

**STUDY TOPIC
TEAMS OF OUR LADY
2026-2027**

**History of salvation, History of a people,
of a family**

ERI, FEBRUARY 2026

Presentation

The International Responsible Team proposes to all Teams around the world for the third year of the 2024-2030 period a study theme based on a reflection on the family in Sacred Scripture that continues to deepen the orientations we presented at the International Meeting in Turin, “Called to Live in Communion.” This third year, as we explained then, we wanted to delve into the orientation: “Called to Live in Communion as a Family.” We thank the editorial team of the Spain SR for presenting us with a text that will help us rediscover our married and family life as a privileged place of God’s action, as a space where God continues to write His love story to Humanity today.

Throughout these months we will journey through the great history of salvation as presented to us in Sacred Scripture, discovering that it is not a distant or foreign narrative, but a mirror in which our own experience as spouses, parents, children, and team members is reflected. The history of salvation is, from the beginning, the history of a people and a family. And therefore, our own history—with its lights and shadows—can also become a place of encounter with God.

Every history, when looked at with faith, can become a history of salvation. We are not speaking of an ideal or perfect history, but of a real history, woven from encounters and ruptures, from fidelities and frailties, from sincere searches and from errors that wound us. It is precisely there, in the concrete and everyday, where God chooses to enter to reveal Himself and save. The Bible shows us that God does not act outside of human history, but within it, choosing real families, marked by limits and sins, to carry forward His project of communion.

It is an itinerary in 8 chapters that begins in the first pages of Genesis, where we contemplate how we have been created in the image and likeness of God, called to communion, to complementarity, and to fruitfulness. From there, we enter without fear into the reality of sin, not as a simple moral fault, but as a profound rupture that wounds our identity, our relationships, and our capacity to love. The Word will help us recognize the dynamics of sin that run through family history—comparisons, rivalries, silences, inherited wounds—and to discover how God never tires of intervening to open paths of reconciliation. Along the journey, we will also see how God’s faithful love manifests itself with special force in the image of marriage and covenant. The prophets reveal to us a God who loves as a spouse, who remains faithful even when rejected, and who always offers the possibility of starting anew. This perspective illuminates in a new way our own matrimonial

vocation: we are made for unity, for a unique, faithful, and total love that reflects God's own love.

The itinerary will also lead us to contemplate the family as the heart of the Kingdom, as the place where Jesus wanted to grow and from where He dignified all human relationships. The family thus appears not only as a recipient of salvation, but as an active subject of the mission, called to be a domestic Church and a space of evangelization. In this context, the transmission of faith occupies a central place as a testimony that is communicated through life, through shared prayer, forgiveness, and daily coherence. We also propose at the end of the study topic a time of reflection, to review the path traveled, to be grateful for what has been lived, to recognize the fruits, and to open ourselves with confidence to what the Lord has done and will continue to do in our personal, conjugal, and team life.

This study topic does not intend to offer us prefabricated answers or ideal family models. Rather, it wants to help us look at our own life with God's eyes, to reconcile ourselves with our history, and to discover that even where we perceive limits or wounds, God continues to act with faithfulness and hope. As married couples of Teams of Our Lady, we walk together convinced that we are not alone, that the grace of the sacrament sustains us, and that the Lord continues to make all things new.

May this journey help us renew our faith, strengthen our communion, and allow ourselves to be transformed by the One who continues to write, today, His salvation history in the heart of our families.

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International Responsible Couple Teams of Our Lady

Chapter 1 - Created for Communion

"In the image of God he created them" Gn 1:26-31

Objectives

To contemplate our origin "created in the image and likeness of God"

To give thanks for the path given to us to live in complementarity "Male and female he created them"

To accept the mission offered to us to be fruitful, understood beyond physical parenthood/motherhood

Reading of the Word

Reading from the book of Genesis 1:26-31

Then God said: "Let us make man in our image and likeness; let him have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air, the cattle and the reptiles of the earth." And God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them. God blessed them; and God said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, the birds of the air and all the animals that move on the earth." And God said: "Behold, I give you all the seed-bearing plants on the surface of the earth and all the fruit-bearing trees that bear seed: they shall be food for you. And the green grass shall be food for all the beasts of the earth, for all the birds of the air, for all the reptiles of the earth and for every living being that breathes." And so it was. God saw all that he had made, and it was very good. An evening passed, a morning passed: the sixth day.

Commentary

The biblical text gives us three lights regarding the family, which answer three questions: our origin, the path we are invited to live, the purpose of our life.

