any mistake will be excused. And if we fail, it's disappointment, it's the end. We expected a love without cracks, without excuses, without reproaches; a love that was perfect, unconditional and total.

God has placed such a thirst for love in the heart of man that he seeks it tirelessly throughout his life, and believes he can find it in a privileged way in married love, but it is God alone who is the answer. This thirst cannot be totally satisfied by another human being. We forget the source and look for where it is reflected, but this reflection, even if it is already a promise, cannot replace the true fountain.

Suggested questions for the sit-down assignment

1. To what extent have we already experienced the disappointments mentioned above? Let's give each other some concrete examples. What explanations can we give for these situations?
2. "*The source of Christian love is not in the human heart. It is in God.*" What do we think of this powerful statement by Father Henri Caffarel? In what way, in our marriage, has a certain distance from God, or even in some cases a forgetfulness of God, been detrimental to the quality of our married love? Conversely, what have been the consequences for our married love when one or both of us has been closer to the Lord? In concrete terms, how

have we been able to experience this greater closeness to the Lord, and how can we make it more present every day?

3. *"While at first they took the way of love to go to God, a day comes when it seems truer to say that they pass through God to go to love. Or rather, their love is in God and there's no need to leave one to go to the other."* Depending on how long we've been a couple, this step may not have happened yet. What do we think of this statement? Are we living it in our relationship? What obstacles do we encounter along the way, and how can we overcome them?
4. *"God is already present at the heart of simple natural love," we said, "and those who seek him there find him there. But in Christian homes founded on the sacrament of marriage, his presence is infinitely more real and more effective."* Our sacrament of marriage: how would we define it? How do we live it? What are its tangible effects on our conjugal relationship?
5. Father Henri Caffarel insists on the graces procured by conjugal love and the graces procured by the sacrament of marriage? Can we name and explain the graces procured by married love and the graces procured by the sacrament of marriage?

THE TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word : Rom 8:31-39

What then shall we say to this? If God is for us, who can be against us?

He who did not spare his own Son but handed him over for us all, how will he not also give us everything else along with him?

Who will bring a charge against God's chosen ones? It is God who acquits us.

Who will condemn? It is Christ [Jesus] who died, rather, was raised, who also is at the right hand of God, who indeed intercedes for us.

What will separate us from the love of Christ? Will anguish, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or the sword?

As it is written:

"For your sake we are being slain all the day; we are looked upon as sheep to be slaughtered."

No, in all these things we conquer overwhelmingly through him who loved us.

For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor present things, nor future things, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

Questions for the meeting discussion

1. Following our Sit Down (question 4), let's talk about what each of us understands about our sacrament of marriage.
2. *"If we must speak of deception, it is not love that is guilty of it, but those who turn it into an all-powerful god, capable of satiating the human heart. That is the great lie."* I'm sure we've made this observation for ourselves or for loved ones. How does this encourage us to be witnesses to the good news of Christian marriage? Particularly to our children, grandchildren, godchildren... How can we avoid the risk of one day thinking that our human love is enough to satisfy us?
3. We often talk about the graces of the sacrament of marriage. Following the reading of these texts by Father Henri Caffarel, and our Sit Down, can we name them, distinguishing between graces that are experienced and those that are more difficult for us to perceive? To what extent does this confirm the necessity of God's presence in married love? In what way is our sacrament of marriage a treasure? Does it lead us to holiness? How does it oblige us to bear witness?
4. How can we rely more on our sacrament of marriage to overcome certain marital difficulties or to make our love even more selfless?
5. *"It is through prayer and the sacraments that spouses draw on the sources of divine grace. Penance maintains the transparency of the spouses' hearts (see chapter 5), and this seed of fire, which the Eucharist deposits in each of us, illuminates and warms married life."* How does our personal and conjugal prayer enable us to "draw from the wellsprings of divine grace"? How have we experienced the "seed of fire" that is the Eucharist, which "illuminates and warms married life"? Do we take care to determine together, before each Eucharist, the common offering we are going to bring to it, so that our married life is concretely transformed by it?

Chapter 5: Caring for love

The text we present below offers a series of general considerations that Father Henri Caffarel proposed to "Foyers qui souffrent" (suffering households), couples who, faced with difficulties, might be tempted to distance themselves or give up. They are a series of proposals, called *remedies*, which he thought might be useful to many.

A clear-sighted effort

And first of all, you have to make an effort to be clear-sighted; you have to want to see; even if it means making discoveries that hurt, even and especially if it means finding out personal wrongs, condemning yourself. How desirable it would be if this effort could be made by two people! In fact, by the time the spouses undertake it together, they are no longer disunited. Everything must be done to make this honest conversation possible one day. "Doing everything possible" does not mean rushing things: it is often wise to know how to wait, how to temporize; a false move can considerably delay the moment of healing. The fact remains, however, that while it's wise to wait, out of prudence and patience, it's culpable to evade questions out of cowardice. Doesn't everything in the dark take the form of threatening ghosts, which vanish as if by magic when the light is shed?

Shedding light means seeking out the causes of evil. The most visible are not always the most real: we mustn't allow ourselves to be hypnotized by them. It's important to look beyond them. Without being afraid to acknowledge the spouse's faults, we must not blind ourselves to our own. It's necessary to look them in the face. Not so much to be sorry for them - great despair is no solution - but to acknowledge them to yourself and perhaps, when the time comes, to the other person. I'd like to think that many situations fester because spouses shy away from the effort of searching and being frank. Had they done so, all would have been quickly unraveled. Truth is liberating.

Once the causes have been identified, it's time to look at the real remedies. Palliative treatment momentarily soothes the pain, but as it does not reach the cause, it does not cure.

Change your heart

The first remedy is often a change of heart. Ah, I know we tend to wait for our partner to change, but if they both react like that, chances are nothing will change!

How many things need to be rectified in our hearts! First of all, aren't the roots of that weed, the illusion of happiness, still alive and well? As if perfect happiness could ever exist on earth, as if marriage were supposed to bring ready-made happiness... How many disasters have their origins in this illusion held by so many young couples! It needs to be exorcised once and for all.

Then we have to tackle the disappointments and their poisonous fruits. I'm thinking in particular of those resentments, those animosities, proliferating in a heart that believes itself wronged. Look a little closer and discern in all this that feeling I haven't yet named, to which very few dare give its proper name: hatred. Please don't be too quick to think, when you read this word, that the passion it designates is foreign to you. I'm well aware that, in today's overloaded lives, nerves very quickly get the better of us, without the heart being bad. And I'm careful not to confuse impatience with hatred. But I also know that it's dangerous to give free rein to these irritations which, benign at first, contaminate the heart later on and run the risk of arousing hatred: let's have the courage to call by its name this reptile in us that wakes up at certain times, rears up and hisses. Is it not hatred that betrays itself in so many reactions and reflections?

This joy in catching the other in the wrong, this bitter need to be right against him, this venomous allusion to a past fault, this search for grievances - like a hunter adding arrows to his quiver - this jealous care to leave no opportunity to slip the poison of contempt into a word or a gesture; isn't this hatred, more or less serious depending on the case, but always pernicious? For a time, it can cohabit in the soul with love, but one day, as an invading parasite, it will suffocate it. I apologize for the cruelty of my words, but you can't purify a wound without making the patient suffer. There are, of course, generous hearts, infinitely good and merciful, who know nothing of this dreadful evil. No doubt they are rare, and they themselves are not immune to the temptations of hatred.

We need to cultivate within ourselves the antidote to hatred: forgiving mercy. To forgive is to tear up the page on which we wrote, with malice or rage, the debtor account of our spouse, and to rediscover before him or her the attitude of unreserved giving. I believe that this is one of the nerve centers of family life. It's pointless to look for other remedies until we've obtained the grace to know how to forgive, "seventy times seven", if need be. What a relief in the heart that has forgiven! Gone is that noxious climate of moaning, reproach and demands. No doubt the pain remains, but the bitterness is gone. And because we've taken the lead in forgiveness - not the haughty forgiveness of the proud, but the humble forgiveness of the one who doesn't hesitate to admit his or her own wrongs - perhaps the spouse will be reborn in love.