An origin

"Then God said: 'Let us make man in our image and likeness.'"

Of the thousand resolutions we can make in life, the most important will always be "to be myself," that my whole life be oriented from my deepest being.

If I am made in the image and likeness of God, and God is love, then my deepest identity does not depend on what I do, what I have or what others think of me. In my very being, before any achievement or failure, I am called to live from this truth: I am love and I am made to love.

The most terrible disasters and the most devastating betrayal in life always stem from the temptation to stop being who I truly am, beginning with not accepting myself: "I'm not worth it," "I can't be loved like this," "my history, my body, my life... are badly made."

If I don't believe that I have unique value in myself beyond my qualities or my values, I will try to find it by emphasizing my ego, shutting myself up in myself, demanding to be reaffirmed, expecting from others what only I can give myself, seeing everyone as enemies who don't meet my expectations... and especially I will direct that pain toward my Father God, because He is ultimately responsible for the disaster that I am and that my life is, or at best, I won't blame Him, but I won't see myself worthy of being loved by Him.

Surely when we have heard the parable of the "Pearl of great price," from a more "moralistic" interpretation of the Gospel we have thought that we are the merchant and that this parable is inviting us to sell everything for the Kingdom of God. But what if there were another explanation? What if you were the pearl of great price and Jesus were the merchant who sold everything, even his blood to buy you? How that changes things, doesn't it?

Well, that's how it is, you are the pearl of great price, for whom God himself delivered his son to death to buy you and rescue you from what you are not, from non-love. Because if you are love, non-love not only affects you morally but breaks you in your very being.

Believing this gives us the ability to give ourselves, without needing to go looking for ourselves, demanding self-reaffirmation, requiring that we be loved always and at every moment... recognizing this enables us to reorient our conjugal and family project.

When we forget that we are created in the image and likeness of God and demand that the other fill what they cannot

A project to build

"male and female he created them"

"And God created man in his image, in the image of God he created him, male and female he created them," it is surprising to read this verse, written thousands of years ago and which solemnly proclaims the intrinsic equality between man and woman. At this point it is important to clarify that the word "man," in this verse, is contrasted with male, referring to humanity, and not to the male-man himself.

It is surprising that the verse uses the conjunction "and," and not the disjunction "or," which seems like it would be normal... he created them "male or female," in this way God makes it clear that he wanted being like Him not to be exclusive to a single and complete individual, "one or the other," but rather to be the fruit of the complementarity of two, male and female, one and the other, that is, that the image of God is expressed, embodied, and made visible in the union between

male and female, in the communion and difference of both, not in a single individual. Masculinity speaks of God and femininity speaks of God.

The fact that we are equal in dignity does not mean that we are equal to each other. On the contrary, being different, and living that difference as complementarity is when we are truly "in the image of God." Marriage being the place that is called for differences to become a possibility of creative complementarity and not a source of rivalry.

The encounter with the other works our heart so that it bears abundant fruit. Just as the earth needs the work of the human being to bear fruit, the human being needs the encounter with a "you" who confronts them to bring out the best in themselves. We all tend to settle, to expand our I without consideration, without order, and for that God has given us the other, to set limits for us. Limits that define us and prevent us from ceasing to be ourselves.

A purpose of our life

"God blessed them; and God said to them: 'Be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth and subdue it'"

We begin by recognizing that the radical difference of the human being from the rest of creation is that the human being enters into dialogue with God, God can speak with them and they respond to Him: Thus with dialogue, through the creative word, God gives the couple the capacity to give life.

When we speak of fruitfulness we do not speak only of procreation, because every "male and female" is fruitful, is capable of giving life and is called to fill the world with life. Our fruitfulness, even if it is not biological, is guaranteed.

Surely when we read "subdue," our "cultural alarms" will go off and we will think that it should be rewritten, but we must understand the dominion of the human being as a position granted by God to serve the divine order, as a power of service, of good government, and of love. Blessed subjection, if it is in love.

God has made us similar to Him in the government and service of creation, he has enabled us to master something to exercise this government, which we must care for in love and justice: I master social relations, I master delegating and creating effective teams, I master complex situations... We all have a government to exercise, we all have someone to take care of, because we have all been granted someone to whom we must be attentive and this is how we exercise our likeness to God.

To work, although sometimes it costs us, is beautiful in itself... and if not, let's talk to an unemployed person... and not only because of the economic issue. A person begins to fall apart when they feel that nobody needs them anymore, that they "are not useful," because we have been created to be fruitful, to generate life and to serve others, to watch over others... I marry to serve and watch over my husband and wife, to be fruitful as a marriage (even if I don't have children), to develop the work of creation in God's name.

The family has as its mission to generate life, in fact our natural path is to go from being a son/daughter, to being a brother/sister, and end up being a father/mother. And at this point our society, with a great Peter Pan complex, seems to lead us not to stop being children, asking, demanding, receiving, being cared for... first by my parents, then by my spouse, later perhaps even by my children and above all by society that has to give me everything.

Paternity/maternity... being fruitful, engendering life, governing... requires the loss of self, ending self-referentiality. We lack fathers and mothers capable of living their vocation. We lack adults who stop asking "who am I?" to begin asking "for whom am I?" Because in the end the only joy is what we bring to others, giving life and dying to ourselves.

Words of Father Caffarel

"God said, Christian couple, you are my pride and my hope. When I created heaven and earth and in the firmament the great luminaries, I saw in my creatures traces of my perfections and found that 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 kind, I contemplated in those living and exuberant beings, a reflection of my overflowing life and found that everything was good. From all my creation then rose a great solemn and joyful hymn, celebrating my glory and my perfections. And yet nowhere did I see what is the image of my most secret, most fervent life. Then arose in me the desire to reveal the best of myself and it was my most beautiful invention. It was thus that I created you, human couple, 'in my image and likeness' and this time I saw that it was very good. In the midst of this universe in which each creature spells out my glory, celebrates my perfections, finally love had emerged to reveal Love. Human couple, my beloved creature, my privileged witness, do you understand why you are the most beloved among all creatures? Do you understand the immense hope I have placed in you? You are the bearer of my reputation, of my glory, you are for the universe the great hope... because you are love"

Henri Caffarel, Teams facing atheism, May 5, 1970. Rome

Questions to prepare for the sit-down

Being called to live the project of being in the image and likeness of God, means welcoming our origin and understanding the path.

On a personal level, to what extent do you define yourself as a child of God, beyond what you do, can do, live or what is expected of you? In what moments do you realize it? How can you advance in the real recognition of your deepest being?

In the relationship with your spouse, or in general with others, do you live differences as a possibility to complement each other or as a difficulty to walk together? Can you give an example. What experience do you have that the

relationship with the other brings out the best in yourself? Can you share situations in which you see that the devil seeks to make your differences a reason for confrontation and rupture? What "antidote" do you use at that moment?

Look at your life and recognize in it the experience you have as a marriage and family of being a generator of life, even if you don't have children. In what do I recognize that my life is to be a "caretaker of others"? In what does it cost me to live it?

Meeting Development

Reflection guidelines for sharing

Sharing is a very special moment in the life of the team. It is the opportunity to be able to share, from an unusual depth in daily life, what has been lived during the month from a perspective of faith.

Remaining in what has happened to us, it is true that it helps us to know each other, but it does not help us to get out of the loop of immediacy, and of the superficiality that life usually installs in us.

In what has happened to us this month, how have we lived in concrete terms, or how has it been difficult for us to live being "in the image and likeness of God"?

Prayer

Reading from the book of Genesis, 2:18-24

"The Lord God said: 'It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him someone like him, to help him.' Then the Lord God formed from the earth all the beasts of the field and all the birds of the air, and presented them to Adam, to see what name he would give them. And each living being would bear the name that Adam gave it. Thus Adam named all the cattle, the birds of the air and the beasts of the field; but he found no one like him, to help him. Then the Lord God caused a deep sleep to fall upon Adam, and he slept; he took out a rib, and closed up the place with flesh. And the Lord God formed, from the rib that he had taken from Adam, a woman, and presented her to Adam. Adam said: 'This one is bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh! Her name will be "woman," because she came from man.' Therefore a man will leave his father and mother, will be united to his wife and the two will be one flesh." Gn 2:18-24

In a moment of silence let us thank the Lord for the gift he has granted us in our spouse.

Let us ask the Lord for the gift of truly being "one flesh," complementing our lives.

Whoever wishes may share the following prayer. "I ask the Lord to recognize in my husband/wife... a help to my weakness."

We end the prayer with the Our Father

Deep sharing

We propose some guidelines for participation. Like everything else, use it to the extent that it helps you.

Recognizing that we are in the image and likeness of God in daily life is not easy, everything seems to tell us the opposite: "you are the fruit of chance," "you are a collection of atoms," "the other is better than you, don't you realize?", "your life is worthless," "this is just passing days, nothing more"...