Changing your heart also means changing your outlook. Abandoning the critical gaze and adopting the loving gaze which, through the more or less rough bark, reveals a living sap, working inside

and preparing the buds and flowers of a springtime sometimes closer than we think. Who's to say that, in this seemingly indifferent, hard-headed or stubborn being, there isn't a child's heart crying out, or bleeding and crying out for help? So many so-called wicked adults are just poor kids who need to be cradled! So many things and so many people have disappointed or hurt them, that they no longer dare to believe in love and put on armor to protect themselves from the blows. Your loving gaze will pierce the armor.

Working for your partner's happiness

But it's not enough to change your heart; you have to love. And if you've unlearned how to love, you have to relearn. Rediscover the love that made you say, on the day of your engagement: am I capable of making him happy? - and promised to spare no effort to do so. Return to the resolutions of those radiant hours. Understand what's wrong with the way you do things, and avoid it scrupulously. Guess his desires, strive to meet them. Take an interest in his thoughts, his feelings, his joys, his sorrows, his undertakings. Discern in what he is and in what he does what deserves your admiration, and translate it to him. Don't fail to recognize the delicate gestures, however modest or clumsy, by which he tries to show you a little love. This will encourage him to love. Encourage him to give too: you need to know you need him. Perhaps he hasn't yet broken that spring in every human being that mirrors the most secret impulse of God's Heart: the desire to make people happy.

Have you noticed that I haven't talked to you about pursuing the "conversion" of your spouse - if that's what's needed - but only about working for his or her happiness? I readily believe that the best way, preferable to all sermons and zeal, so quickly indiscreet, to obtain the transformation of another, is to work for the joy of that other.

Share

To love is still to share. Sharing is difficult when you're faced with a person who isn't hungry, but we must never give up. When I speak of sharing, I'm thinking above all of the pooling of spiritual goods. If you don't let him see your soul with its desires, its joys, its aspirations, its deepest life, how can you expect him to love you? It was the discovery of your living soul that once held his gaze and awakened his heart; but today, if you pull down the "iron curtain", if you deny him what in you is lovable, you are no longer helping him to love. Why do so many spouses forget that one of the great laws of love is to work every day to conquer the other? As in the early days, the means remains the same: to please. (...)

I wouldn't hesitate to add: share your grievances. Beware of the wall of silence that separates two people more surely than seas or continents. But there is a way... Admit to reciprocity. Even provoke it. The hours when, in the calm of the evening, all irritation calmed, spouses confide in each other what weighs on their hearts can be so beneficial. Not to relieve their egotism, but out of love. An admitted grievance...

Using the graces of the sacrament of marriage

In closing, I'd like to talk to you about the truest reason for hope: your sacrament of Marriage. It is a force at work in your home, making use of the slightest efforts, even blunders and mistakes, to bring about your union. But it demands your cooperation. *"In the same way that, in the natural order, the energies God has poured out are only manifested in their full vigor if men put them to work by their own labor and industry, otherwise they will derive no benefit from them, so the forces of grace, which from the sacrament have sprung up in the soul and remain there, must be fertilized by the good will and labor of men"* (Pius XI).

It's your trust that enables this great sacrament to be fully effective. So multiply your acts of faith in its virtue, to obtain its healing, pacifying, comforting, unifying grace. The same Pius XI wrote: "You are entitled to the help of present-day grace". Do you understand what is so formidable about these words: you have a right? The defeat of a home is often due to the defeat of its faith. The true Christian knows that there are no hopeless situations: if he strikes the rock, a spring can spring up; the hardest heart can open up; the desert can blossom. Ah, how beautiful is this love after the ordeal, so much stronger, purer and more transparent than on the first day! How good it feels under this roof.

Summary

Father Henri Caffarel offers us an anthological manual for resolving conflicts within marriage. He talks about the importance of having the will to work things out, and of showing a lucid effort on the road to healing love: "you have to want to see". And the best thing is to face this process together, which is not at all easy. You have to know how to wait for the right moment for both of them, but without evading it with cowardice. In the end, God's grace will always accompany us and shed its light on us. And it takes courage to recognize our weaknesses with honesty. We need to ask Jesus to look at us and see the truth in our relationship.

From the truth, we will gain the freedom to seek remedies and change the heart. The first thing we should change is the idea that it is the other who must change. This may be true, but we have little ability to do so. However, we can change ourselves, our way of seeing and expecting. In a

relationship lasting several years, very negative feelings can develop towards our partner, resentment and even hatred. Maybe not towards the person, but towards some of his or her attitudes. If we let this weed grow without treating it, it will choke our love. This is where we need to change our hearts and let in the light of forgiveness, which is the antidote to hatred. Knowing how to forgive "seventy times seven" if necessary, and changing the critical gaze to a loving one, will be our challenges in changing the heart.

But Father Henri Caffarel goes further, saying that it's not just a matter of changing the heart, but of loving. And if we've forgotten this, we need to relearn by remembering how we loved each other during our engagement, when we worked for the other's happiness and joy, which is the best way to transform him or her.

Finally, our greatest reason for hope lies in our sacrament of marriage. This sacrament, like all sacraments, is a source of grace when we put it to work through prayer and faith. Father Henri Caffarel asserts that the collapse of a marriage often has its origins in the collapse of its faith.

THE SIT DOWN

Tracks for the sit-down assignment

It's impossible to live together through the years without routine making its inexcusable appearance. Much of life is made up of routines from which there is no escape. Days follow one another with almost the same schedules, the same repetition of gestures, the same tasks, the same difficulties.

Dialogues are shortened or repeated. Words tell only what's happening, and often what's going wrong: difficulties at work, disagreements with colleagues, minor problems with children, misunderstandings with families of origin, if not complaints and demands. Routine can provoke an insidious crisis that withers life, projects and feelings.

We're content to do what we have to do day after day. You know it's not the other person's fault, but you're still angry with them for not being able to break the closed circle of boredom in which they both feel trapped. We're content to hold out, to put up with it, to tell ourselves that life is like that and there's nothing we can do about it. On the other hand, to be alive, love needs to integrate the unexpected, the surprise, it needs to go beyond the implied, to manifest itself in words and gestures that from time to time rekindle its vitality.

Finally, we see that forgiveness is possible if it is given and received as it should be given and received. If they are haughty, forgiveness breeds revolt. If they are reticent, they overwhelm the other, who is always afraid of a relapse. Without love, they can neither liberate nor save. True forgiveness, the fruit of a very pure love that only God can engender in our hearts, can bring a living spring to the heart of both the forgiven and the forgiver.

Suggested questions the sit-down

A lucid look at "routine": routine is what saves couples... A surprising statement. But why?

Imagine that every day you jump out of bed and ask yourself the following questions:

- Where will I sleep tonight?
- Where will I be working today?
- Who will I love all day long?

And so on and so forth. It would be unbearable, and anxiety would fill our days. Human beings need a secure base. What for? Precisely to allow for creativity and the unexpected. And this security, this trust in others based on a human organization, enables us to surprise each other and invent "gifts" for each other where love will be nourished.

1. I'm sure we've all experienced routine in our married lives, and seen it make our love more bland and boring, or even lead to a crisis that's more or less overcome. Can we name what constitutes a burdensome routine for either of us? How can we go beyond the sometimes inescapable routine and introduce something new, unexpected, whimsical, humorous? What words and gestures could revitalize our love, and our own vitality?
2. An effort of lucidity that requires preparation.
First, which can be a personal preparation to answer the following questions if possible in writing:
 - How do we feel about our lives? How do we feel as a couple? Do I have any delicate, painful points that I'd like to discuss with the other person?
 - Where does our love stand? How has it evolved since the wonder of the first day? It may have been damaged at times by our attitude.

Second, let's share with our spouse:

- on what we've each written on our own,
- our own shortcomings that we've identified. Then, as a couple, let's try to identify the causes. Finally, let's try to find remedies for whatever is damaging our married love.

3. Change your heart.

Among the remedies identified during the sharing on the previous question, we probably noted the need to change our hearts.

Father Henri Caffarel talks about the illusion of happiness, the illusion of perfect, easy happiness on earth. To what extent is this illusion still alive in our minds at times?