That is why the points of effort become the necessary help to be able to remember, internalize and live our deepest being.

Listening to the Word introduces us to blessing, illuminates our life, enters to the deepest part of the heart to guide, lift up, heal.

Conjugal prayer puts us before the one who unites us, and thus renews our identity of being the image of the love of the One before whom we both place ourselves when we pray.

The sit-down helps us to convert difference into complementarity, to look at each other with God's gaze, to recognize each other as a gift.

In what concrete things do we live the points of effort this way?

Exchange of ideas on the topic

What caught your attention about this topic? Was there something that helped you especially?

In Western society of the 21st century, much emphasis is placed on all aspects of equality between men and women. In many countries there are even ministries dedicated to this issue. This culture of "equality," however, generates false egalitarian models, based on strict observance of the distribution of domestic and family tasks, without attending, precisely, to our specificities and differences, which were what captivated us and made us fall in love with the other. That is, they invite us to forget that we are different and complementary, just as God created us and they put all the emphasis on radical equality. The experience of many families questions the effectiveness of living this aspect in a belligerent way, leading to conflicts based on demand and completely turning their backs on love. According to this reflection:

How do you live difference in your marriage as true complementarity? What difficulties do you find?

The sacrament that unites us has a vocation of eternity, so we must always be very careful in our relationship with everything that can hurt us. What things do we see that take care of our "forever"? What things do we see that put it in danger?

Chapter 2 - The Rupture of Communion

"I heard your sound in the garden, I was afraid" Gen 3:10

Objectives

1. To understand the concept of sin as a theological category
2. To recognize the dynamics of sin
3. To observe how sin breaks our marital, family and team communion

Reading of the Word

Reading from the book of Genesis 3:1-12

¹The serpent was more cunning than any other beast of the field that the Lord had made. ²And it said to the woman: "Did God really say that you should not eat from any tree of the garden?" ³The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden God said: 'Do not eat it or touch it, lest you die.'" ⁴The serpent replied to the woman: "No, you will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil." ⁶Then the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, pleasing to the eyes and desirable for gaining wisdom; so she took of its fruit and ate. Then she gave it to her husband, who also ate. ⁷The eyes of both were opened and they discovered that they were naked; and they wove fig leaves and girded themselves with them. ⁸When they heard the voice of the Lord God walking in the garden at the time of the breeze, Adam and his wife hid from the sight of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹The Lord God called to Adam and said to him: "Where are you?" ¹⁰He answered: "I heard your sound in the garden, I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid." ¹¹The Lord God replied to him: "Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten from the tree from which I forbade you to eat?" ¹²Adam answered: "The woman you gave me as a companion offered me the fruit and I ate."

Commentary

A Plan Truncated by "Missing the Mark"

In the previous theme we reflected on and shared the great truths of our life:

In the first two pages of Genesis, the account of the meaning of our origin tells us about God's desire and his original plan: our origin, path and purpose. But this is not our reality. Our origin has become blurred, countless pseudo-paths have been opened, the purpose of our existence has become self-referential, and it has caused us an existential void, often unbearable. What has happened to us?

We look around us and see wars, division, sadness, chaos, despair, suicide, rejection of God, selfishness, self-sufficiency, emptiness... Where is God's original plan?

The answer seems evident: sin has entered our lives. It is a word used both by Christians and by society, even by those who declare themselves opposed to the

faith. However, it is a much-handled term and often stripped of its original and profound meaning.

The word "sin" (hamartía) literally means "to miss the mark," to fail to reach the target.

If we have been created for communion with God, sin cannot be understood only in a moral sense. It is, above all, that which makes us forget who we are and why we live.

Sin blurs our origin, confuses us on the path and makes us lose sight of the purpose of our life. Therefore, it is fitting for us to recover an ontological and relational reading of this word, because, ultimately, sin attacks our deepest being and separates us from ourselves, from others and especially from the Love of God.

Therefore, if we approach sin with this understanding, we will see that this rupture distorts God's original plan. He, who had desired and created communion, encounters sin which inflicts a profound rupture:

- The full unity between man and woman will be wounded by division.
- Brotherhood will be attacked by comparison, complaint and contempt for the other, even unto death.
- The possibility of building together will be annihilated by wanting to "make a name for ourselves" which divides us as a society.

The biblical text of Genesis does not so much attempt to explain the past of what happened, but to illuminate the present that we are living. It helps us understand and manage our now.

Let us begin by imagining Adam and Eve enjoying life, joyfully welcoming their first days: everything was for them, the earth yielded fruits, they lived in absolute peace... it was "Paradise."

From Being Created in God's Image to Fleeing from Him

Gen 3:1: ¹The serpent was more cunning than any other beast of the field that the Lord had made.

A new character appears: the serpent. This animal of the "desert" is a type of small serpent, slippery, barely visible, that goes unnoticed and which Sacred Scripture says was the most cunning of animals. Its strategic intelligence waits until Eve is alone. Surely if Adam and Eve had been together, they would have won, but either of the two separately was bound to be deceived.

Gen 3:2: ²And it said to the woman: "Did God really say that you should not eat from any tree of the garden?"

It seems as if the devil had had an oversight and had been confused, but in reality he is telling her subliminally, letting it fall into her subconscious: "if he doesn't let you eat from one tree it's as if he didn't let you eat from any, because what he's doing is taking away your freedom."

Gen 3:3 - ³The woman answered the serpent: "We may eat the fruit of the trees of the garden; but of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden God said: 'Do not eat it or touch it, lest you die'"

The serpent begins to speak with Eve with half-truths, sowing doubt, forcing her to justify God... and Eve enters into dialogue with evil from great naivety, allowing herself to be deceived.

God made "all kinds of trees beautiful to look at and good to eat; moreover, the tree of life in the middle of the garden," so what Eve says is not true: "of the fruit of the tree that is in the middle of the garden God said: 'Do not eat it or touch it, lest you die.'" What God said was: "You may eat from all the trees of the garden, but from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat." Therefore, it is not true that God does not want us to eat what gives us life, what is in the center, but rather he is protecting us.

God's command warns us of the inability to know everything, makes us realize that if I insist on knowing things in their totality in order to love them, "I will die," because there will always be things, situations, and people, that I will not get to know and that will require me to love beyond understanding.

The serpent makes Eve see that what God has ordered has been a prohibition and not a defense. It's as if you say to your spouse: remember that if you drink coffee now you won't sleep, and he understands it as a prohibition.

From this approach, the harshest experience and the most terrifying lie is very easily extracted: "GOD DOESN'T LOVE YOU," he has forbidden you to eat so that you will not be happy.

Gen 3:4-5 - ⁴The serpent replied to the woman: "No, you will not die; ⁵for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil."

The serpent, in addition to calling into question God's intention, leads Eve to obsess over one tree, just one in an entire paradise. He makes her understand that her sin will have no repercussions, moreover, he makes her believe that she will have a better life, that she is incomplete, and that she will only be happy if she is like God, even without Him: "God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God."

From this moment on, Eve enters into doubt, she stops seeing God as the provident Father who cares and begins to see him as someone from whom she has

to defend herself, she begins to yearn for an ideal world (let's not forget she was in paradise), and to conclude that God doesn't love her, that he doesn't want what is best for her.

Gen 3:6 - ⁶Then the woman saw that the tree was good to eat, pleasing to the eyes and desirable for gaining wisdom; so she took of its fruit and ate. Then she gave it to her husband, who also ate.

Sin shows itself to us as something wonderful: Affirming, be happy, defend yourself, do what you want, enjoy... Eve "saw that the tree was good for food, that it was pleasant to the eyes, and a tree desirable to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate," but precisely those qualities are possessed by all the trees, since God made: "every tree pleasant to the sight and good for food," she didn't need to eat from that particular tree, but someone had made her obsess over it.

Gen 3:7-8- Then the eyes of both of them were opened, and they knew that they were naked; and they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves coverings. ⁸And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden.

Man experiences nakedness. Before he was already naked, but that didn't affect him because he felt protected by God. Now that he has broken with God, he is ALONE! He experiences existential emptiness. He will try to cover that emptiness, that deep hole with things, with affections ("...and sewing fig leaves together made themselves coverings"), alienating himself as a way to hide from the reality that frightens him, but that won't prevent him from continuing to feel a profound insecurity "...the man and his wife hid themselves among the trees of the garden..." and he will respond to God "I was afraid because I was naked; therefore I hid myself."

Gen 3:12- ¹²Then the man said, "The woman whom You gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate."

Immediately the feeling of guilt and selfishness appears, the condemnation to love only oneself and always live within the circle, and the man who loved his woman as himself (he had just said 'this is bone of my bones') doesn't hesitate to accuse her so that God will punish her and save himself: That's why, when you've had a fight, the blame is always the other's: the boyfriend says it's the girlfriend's, the children say it's those old-fashioned parents, the workers say it's the boss who is a tyrant, the unemployed say it's the government's, etc.