Only unremitting forgiveness will enable us to rediscover the attitude of unreserved self-giving, a look of love rather than criticism. "Penance (the sacrament of reconciliation) nurtures the hearts of spouses" (chapter 4). In what ways have we been able to have these experiences?

4. Working for your partner's happiness.

"We have to love," says Father Henri Caffarel, relearning how to love if necessary, rediscovering that love of the first day that was all about the happiness of the spouse.

In relation to our spouse, tell us in what ways we take an interest in his or her thoughts, feelings, joys, sorrows and undertakings. Do we always admire our partner? How do we show it, and how does our partner perceive this admiration or not?

5. To love is to share.

Let's talk about how we share spiritual goods, spiritual life, our souls and our deepest hearts. But also our joys and grievances.

6. Finally, could we not, if we haven't already done so, take time each evening to reread the way in which we have lived and felt married love? Giving thanks for the beautiful things we've experienced, and asking forgiveness for our shortcomings.

THE TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word: Col 3 :12-17

Put on then, as God's chosen ones, holy and beloved, heartfelt compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience, bearing with one another and forgiving one another, if one has a grievance against another; as the Lord has forgiven you, so must you also do.

And over all these put on love, that is, the bond of perfection.

And let the peace of Christ control your hearts, the peace into which you were also called in one body. And be thankful.

Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, as in all wisdom you teach and admonish one another, singing psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God.

And whatever you do, in word or in deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Questions for the meeting discussion

In view of the many important and varied questions in this chapter, which are included in the suggested questions for the sit down, we suggest that sufficient time be set aside for discussion of this endeavor (concrete point of effort), so that whatever the team member wishes to say on this subject is reported at this time, and not during the discussion of the theme, which will therefore have no specific time at this meeting. This requires a deep respect for what each team member would like to say about the issues addressed in his or her marital dialogue.

Chapter 6: Cultivating married love

Conjugal agape

To emphasize the originality of Christian brotherly love, and to prevent it from being equated with any other form of love, the New Testament writers used a Greek word that was not commonly used: agape. We don't know how to translate it into French... The term amour (love) is too common; as for the term charité (charity), which is its true translation, it has been so trivialized and scorned since we invented charity sales and charity bazaars! So much so, in fact, that this most noble of words has become synonymous with vaguely pious condescension. (...)

Christ invites us to love all our brothers and sisters. But since it's impossible to love them all with the same concrete and effective love, the Lord wants us to be particularly attached to certain people, so that with them we can go as far as possible in the practice of agape. And I think I hear Christ saying to married Christians: *"My commandment is for you to live it out in the closest, strongest, most intimate human relationship: marriage. Love one another as I have loved you."*

Love and agape

"Love one another as I have loved you!" What are you going to do, husband and wife, to respond to this demand of Christ, to acquire and increase this love, this conjugal agape? Insofar as this love is of divine origin, as we have seen, you must first draw it from divine sources, by meditating on the Word of God, by receiving the Eucharist, by praying, but I won't dwell on that today. Since this love is yours, since it is given to you, since you have it at your disposal, you have to exercise it. Otherwise, like any unused faculty, it will quickly wither away. But what does it mean to exercise conjugal agape? That's what we need to think about at length.

Above all, don't imagine that to practice agape is to ignore the human elements of love. Look at Christ - for we must love as he did. He certainly loved people with agape, but how human that agape is! How often the Gospel shows him affectionate with his apostles and the children of Palestine, moved with compassion in the presence of human distress, and his weeping before the tomb of Lazarus elicits from the Jews the exclamation: "How he loved him!" To love with agape, then, is not to renounce human ways of loving, but to let pass through all the words and manifestations of human love, the impulse of that love which we draw from the heart of God.

So let's look at what conjugal love becomes under the impulse of agape, and to get to the heart of the matter, let's start with the fundamental laws of conjugal love: to know and to make known, to take charge and to let oneself be taken charge of, to give and to receive.

Getting to know each other

Love and knowledge go hand in hand: you have to know before you can love. But have you noticed that your love, in order to stay alive, requires a renewed knowledge of your partner? For my part, I've often observed that neglect and distraction of the gaze precede and lead to the decline of love, and that faithful attention, on the other hand, engenders fidelity of heart.

Let's take a closer look. Marital love is a complex reality: a bundle of more or less interconnected, hierarchical impulses. All must be kept alive, lest the decline of one lead to the decline of the others. The law of knowledge applies to all of them. It's dangerous for a newly-wed to lose sight of his wife's moral qualities, but it's no less dangerous to cease to marvel at the charm of her face, or to become inattentive to her tenderness: little by little, those varied impulses awakened in him by the sight of his wife's moral qualities, physical beauty and gestures of tenderness will fade away.

The worst thing would be to lose sight of the other person's deepest self. It's the discovery of a being's originality and uniqueness that is the foundation of true conjugal love. Remember... What was it that awakened, called, conquered and attracted your inner self, if not the sight, in this being who crossed your path, of his or her "inner face"? No doubt you'd already been alerted by his visible qualities, but they wouldn't have been enough to arouse a certain quality of love if you hadn't discovered in him a more mysterious beauty. But how easily the gaze loses this miraculous gift of "double sight"! Above all, don't take it for granted, but keep launching and re-launching yourself into the discovery of the other person.

If husband and wife look at each other with fresh eyes every day, their love is bound to become ever younger and more vibrant. If they know they are begotten of the Lord, then their gaze will try to find in each other a totally different beauty, the face of a child of God. Don't cry mysticism: the Christian whose eyes are sharpened by faith learns to see transparency in others. It's as if Christ were communicating his own gaze, the gaze that Saint Mark evokes in the episode of the rich young man: "*Jesus fixed his gaze on him and loved him*". I'm sure there are many among you who would be ready to testify that their love was transformed from the day they looked at their spouse in this way.

But it's quite clear that only spouses who practice making themselves known can get to know each other in depth. Who cultivate the virtue of transparency. It's not easy to reveal the universe of your thoughts and feelings, your intimate personality. Many tendencies conspire against this openness: modesty, shyness, stinginess of heart. Most serious of all is the insidious temptation to draw back the iron curtain in retaliation for an indelicacy or offense, real or imagined.

We must reject these tendencies and temptations at all costs. How will the other person come to meet us if we conceal from him the qualities that might seduce him, the sorrows that would arouse his affectionate compassion? A friend who doesn't forgive me for having been born in Lyon once brought me a supposed definition of the Lyonnais: "*We're reduced to assuming it's full of perfume, but refusing to uncork it!*" If you want to be appreciated and loved, you have to know how to... pop the cork.

But agape demands more: that you allow your spouse to enter into your intimacy with God, following the example of Christ who allowed his apostles to witness his tête-à-tête with the Father when, before leaving the Cenacle to go to the Garden of Olives, he prayed his great priestly prayer before them. Praying aloud, husband and wife, side by side, talking regularly about your interior life, sharing your discoveries in the field of faith - isn't this an essential condition for getting to know each other as God knows you? (...)

Caring and being cared for

This second law follows on from the first. This being, whose qualities, unique value and potential for good and happiness you have glimpsed, how could you not feel a vehement desire to promote its full development? Contrary to common belief, I'm convinced that, for a well-born heart, the first movement of love towards another - if this love is founded on the discovery of that other's deepest self - is one of pure homage, of self-offering, of ardent and selfless desire for that other's fulfillment. I'm sure you've experienced it. It's true that a second movement, a self-interested one, arises almost immediately, as you realize that the love of this being reserves joy and profit for yourself. The question is whether you'll put his good before yours, or your good before his - and in the latter case, true love will only have lasted "the space of a morning".

The will to do good for others is the soul of all true love. It demands that you overcome the old instinct to claim and monopolize, and translate it into daily action.

Sometimes, wanting what's best for a loved one means denying them what would be detrimental to their greatest joy. It's not always easy. There are times when to love is to accept suffering.

But for God's children, it's not just a question of promoting the human good and happiness of others; each one knows and wants to be responsible for the blossoming in the Lord's grace of the one they love. It's our dearest ambition to bring him or her ever closer to Christ. Oh, it's not impossible that, from time to time, you'll feel a little twinge of sorrow as you witness Christ's growing hold over you, but you know that the Lord does not confiscate the hearts that surrender themselves to him.