From Being Created Complementary to Envy and Greed

Gen 4:3-5a ³And in the process of time it came to pass that Cain brought an offering of the fruit of the ground to the Lord. ⁴Abel also brought of the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. And the Lord respected Abel and his offering, ⁵but He did not respect Cain and his offering;

This process of rupture is not casual. Everything begins with a comparison, and beyond whether the result is favorable or unfavorable, comparison itself breaks the greatness of our own irreplaceable identity and makes us feel treated unjustly. That experience can be born from believing that I am not worth it, so when I look around me, I feel envy of the other and want what the other has and I don't believe I have.

In Cain's case, he offers "fruit," but not the firstfruits. It's not the same thing. When I give the firstfruits of something I am left with nothing, because when I give the first I don't know if there will be a second. Abel gives the firstfruits, he trusts, he is left with nothing before God, Cain gives fruit, nothing more.

Gen 4:5b-7 Cain was very angry, and his countenance fell. ^6^So the Lord said to Cain, "Why are you angry? And why has your countenance fallen? ^7^If you do well, will you not be accepted? And if you do not do well, sin lies at the door. And its desire is for you, but you should rule over it."

At this moment it's easy to enter into a victimist dynamic, where everything becomes clouded and thoughts become toxic, they lock us within ourselves and deject us.

In Cain's head, something like this could have happened: "look what Abel has offered, it's better than my offering, look how God has noticed, he's his favorite, he has never loved me, I am alone, I'm worthless, no one loves me, my life has no meaning"... and once we have succumbed to entering this evil loop, despite God approaching and caring for him, Cain no longer listens, he has already broken the relationship, he has already sinned.

Gen 4:8 ^8^Now Cain talked with Abel his brother; and it came to pass, when they were in the field, that Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him.

Faced with the rupture of the relationship with the other, which is born from comparison, envy, and greed, the dynamic of sin leads us to use two mechanisms that seem antagonistic, but are two sides of the same coin: fear and domination of the other.

Fear: If it has been engraved within my heart that I am worth what I do and I don't have inherent worth, as soon as I recognize that what I have done is bad, I will feel naked, judged, and condemned... and I will fear the other because it's impossible for me to be loved like this. This is Adam and Eve's experience: "I was afraid because I was naked" (Gen 3:10).

Domination of the other: Cain, who has received from God lordship over the field, in line of grace, uses it as "his own territory" to which he takes his brother Abel and precisely in that place of lordship where he subjects him unto death. "When they were in the field, Cain rose up against Abel his brother and killed him" (Gen 4:8)

Words of Father Caffarel

"Destined for the highest, human love sometimes collapses and falls into the abyss. Let us not look for the explanation anywhere other than in original sin: the latter was not only an individual fault, but it was also the sin of the couple; through the rupture of the alliance between God and the first couple, the love that united man with woman loses its original purity: a corrosive power destroys it from within; a law of gravity attracts it to the earth; wear and aging threaten it every day.

Corrupted, it becomes corrupting. God had made it a source of joy, peace, life, holiness; sin turns it into a cause of suffering, drama, crime, death. The river of life that was to fertilize the earth has become a devastating torrent.

The first task of love was to unite. Sinful love becomes a cause of disunion: it separates man from God, makes him fail in his fidelities; having reduced him to servitude, it turns him away from his duty and tears him from his fellow men, introduces into the most intimate part of his being a ferment of division that pits flesh against spirit, corrupting both.

And yet, although deprived of its original splendor, love has not lost all its goodness and prestige: it cannot silence the promise it must bring to the world and that sign with which it has been marked by God cannot be completely erased."

L'Anneau d'Or, The Mystery of Love, 1945. Vocation of Love

Questions to Prepare for the Sit-Down

Are you able to recognize in your life how "the serpent" is present in your day-to-day with subtleties and deceptions? From what lies does the dialogue of temptation usually begin in your case?

Are you able to see yourselves reflected in that toxic dynamic that is born of comparison and leads us to think that nothing makes sense? How do you usually get out of that loop?

In your relationships, what appears more: fear, domination, or both? Are we able to recognize the moments where this prevents us from letting ourselves be loved and tends to separate us from everything and everyone?

Meeting Development

Reflection Points for Sharing

Sharing is a very special moment in the life of the team. It is the opportunity to share, from an unusual depth in daily life, what has been experienced during the month from a perspective of faith.

Staying only with what has happened to us, while true that it helps us get to know each other, does not help us get out of the loop of immediacy and superficiality that life usually installs in us.

In what has happened to us this month: In what situations have we been especially tempted? How have we experienced them?

Participation

We propose some points for participation, like everything else, use them to the extent that they help you. The points of effort become the necessary help to "not fall into temptation."

Listening to the Word is the light that makes us distinguish the voice of the serpent that victimizes us, from the voice of the Good Shepherd who invites us to love.

Conjugal prayer allows us to recognize our "nakedness" in a sacred environment. Faced with the situation of having fallen into temptation we are afraid, we feel vulnerable and unable to let ourselves be loved. Conjugal prayer can be that sacred place where we can be loved.

The sit-down helps us not to face temptation alone like Eve. In it we strengthen ourselves to fight against evil with the weapons of faith.

Comment on whether this month the points of effort have helped you live this experience of victory in the spiritual warfare we are living.

Prayer

Reading from the book of Genesis, Gen 4:1-8

¹Adam knew Eve, his wife, who conceived and gave birth to Cain. And she said: "I have acquired a man with the help of the Lord." ²Then she gave birth to Abel, his brother. Abel was a shepherd of sheep, and Cain cultivated the soil. ³After some time, Cain offered gifts to the Lord from the fruits of the soil; ⁴Abel also offered the firstfruits and the fat of his sheep. The Lord looked with favor on Abel and his offering, ⁵but he did not look with favor on Cain or his offering; Cain became enraged and was downcast. ⁶The Lord said to Cain: "Why are you enraged and downcast? ⁷Would you not be encouraged if you acted well? But if you do not act well, sin crouches at the door and covets you, although you will be able to dominate it." ⁸Cain said to his brother Abel: "Let's go to the field." And when they were in the field, Cain attacked his brother Abel and killed him.

- In a moment of silence we recognize how throughout this month we have lived from comparison and envy.

- Let us ask the Lord to be able to get out of the loop of rage and dejection.

- Whoever wishes may share the prayer. "I ask the Lord to recognize the moments that... and I ask for his help to get out of them."

We end the prayer with the Our Father

Exchange of Ideas About the Theme - Some Points

- Based on the theme, do you understand sin as missing the mark? Did you understand it that way before?

- One of the great spiritual dangers is believing that we are not tempted, that the evil spirit does not exist... how do you experience temptations as a spiritual struggle?

- How do you understand that in concrete life, sin breaks communion with God, with the spouse and with the family?

Chapter 3 - Dynamics of Family Sin

"God sent me to save your lives" (Gen 45:7)

Objectives

- To recognize how God breaks into the real history of a family
- To understand the dynamics and forms of sin that are integrated into our relationships
- To give thanks for God's patience with his chosen ones
- To be aware of how the God of History makes all things new and makes reconciliation possible

Reading of the Word

Reading from the book of Genesis 45:4-15

Joseph said to his brothers: "Come near to me." They came near, and he repeated: "I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold to the Egyptians. ⁵ But now do not worry, nor be sorry for having sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life. ⁶ There have been two years of famine in the land and there are still five years in which there will be neither plowing nor harvest. ⁷ God sent me before you to ensure your survival on earth and to save your lives in an admirable way. ⁸ So then, it was not you who sent me here, but God; he has made me father to Pharaoh, lord of all his house and governor of all the land of Egypt.

⁹ Hurry up to my father and tell him: 'Thus says your son Joseph: God has made me lord of all Egypt; come down to me without delay. ¹⁰ You will dwell in the land of Goshen, and you will be near me with your children and grandchildren, with your sheep, cattle and all you possess. ¹¹ I will provide for you there, for there are still five years of famine, so that you will lack nothing, neither you, nor your household nor all that is yours.' ¹² You are seeing with your own eyes, and also my brother Benjamin with his, that I am speaking to you in person. ¹³ Inform my father of all my authority in Egypt and of all you have seen, and hurry to bring my father down here." ¹⁴ And throwing himself on the neck of his brother Benjamin, he burst into tears; and Benjamin did the same. ¹⁵ Then he kissed all his brothers, weeping as he embraced them. Then his brothers spoke with him.

Commentary

One of the most complex relationships in the entire history of salvation is the fraternal relationship. We often discover how brothers can become wolves to one another.

This conflict is not just a personal or psychological matter: it is a wound that is transmitted from generation to generation, a kind of "originating original sin" that deforms the way human beings position themselves before their fellow human beings.