Taking care of each other, being responsible for each other's development, implies in return that each of you recognizes that you need the other. Of course, it's easy to turn to the other for trivial services and superficial satisfactions, but it's much less easy to accept that you need him or her in depth, to entrust him or her with your needs, weaknesses and ignorance, so that he or she can come to your rescue. Nevertheless, it's an inalienable requirement of love. And besides, haven't you noticed that often the best way to promote moral progress in a person is to need them, to stimulate their love and generosity by appealing to them?

The Christian, for his part, will rely on his spouse in his efforts to divest himself of the behaviors and feelings of the "old man" and acquire the feelings and behaviors of a true son of God. It's certainly not a question of expecting the spouse to be a director of conscience, in the strict sense of the term; but if he doesn't have the powers of the priest, he does have others, and precisely to help his fellow traveler grow in charity. No doubt there are some among you who have been delighted to realize that the habit of humbly turning to the spiritual help of your spouse, of asking for help, support and training, has ultimately been the best way to help him or her in their spiritual progress. For he felt that if he was not to disappoint the trust placed in him, he had to be ever more united with God. Why do so few couples achieve the pinnacle of conjugal agape that is spiritual mutual aid? Do they doubt that the demands of the new commandment go so far?

Summary

Father Henri Caffarel asks how we are to love one another with the love that Christ has for us, for we are called to such demanding love and, since it is impossible to love all our brothers and sisters like Christ, we must make efforts in our most immediate environment, starting with our spouse. To do this, he suggests we start from three fundamental aspects of married love: knowing the other and making oneself known (chapter 6), caring and letting oneself be cared for (chapter 6), giving and receiving (chapter 7).

Knowing yourself: this is not just a question of superficial knowledge, although this is important (beauty, attractiveness, admiration...), but of being attentive to the deepest self, because the foundation of true married love is the discovery of a person in all that is original and unique about him or her. To achieve this, it is essential to constantly awaken our sensitivity to what we described in Chapter 1: Awakening the loving gaze.

To do this, we need to give the other person the opportunity to get to know us in our intimacy with God, just as Jesus let us see how he united with the Father in prayer. Conjugal prayer is our tool for deepening this understanding.

Caring for each other: At some point in our relationship, we've all experienced the desire to help the other person, to bring them to their full potential. Looking out for the other's good is the soul of all true love. And this is difficult, because it can sometimes cause the loved one to suffer. And this must be accepted. Father Henri Caffarel goes beyond the day-to-day care of the other and seeks spiritual care and progress. And to do this, he suggests we recognize and express to our partner our deep need for him/her. This can be a powerful tool for stimulating her/his love and generosity.

THE SIT DOWN

Tracks for the sit-down assignment

We don't know how to appreciate the person we have too close to us. We don't have enough perspective. We don't realize that we're sharing real life, but that we may also be secretly holding on to parallel dreams. We can never be completely sure of each other's hearts. A heart that we can neither possess nor know in its entirety, unless the other is willing to reveal it.

We see ourselves at that turning point in life when we're still young but not so young, and we start to think about the time that remains. That's when we start asking ourselves "what ifs": "*what if I'd married that first love that isn't totally forgotten*", "*what if I see that person again who seems to understand me so well*", or "*what if faith is just a mirage that reassures me...*". All these "ifs" place us at crossroads that shake us up. And we have to choose again. We can even doubt the bond assumed by our marriage, justifying ourselves by the idea that we were too young. When, on the contrary, we should relive the memory of the certainty that the generosity of youth made so indisputable, and remain faithful to it beyond the limits and changes of life.

Suggested questions for the sit-down

1. Conjugal agape, love and agape.

It's about loving with the very love of Christ, loving with that selfless impulse of love, all directed towards the happiness of our spouse.

"Love one another as I have loved you!" What are you going to do, husband and wife, to respond to this demand of Christ, to acquire and increase this love, this conjugal agape?

2. Know and be known.

Do we take a fresh look at ourselves every day? Do we marvel every day at the charm of our partner's face, his moral qualities and, above all, his inner self?

Are we open enough to each other to reveal our thoughts, feelings and innermost selves?

Do we give concrete examples of what has been given and also of what has not been given to the partner and which could have been or could be (we sometimes have to choose the right moment to say certain things...)? How can we remedy this?

3. *"But agape requires more: that you allow your spouse into your intimacy with God..."*

How do we share our intimacy with God? How do we help each other spiritually? What are the concrete gestures and actions we take to help others grow in their faith? Have we considered having our own personal spiritual guide? What are the obstacles to doing so? If you do, what benefits will it bring to the quality of your married love? Let's give thanks.

4. Caring and letting yourself be cared for.

We're talking about taking responsibility for our partner's full development. *"Taking care of each other, making each other responsible for each other's fulfillment, implies in return that each agrees to recognize that he or she needs the other."*

What would you like to say about this statement by Father Henri Caffarel? Do we confide enough in our spouse? What could we share more to love with a love even more in line with that with which God loves us?

5. God has given us a magnificent gift in giving us our spouse to love. To love as Christ asks us is to want the other person to be happy. It means drawing love from the very heart of God.

Talk about what each of you thinks and experiences of this demand for love?

"The whole question then is whether you'll put his good before yours, or your good before his."

What are the times when you just can't do it? Do you know the cause? What could you do about it? But do we know how to keep time for ourselves, to cultivate our own secret garden?

Wanting the other person to be happy sometimes requires us to say certain things to each other, and can lead to disagreements that enable us to love better afterwards? How do we achieve this?

THE TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word: Romans 12:9-21

Let love be sincere; hate what is evil, hold on to what is good;

love one another with mutual affection; anticipate one another in showing honor.

Do not grow slack in zeal, be fervent in spirit, serve the Lord.

Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer.

Contribute to the needs of the holy ones, exercise hospitality.

Bless those who persecute [you], bless and do not curse them.

Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

Have the same regard for one another; do not be haughty but associate with the lowly; do not be wise in your own estimation.

Do not repay anyone evil for evil; be concerned for what is noble in the sight of all.

If possible, on your part, live at peace with all.

Beloved, do not look for revenge but leave room for the wrath; for it is written, "Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord."

Rather, "if your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink; for by so doing you will heap burning coals upon his head."

Do not be conquered by evil but conquer evil with good.

Questions for the meeting discussion

1. What have we discovered by reading these texts by Father Henri Caffarel? What do we wish to share about our sit down?

2. How does the team stimulate us to love with an ever-greater love for our spouse and for God?
3. How easily do we share with our spouse our relationship with God and our spiritual life? How do we do this? How does this spiritual mutual aid improve the quality of our married love?
4. To live this level of agape, we need our Lord's help. To dare to ask for his help. Is prayer an endeavor (concrete point of effort) that we've gradually been able to implement in our daily lives? Is it still difficult? How do we help each other? How does the team help us? The same goes for conjugal prayer, which can be the place where we confide our love to the Lord, its joys and its difficulties in loving as he loves us.

Chapter 7: Conjugal communion

Giving and receiving

You passionately want this person you love to be fulfilled, to acquire all possible perfection, to live an ever more intense life. But as long as you confine yourself to giving him your devotion, to sharing with him only your material and moral goods, he will remain deprived of what is most necessary to him: the gift of yourself. He too could say to you, "*It's not the goods, it's not the services, it's you I want, not just something from you.*" Loving is much more than giving, it's giving yourself, dispossessing yourself for the benefit of the other, giving up your right to self-determination, joyfully consenting to dependence. Love means exodus and ecstasy. Exodus: leaving one's father and mother, one's home and possessions, and finally leaving oneself behind to reach the distant island of the other. Ecstasy: losing sight of oneself, being outside oneself, present to the other, given. A young scout once said, "To love is to camp in the heart of another. "

Does this mean that the humble gestures of love, the modest attentions, are superfluous and trivial? That would be to ignore our carnal condition and the laws of communication between human beings. A bouquet of violets on a birthday is a precious gift, because it's a visible sign to the recipient of the profound self-giving of the giver. Like the bouquet of violets, the whole of married life should be charged with meaning. Cohabitation, sexual relations, gestures of tenderness lose all value if they are empty of soul, if they are not signs of a deep, mutual gift.

But I'm talking as if exchanges between spouses only have the value of a sign. Not only do they express the gift of self, they also renew and deepen it. In love, as in religion, rites and signs are necessary, because they are effective in updating and reactivating the soul's fervor.

At the level of agape, to love is also to give oneself, to surrender one's deepest self, but then it's a reformed self, recreated, enriched by agape, henceforth capable of loving "as" Christ loves, even to the point of self-sacrifice. Better still, it's giving way to God's love:

I want to learn with God to reserve nothing, to be that all-good, all-given thing that reserves nothing and from whom everything is taken!

Take, Rodrigue, take my heart, take my love, take this God who fills me!

The force by which I love you is no different from the force by which you exist.

I am forever united to that thing which gives you eternal life" (Le Soulier de Satin).

Each spouse should be able to say to the other, adapting Saint Paul's phrase: I love you, but it is no longer I who love you, but Christ who loves you in me, who gives himself through me (cf. Gal 2:20).

Just as the ball thrown against the wall returns to the player, so the gift returns to the giver if it is not welcomed. Reciprocity in giving therefore requires reciprocity in receiving. I'll never come out of myself if there's no one to receive me.

The term "welcome" seems to imply passivity. But make no mistake: in love, welcoming is a very active attitude. It means always being ready to receive a confidence, a confession, a gift, a testimony of love - with respect, intelligence and gratitude. It's about accepting the other person not as we'd like them to be, but as they are, with their inadequacies as well as their qualities, with their sinfulness as well as their grace. "You no longer have to be someone else for me to love you.

But don't get me wrong: it's not just at home or close to home, it's within oneself, in the very depths of one's spiritual being, that the loved one must be welcomed. A friend wrote to me: "*Brigitte is more and more interior to me*"; I understood from these words that her love was progressing.

Paradoxical as it may seem, I would say that welcoming must precede giving, in the sense that the other must always feel expected and desired. Welcoming is first and foremost greed, the greed of love, not to be confused with selfish covetousness. Greed that shows the loved one that he or she is needed to be happy, that he or she is capable of making others happy - an experience that I'm not far from thinking is indispensable, irreplaceable, for awakening one of the most secret fibres in the human heart.

It has been said that agape is a pure, rigorously selfless gift. Yes, in God, in the Father, in whom it has its source, it is a gushing fullness. In the Son, on the other hand, love is first and foremost acceptance of the Father's gift, and the same is true of God's children. So seeing your spouse as a "living sacrament" of the Lord, eagerly awaiting God's gift and eagerly welcoming it, are all fundamental spiritual attitudes that agape commands.

The supremacy of agape

Will you reproach me for having sacrificed too much to the psychology of married love? I don't think I deserve it, so convinced am I that by playing the game of human love, honestly, daily, perseveringly, spouses allow agape to grow and permeate their whole being and their whole life,

making of it an offering pleasing to God. Does this not echo the most authentic teaching on Christian marriage: the grace of the sacrament of marriage uses all the activities of married life to communicate itself? I am suspicious of those who, on the pretext of the supernatural, begin by neglecting the demanding laws of human love. (...)

It's already true of human love that it achieves the unity of life; it's even truer of agape. Insofar as it is love of God, it regulates, orders and unifies the inclinations, aspirations, wills and virtues of the spouses, all their varied activities - family, professional, social and religious - and directs them towards its own end: the glory of the Lord. Insofar as it is love of the spouse, it assumes, integrates and unifies in a single bundle, in a single impulse, all the components of conjugal love: attraction and physical impulse, testimonies of tenderness, and all their varied feelings of devotion, esteem, respect, generosity, gratitude, fidelity... It enlists them in its service, communicates their impulse to them - not, moreover, without healing them, refining them, elevating them, infusing them with purity, fervor, holiness.

Between these two children of God who practice the new commandment, married life undergoes an admirable transfiguration. And to think that some households fear the intervention of agape for the integrity of their conjugal love!

Here, sketched out, is the ideal to which Christian spouses aspire under the impulse of agape. Once again, I'm afraid, some will accuse me of being an unrepentant idealist. But do Christian households want to understand their union in the light of Christ's teachings? Do they want to play right into the hands of the one who came to make "all things new"? Would it be enough to present Christians with studies in marital psychology, more or less seasoned with Christian morality? For my part, I refuse to do so. Nothing seems more serious than half-truths that ease the conscience and, ultimately, dispense with any spiritual effort. If there are those who are discouraged by the ideal, isn't it because they refuse to be condemned by it? Just as I, a priest, am condemned by the holiness of the Curé d'Ars. But if we accept this condemnation, the ideal becomes a force of attraction.

Conjugal communion

As we have seen, conjugal love aspires to reciprocity, but this reciprocity in knowledge, in care, in gift, is not the ultimate end to which the dynamism of love tends. Beyond the exchanges, the sharing, the back-and-forth of giving, there is communion. Remember our diagram: relationship, love, communion. Conjugal love postulates communion at every level: in the flesh as well as in feelings, in intellectual life as well as in moral life. Many people misunderstand the nature of this

communion. They see it as passivity, as indulgence: love resting on desire in reciprocal possession, passive adherence to a shared ideal. It's something else altogether: a shared activity, an ardent life.

Communion of saints

Conjugal agape, too, tends towards a communion of its own, far more intimate, stronger and richer than any other. Agape unites the spouses at the level of their Christian selves, making them "one heart and one soul", as it is said of the first disciples (Acts 4:32). Far from being passive, this communion through agape is an intense, shared activity, a synergy, the participation of two in the same vital act of knowing and loving God, under the impulse of the Holy Spirit who indwells the spouses. Saint John's promise is verified for them: *"God is love, and whoever remains in love remains in God and God in him This is how we know that we remain in him and he in us, that he has given us of his Spirit."* (1 Jn 4:16,13). *"For those who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God. For you did not receive a spirit of slavery to fall back into fear, but you received a spirit of adoption, through which we cry, "Abba, Father!"* (Rom 8:14-15).

Such communion is not miraculously given one day, but is built up little by little through the multiform action of conjugal agape, of which it will be the masterpiece. If it's true that any progress in mutual love strengthens it, it must also be directly pursued. And there are many ways to work towards it: it's to seek, husband and wife together, the knowledge of God by reading and meditating on his Word, by sharing religious thoughts and feelings; it's to give ourselves together to the Lord's works: raising children, welcoming others, serving the Church; it's also and above all to adore and praise God, to give him thanks and love him together.

Then, sometimes, after a long period "faithful to fraternal communion" (Acts 2:42), the spouses have a marvellous experience: they realize that the same Holy Spirit gives them both the same light, the same love, the same prayer, the same joy. St John's verse suddenly becomes luminous for them: *"We know, we experience, that we have passed from death to life, because we love one another"*. Because they love each other, Life has arisen between them and in each of them.

St. Thomas uses some admirable expressions to describe the communion achieved by agape: *"It is a sharing in the goods of eternal life": "a common participation in the happiness of God"*.

As we have seen, sacred authors have used the term *koinônia* to define this communion achieved through agape - between two or three Christians, as well as between all. This is none other than the "communion of saints" in which you profess to believe in the recitation of the creed, and which so

many Christians equate with some "compensation fund" for merits, when in fact it is the prodigious reality of the union of hearts and souls, under the influence of a living agape, the great spiritual community that all God's children form together.

But this communion is not only spiritual and invisible, it is also situated in space and time, it is "incarnate" and, in this respect, another Greek word is used to designate it: ecclesia, church. It designates the same reality as koinônia, but whereas koinônia emphasizes the inner, invisible aspect, ecclesia emphasizes the outer, institutional aspect.

Both terms are worth remembering when talking about the home founded by and on the sacrament of marriage. It is, as I have just shown, a spiritual community animated by agape; it is a koinônia, a reduced communion of saints; but it is also an ecclesia, a domestic ecclesia, a small church, a visible cell of the Church where the koinônia takes shape, where the mystery of the great Church is actualized and lived out, and all the more perfectly because agape is more alive there. These two notions of koinônia and ecclesia are like two windows opening onto the depth of the mystery of Christian marriage.

Summary

In this chapter, Father Henri Caffarel continues the development of his discourse on the three fundamental aspects of married love. After speaking in chapter 6 about knowing and caring for one another, he turns here to the theme of giving and receiving. It is probably in this chapter that Father Henri Caffarel's demanding character is most apparent, for this concept of conjugal communion rests on the ideal of love that Christ has for each of us, as the ultimate goal of our conjugal love. No more, no less.

For loving is much more than giving ourselves to one another. Loving (at this level) means freeing my deepest self, perfected by spiritual love (agape), to love as Christ loves us, even to the point of self-sacrifice. This means giving way to God's love. This ambitious goal can be read in the quote adapted from Galatians: "I love you, but it is no longer I who love you, but Christ who loves you in me, who gives himself to you through me". (Gal 2:20)

And it all starts with giving ourselves to each other, and welcoming each other. Welcoming means accepting the other not as we would like them to be, but as they are, with all their faults and qualities. And the gift we give to the other must be an unreserved and unrequited gift. In agape, we

find this characteristic of God's overflowing, infinite love. This love should be our ideal. Sure, it's demanding and difficult, but it's a beautiful and attractive ideal, and for this reason it should also be a source of motivation for marriage.

The ultimate goal of married love lies not so much in the reciprocity of giving and receiving, but in communion at every level. This communion must be understood as a common activity, a common life inspired by the Spirit, which transcends the earthly and approaches the divine, as we understand the communion of saints.

THE SIT DOWN

Tracks for the sit-down assignment

Finally, we were able to recognize that this desire for the absolute, which inhabited the love of one for the other and was never fully satisfied, was a call for both of them to seek God together. We also discovered that this intimate and profound communion did not distance the couple from others, but opened them up to the world, that this gift of communion was not only a covenant between the two of them with Christ, but that it pushed them towards all those around them who expected them to be a visible sign, the sacrament of another Love, which they would not otherwise recognize.

Suggested questions for the sit-down

1. Giving and receiving.

This undoubtedly requires time during which the Lord will work on us. How do we put this into practice in our daily married life? What are the components of our gift to and acceptance of others, of our greed for love? What obstacles do we encounter? At the same time as we give ourselves to or welcome our spouse, do we give God to our spouse? And do we welcome Him through our spouse? And in what way?

2. Gestures of love are a visible sign our love for our partner. What are these gestures of love, these rituals that we practice with each other, that we've put in place and that have the power to express the gift of ourselves? Have we forgotten them? How can we renew them? How do these gestures, these rituals, bring us and our spouse closer to God?

3. The supremacy of agape.

According to Father Henri Caffarel, agape "regulates, orders and unifies the inclinations, aspirations, wills and virtues of the spouses, as well as all their varied activities - family, professional, social and religious - and directs them towards its own end: the glory of the Lord". Agape also gives human love its impetus, its fervour, its thirst for holiness, while at the same time healing it. In what circumstances have we observed this? How can we continue to implement a love that is more and more agape, that is, more and more in line with God's love?

4. The supremacy of agape.

According to Father Henri Caffarel, agape "regulates, orders and unifies the inclinations, aspirations, wills and virtues of the spouses, as well as all their varied activities - family, professional, social and religious - and directs them towards its own end: the glory of the Lord". Agape also gives human love its impetus, its fervour, its thirst for holiness, while at the same time healing it. In what circumstances have we observed this? How can we continue to implement a love that is more and more agape, that is, more and more in line with God's love?

THE TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word: 1 Jn : 3 18-24

Children, let us love not in word or speech but in deed and truth.

[Now] this is how we shall know that we belong to the truth and reassure our hearts before him in whatever our hearts condemn, for God is greater than our hearts and knows everything.

Beloved, if [our] hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence in God and receive from him whatever we ask, because we keep his commandments and do what pleases him.

And his commandment is this: we should believe in the name of his Son, Jesus Christ, and love one another just as he commanded us.

Those who keep his commandments remain in him, and he in them, and the way we know that he remains in us is from the Spirit that he gave us.

Questions for the meeting discussion:

1. Let's share our understanding of agape love and how we live, or strive to live, day by day, progressively from this agape love?
2. Conjugal communion and the communion of saints.
In what circumstances have we experienced being "*one heart and one soul*"? What can help us, personally and as a couple, to increase our knowledge of God, our love of God? Are we aware that participating together in the Lord's works³ increases our love for each other and for God? Let's give some examples. Have these attitudes made us "*aware that the same Holy Spirit arouses in them both the same light, the same love, the same prayer, the same joy*"? How do we live conjugal communion in the different aspects of our lives?

³ "*Works of the Lord: educating children, welcoming others, serving the Church;*"

3. How does Father Henri Caffarel's perspective on Christian marriage inspire us to think of it as both a communion of saints, a spiritual community animated by agape, and a domestic Church, the place where the mystery of the great Church is actualized and lived out?

Chapter 8: The testimony of married life

I think you'll agree with me that the challenge posed to Christians by atheism urgently requires a response: our witness. If we know and love God, how can we fail to find it intolerable that his true face should be disfigured and mocked in this way? If we love our brothers and sisters, how can we bear the fact that, unaware of the true God, they are plunged into anguish, anxiety and absurdity? If you have a sense of human solidarity, how can you not feel co-responsible for the betrayal of God by Christians?

It's the responsibility of the whole Church to reveal the true face of God in our time, but this evening I'd like to show you that in a very special sense it's the responsibility of the home. I can guess your reaction: the mission is great, too great, we have neither the time nor the competence. But what if I told you that you're particularly suited to this mission precisely because you're from the homes. You have your own charisma. What's more, to be the witnesses the world is waiting for, you don't have to leave your family and professional duties, you don't have to go off on some distant crusade. Let me explain: it's from your conjugal love, from your home, that the atheist world, without suspecting it, expects an essential witness. First, I'll talk about the witness you must bear with your life, and then about the witness of your word.

Allow me to express God's thoughts on the couple in the manner of Péguy, the French writer perhaps too often forgotten today. God says:

"Christian couple, you are my pride and my hope. When I created heaven and earth, and in heaven, great luminaries, I saw in my creatures vestiges of my perfections and I thought it was good. When I had covered the earth with its great mantle of fields and forests, I saw that it was good; when I had created the innumerable animals according to their species, I contemplated in these living and teeming beings a reflection of my overflowing life, I found that it was good! From all my creation, a great solemn and joyful hymn arose, celebrating my glory and my perfections. And yet nowhere did I see the image of my most secret, most fervent life. So I felt the need to reveal the best of myself, and this was my most beautiful invention. And so I created you, a human couple, in my image and likeness. And I saw, and this time, I thought it was very good. In the midst of this universe where every creature spells out my glory, celebrates my perfections, at last love had arisen to reveal my love. Human couple, my beloved creature, my privileged witness, do you understand why you are dear to me among all creatures? Do you understand the immense hope I place in you? You are the bearer of my reputation, of my glory, you are for the universe the great reason to hope, because you are love.

Let's take a closer look at your mission as God's witnesses. The first way to fulfill this mission is to live your love ever more perfectly, to ensure that it unfolds all its potential, that it manifests itself faithfully, happily and fruitfully. It's true that this is beyond your reach. Men and women soon realize that evil is at work in the home. The grace of Christ, the couple's saviour, must be called upon, and your union becomes a witness not only to God the Creator, but also to God the Saviour.

Your home will bear witness to God even more explicitly if it is the union of two seekers of God, in the admirable expression of the Psalms. Two seekers, whose minds and hearts are eager to know, to meet God, to be united with him, because they have understood that God is the great reality, because God interests them more than anything else. How many of you I know are? true seekers of God?

Such a home is a place of worship. Not only in the sense that the spouses are worshippers in spirit and in truth, and that their children are brought up to be worshippers too, but also in the sense that this impulse to worship guides hearts and tasks all day long. The Christian home is that Church in reduction of which Saint John Chrysostom spoke, that Church cell of which Paul VI spoke to us... Even if all other places of worship are closed, disused or destroyed, as is the case in certain regions of the world, the Christian family remains God's dwelling among men.

And because God dwells there, it's a place where God acts, continues to work his miracles, those great things the Bible tells us about. The existence of a Christian home is a holy story, because it is a story led by God. And those who come to ask for hospitality, whether they are aware of it or not, find the One whose home it is. Where there is love and charity, there God is present.

The visitor discovers this God at work in the home through many clues. A preoccupation with poverty and charity, a habitual way of emphasizing the good side of people and things, a spontaneously evangelical judgment of events, an independence from the world, from intellectual or other fashions.

There's no danger of such a home becoming a ghetto, where people shut themselves away from the distress of the world. Rather, it's a place from which we leave to go about all human tasks. The God who is a friend of mankind sends his servants on mission when they have regained their strength through mutual love, prayer and rest. So it's not surprising that Christian spouses are witnesses to the living God in the midst of mankind. As proof of this, let me quote an atheist scientist to a Catholic friend: "For you, God is as alive as your husband or your kids, so my arguments against God are ridiculous in front of you. It's as if I were trying to show you that your husband doesn't exist.

You may say that this portrait of the Christian home presupposes that we have solved the problem of being saints. Not at all: I'm not talking about sanctity, but about seeking God, honoring God,

turning to Christ the Savior to overcome daily temptations and obstacles in married and family life. Penance, by which I mean the humble acknowledgement of one's sin, of one's all-too-frequent unfaithfulness to God, already bears witness to God, already reveals his holiness. Indeed, I recall the words of a diplomat from a Latin American country, after a stay in a Teams home where he recognized that the spouses were not perfect, but which was precisely this type of penitent home, in search of God. "I now know that if my country, like this small family community, recognized its transgressions and did penance, it would know the peace that reigns in the home where I have just stayed."

I would like to have communicated to you my conviction that a home for God-seekers is, in our world that no longer believes in God, that no longer believes in love, a theophany, a manifestation of God as was for Moses that bush in the desert that blazed and was not consumed. That if your home life, if your love bears witness to the God of love, then, but only then, must and can you bear witness to the word, it will be backed up by your life.

The testimony of the word

Quite often, I hear people say, "to speak of God, but isn't that to betray him? words, images, concepts are inadequate." It's true, Muslims are right to teach that God's hundredth name, his true name, the other 99 being mere approximations, is unknowable, unspeakable. The Anglican bishop John Robinson wrote along the same lines not long ago: "*When we speak of God, all our words are destined to miss the point.*" Saint Augustine thought the same, but immediately corrected himself. I read him: "*What can he say who speaks of You? And yet, woe to those who are silent about You.*"

So the question is not: "Should we talk about God? The question is: "How can we talk about God so as not to betray him, and so as not to betray him first of all to your children? And here's the answer I'd like to propose and develop. Our God is, as the Bible puts it, a hidden God, unknowable, but who revealed himself in the man Jesus, who made himself known as love, and who is present in the hearts of his creatures. I'd like to comment briefly on this answer.

Our God is a hidden, unknowable God: images and concepts cannot enclose him, but this conviction, far from alienating the believer from God, draws him closer to him and inspires his adoration. I've often seen this with young children. And a Saint Thomas Aquinas wrote some powerful words on the subject: "At the end of our knowledge," he writes, "we know God as unknown, and it is for our spirit a very perfect way of penetrating into the knowledge of God, of recognizing that the divine essence is above what the intelligence can grasp here below." To say that God is above all language is to give a foretaste of his unique greatness.

And yet, to make Himself known, God took the risk of using language. A language infinitely more explicit and eloquent than any other, the incarnation of His Word. The Almighty, to approach us

without offending us, to familiarize us with Him, revealed His glory to us, but subdued by a human face and smile. He has communicated to us the consuming fire of His holiness, but through a human heart. In this Jesus Christ, God reveals his love. God so loved mankind that he gave them his only son. Love is undoubtedly the least inappropriate concept and word for letting us know what God is like in relation to us. But it's true that the term love is terribly overused and ends up being ambiguous. It's always important to be clear about its meaning. Is it not up to you, husbands and wives, to reveal through your lives, as imperfectly as possible, what this word "love" means? Yes, through the love of man and woman, men and women should be guided towards the unknowable mystery.

It's still up to you, husbands and wives, to give a glimpse of the mystery of the Triune God through your union. For our God is not the sad, impassive celibate of the worlds spoken of by René de Chateaubriand, but a warming sun, a community of 3 people who love each other. Here again, we must hasten to go beyond ideas, beyond words to the realities they designate, and silent prayer is ultimately the best way to access the Trinitarian mystery.

Finally, mankind has not yet been told what, without doubt, matters most to them, until they have been taught that our God is not a God elsewhere, beyond, but very near, present, in the hearts of his children. Without knowing this, Saint Augustine was slow to convert, and he confesses (Confession X 27.38): *"Too late did I love You, O Fairness, so ancient, and yet so new! Too late did I love You! For behold, You were within, and I without, and there did I seek You; I, unlovely, rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty You made. You were with me, but I was not with You."*

God is within us, calling us, waiting for us, at work to divinize us, "my Father and I are constantly at work".

Summary

Revealing the true face of God to the people of our time is the responsibility of the whole Church, but it can be a task entrusted to spouses in particular. As demanding as this may seem, Father Henri Caffarel invites us to spread our own charism by being a loving couple. Because that's all it takes. The human couple who love each other can be considered God's most perfect work. So, simply by being a focus for "God-seekers" in a world that no longer believes in God or love, we'll become a theophany, a manifestation of God, just as the burning bush in the desert burned for Moses without being consumed.

If our life and our love reveal the true face of God, this will be the moment when we can use the spoken word to bear witness to God, because our words will be supported by our life as loving

spouses. And that's the best way to avoid betraying the God of Love. Let our words be consistent with our lives.

So it's up to couples united by the sacrament of marriage to let the mystery of the Triune God shine through their union, a God who is a community of three people who love each other. And we must do so without delay, for our responsibility is great. In this way, we can avoid Saint Augustine's regret about his late conversion: "*Too late did I love You, O Fairness, so ancient, and yet so new! Too late did I love You! For behold, You were within, and I without, and there did I seek You; I, unlovely, rushed heedlessly among the things of beauty You made. You were with me, but I was not with You.*"

THE SIT DOWN

Tracks for the sit-down assignment

So what is this inspiration that comes from Father Henri Caffarel, or rather has passed through him, and which gives Équipes Notre-Dame its specific character and charism? It's the intimate link between spirituality and mission, inner inspiration and effective commitment in the Church and society.

We can't separate these two elements, which are part and parcel of the movement's common vocation. At its deepest level, we are convinced that the spiritual life is not domain reserved for an elite group of Christians, who would make it their privilege and their specialty. It is open to all through the Holy Spirit received at baptism: and for all, married men and women, it also has its source in the sacrament of marriage. There is no need to look elsewhere for methods or paths of sanctification: the "yes" of conjugal commitment is the source of a holy life, of a life of disciples of Jesus Christ, because this "yes" has been captured forever in Holy Covenant of God through the sacrament of marriage, so that the couple's mission in the Church and in society is rooted in an existence of men and women who live by this Holy Covenant. (...)

The question facing our Movement today, every Team and every member is: how can we pass on to all Christian couples the gifts we have received through our participation in this movement of conjugal spirituality? The needs are greater now than at any time in history, and the harvesters are few. It's easy to leave this to others, but when we think of all that our initiation has brought us personally, the blossoming of our spirituality as a couple and the support received in our homes that have become domestic churches, then we understand that we have a real responsibility.

Suggested questions for the sit-down

1. "The atheistic world, without suspecting it, expects an essential testimony of your conjugal love and of your family."
In what way are we the witnesses the world is waiting for? To whom are we privileged witnesses, and in what way? How do we move forward?
2. "It's to live your love ever more perfectly, to make it unfold all its virtualities, to make it manifest, faithful, happy, fruitful." Realizing that this is beyond our strength alone, can we testify to the fact that only Christ the Savior can bring us the graces we need to develop a faithful, happy and fruitful love?
3. In what circumstances has He shown Himself to us, and how can we share this experience, which is so beneficial to our relationship? To what extent, then, does Father Henri Caffarel's famous phrase take on its full meaning for us: "I would like to have communicated to you my conviction that a hotbed of God-seekers is to be found in our world, which no longer believes in God, no longer believes in love, a theophany, a manifestation of God..."? Our first place of witness is our family: our children, our parents, our brothers and sisters, nephews and nieces... Beyond our witness of married life, our witness of love, in what situations have we put into words to bear witness to the beauty of a love where the Lord is truly present at the heart of our lives?
4. What do you do to take care of your relationship? How do you feel about approaching young couples, with delicacy and kindness, in your different living environments, with this question

THE TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word: Jn 3 : 13-17

“No one has gone up to heaven except the one who has come down from heaven, the Son of Man. And just as Moses lifted up the serpent in the desert, so must the Son of Man be lifted up, so that everyone who believes in him may have eternal life.”

For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him might not perish but might have eternal life.

For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world might be saved through him.

Questions for the meeting discussion:

1. More than 60 years ago, Father Henri Caffarel was already pointing out the urgency of the Christian couple's witness in a world won over by atheism. All the more so today. Are we convinced of this? What have we done since we got married? What are we doing today? Are we doing it primarily for God, or for our brothers and sisters? Please explain.
2. Let's talk about how our married love can bear witness to the presence of a Trinitarian God? How can our conjugal love reflect the love that flows between the three divine persons? What can we do to make this circulating love (the Holy Spirit) even more present within our couple, so that we can bear greater witness to its benefits? Can the team help us in this?
3. Throughout this year, some of the questions for the sit-down assignment or for the meeting have concerned our witness as a Christian couple. Let's talk about the ways and circumstances in which we have been able to bear witness, to put into words the beauty but also the necessity of a married love that is based on the living presence of Christ in us and within our couple?

Chapter 9: Balance sheet

This chapter has a different structure from the other team meetings we've had throughout the year, and its aim is to review the personal, couple and team journey in the light of what we've experienced. It's a time to reflect, together and under God's watchful eye, on the past year. It's a kind of team meeting, a time for sharing and helping each other in a climate of prayer, truth and communion.

The important thing is to prepare for this meeting as a couple; together, at the end of the year, we take stock of what we've experienced, reflect on the strengths and weaknesses we should emphasize in the next theme, and prepare for the election of the new couple in charge. Another possible option is for this meeting to take place as part of a final Eucharist experienced as a team, and for the proposals to be adapted to the different parties.

As the core of this chapter, we suggest reading a few paragraphs by Father Henri Caffarel from the book, "Amour, qui es-tu?" (Love, who are you ?) 1971, which bring together some of the ideas we've been working on throughout this theme of study.

"Let a man and a woman seduce each other. Let each, every day, have the will to be loved by the other and, for them too, everything is changed. Each needs to "dress his heart" before any encounter. Above all, each needs the other, which is so important in love. But there are needs and there are needs: one is just selfish greed, another is humility of heart; it is this, of course, that matters most in love. Each of us discerns in the other the 'unique' being that 'can only be seen with the heart', and of this unique being we know and want to be responsible, because we are forever responsible for the being we once made ourselves love."

"Love demands putting everything in common, the best and the worst, carrying each other's burdens, living everything together. When we love each other, it's not a question of taking some and leaving some, but of taking responsibility of each other, totally, accepting each other, giving each other what we are. Without, of course, giving up on helping each other to become what we should be."

"Love is complicity. [...] Each person's self is linked to the other's self. It's much more than a pact: it's a knot of two selves. And this link gives each person the security of knowing that, should they change not only physically but also morally, they will nevertheless remain loved by their partner, because they are loved not for this or that physical or moral quality, not for this or that action, but for their "self", for what is unique in them, what remains through all changes and even in death. This knowledge, which lies at the foundation of love, is not acquired once and for all; it requires a daily conquest, on pain of quickly withering away."

To be present to the one you love is to reach out with your gaze to your deepest self. It means being intensely attentive. And through this attention, offering them the best of yourself. So much so that the loved one feels protected, guarded, safeguarded by this loving attention. They know that their temporal existence, but above all their innermost being, their spiritual destiny, is being taken care of. He then experiences a feeling that we must call 'security', but only if we give this word all its spiritual density"

THE SIT DOWN

1. Let's take a moment to review our team life over the past year. In what ways has our way of giving ourselves to our spouse changed, in daily activities, in moments of intimacy, in the spiritual life; and of giving ourselves to others and to God?
2. We can comment on what these last texts by Father Henri Caffarel suggest to us about our conjugal love.
3. How, thanks to deep communion with our spouse, can we feel strengthened to undertake our family, social, professional, ecclesial commitments, our life wherever we find ourselves?

TEAM MEETING

Listening to the Word : Ecclesiastes 4 : 9-12

Two are better than one: They get a good wage for their toil.

If the one falls, the other will help the fallen one. But woe to the solitary person! If that one should fall, there is no other to help.

So also, if two sleep together, they keep each other warm. How can one alone keep warm?
Where one alone may be overcome, two together can resist. A three-ply cord is not easily broken.

Let's try to present in a climate of prayer what this itinerary on married love has meant for each of us, for our couple, our family and our team.

The choice of the next responsible couple could also be made in this atmosphere of prayer.

- The current responsible couple can comment on how they have experienced their responsibility.
- The team can decide whether it expects any particular "animation" from the new couple in charge.

→ Choosing the new responsible couple

We can end up praying together:

"Lord, we are gathered in your name. We are together with the person to whom we have been united by the sacrament of marriage. We are together with the married couples and members of our Team to be attentive to each other and to carry them along in our prayer. Lord, give us the grace to recognize what is essential for our life of faith, and open our hearts and minds so that our team becomes more and more a fraternal community at your service. " Amen.

Questions to prepare for the team meeting

1. How did we experience this year's Endeavors (Concrete Points of Effort), especially the Sit Down?
2. How did the sharing go?
3. How were we listened to, respected, supported and encouraged? Have we all been able to share, to really communicate "in truth"?
4. How has the theme helped us to grow in our married life? What were the most enriching aspects of our time together as a couple?
5. Of everything we've been through this year:
 - What should we pursue?
 - What should we change?

Appendices



Prayer for the Beatification of the Servant of God, Henri Caffarel

God, our Father,

You planted deep in the heart of your servant, Henri Caffarel, a fountain of love which bound him totally to your Son and inspired him with a wonderful capacity to speak of Him.

A prophet for our time, - he revealed the dignity and beauty of the vocation of every person in the words Jesus addresses to each of us: “Come follow me”.

He made couples enthusiastic about the greatness of the sacrament of marriage, the sign of Christ’s fruitful love for the Church and of His union with her. He showed that priests and couples are called to live a vocation of love.

He was a guide to widows: love is stronger than death. Prompted by the Holy Spirit, he accompanied many Christians on the path of prayer. Seized by a devouring fire, he was a dwelling place for you, Lord.

God, our Father, through the intercession of Our Lady, we ask you to hasten the day when the Church will proclaim the holiness of his life, so that people everywhere will discover the joy of following your Son in accordance with their particular vocations in the Holy Spirit.

God our Father, we invoke the intercession of Father Caffarel for.....

(indicate the particular favour being sought)

Prayer approved by Monsignor Andre Vingt-Trois – Archbishop of Paris. “Nihil obstat”: 4th January 2006 – “Imprimatur”: 5th January 2006.

Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord
and my spirit exalts in God my Savior;
because He has looked upon His lowly handmaid.

Yes, from this day forward
all generations will call me blessed,
for the Almighty has done great things for me.

Holy is His name,
and His mercy reaches from age to age
for those who fear Him.

He has shown the power of His arm.
He has routed the proud of heart.
He has pulled down princes from their thrones
and exalted the lowly.

The hungry He has filled with good things,
the rich sent empty away.
He has come to the help of Israel His servant,
mindful of His mercy
-according to the promise He made to our ancestors-
of His mercy to Abraham
and to His descendants forever.

Our Lady, Queen of Teams, pray for us.