What is surprising is that, in the midst of this wounded reality, God carries out his history of salvation. Precisely the family of Abraham—far from being perfect—is the one God chooses as an instrument of his project of Love for all humanity.

It may disconcert us to discover in Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebecca or Jacob behaviors contrary to what we would expect from a "family chosen by God." In them abound jealousies, deceits, betrayals and violence. However, this story teaches us that God does not choose the wrong family: he chooses real people, fragile, wounded, but open to his grace.

Over the following pages we will traverse three generations—Abraham, Isaac and Jacob—to discover how, despite sin, God writes straight on the most crooked lines.

Abraham: The Beginning of a Wounded History

The history of salvation begins with Abraham, called by God to leave his land and to trust in a promise. However, even in him—the "father of faith"—human fragility is manifested. Out of fear, he lies and hands over his wife Sarah to Pharaoh, to save his own life. (Gen 12:10-20)

Sarah, moved by impatience and despair over her sterility, gives her maid Hagar to have a son with Abraham. But when Hagar conceives, Sarah is filled with jealousy and expels her to the desert together with her son Ishmael. Only God's intervention prevents their death (Gen 21:8-21).

Isaac, son of that history, grows up seeing how his brother is banished and how his parents' preference divides and wounds. Thus, from the beginning, the family called by God to be a blessing carries within itself a wound of division that will mark the following generations.

Jacob and Esau

Isaac marries Rebecca, but she is also sterile. Isaac prays to the Lord for his wife, and God hears his plea: Rebecca conceives twins. From the beginning, the pregnancy is conflictive: the children struggle within her womb. Worried, Rebecca consults the Lord, and He reveals to her the mystery of her motherhood:

"Two nations are in your womb, two peoples will separate from your entrails. One people will dominate the other, and the elder will serve the younger" (Gen 25:23).

When she gives birth, the first to come out is Esau, reddish and covered with hair; behind comes Jacob, grasping his brother's heel. That image—two brothers in tension from the womb—anticipates the conflict that will mark their history and that of their descendants.

Over time, the differences between the brothers accentuate: Esau becomes a hunter and man of the field; Jacob is quieter, a lover of domestic life.

Isaac prefers Esau, while Rebecca loves Jacob. Once again, preference introduces division into the bosom of the family.

One day, while Jacob was preparing a stew, Esau returned from the field exhausted and hungry. "Give me some of that red stew," he said. Jacob responded: "First sell me your birthright." Esau, dominated by hunger, accepted. Scripture concludes with a harsh sentence: "Thus Esau despised his birthright" (Gen 25:34).

The conflict, however, does not end there. Later, with the complicity of his mother, Jacob deceives his father and obtains the blessing destined for his brother. "Listen to me well, my son—Rebecca tells him—: go to the flock and bring me two kids; I will prepare a tasty stew for your father, and you will take it to him so that he may bless you before he dies" (Gen 27:6-10).

Isaac, blind and aged, blesses the wrong son. When he discovers the deception, he does not revoke the blessing, but accepts it as definitive. Esau, enraged, swears to kill Jacob, and Jacob flees to the land of his uncle Laban. Thus, deception again provokes separation between brothers: Abraham's inheritance repeats itself. Gen 27:18-46 and Gen 28:1-9

Jacob, Leah and Rachel: A Family in Tension

Jacob arrives at his uncle Laban's house and falls in love with Rachel, the younger daughter. He agrees to work seven years for her, but on the wedding night Laban deceives him and gives him Leah, the older sister, as his wife. He who had deceived is now deceived: history takes a turn of justice and learning. Gen 29:21-30

Jacob works another seven years to also marry Rachel, and thus a family marked by rivalry and the desire for recognition is formed. In a society where motherhood guaranteed a woman's worth, Leah and Rachel compete to give Jacob children. Faced with sterility, both give their maids—Zilpah and Bilhah—to have offspring in their name. Gen 30

From these four women are born the twelve sons of Jacob, the twelve patriarchs of Israel. At this point, history takes a leap: there is no longer exclusion, for all the sons are blessed. The promise opens to all, even to those born of slave women. God's election is not based on human merits, but on his mercy. Gen 31

Joseph and His Brothers: The Circle Repeats for the Last Time

Among the twelve sons, Joseph—firstborn of Rachel, the beloved wife—holds a special place in his father's heart. Jacob loves him more than the others and gives him a long-sleeved robe, a sign of distinction. "When his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him" (Gen 37:4).

Joseph has prophetic dreams in which he sees his brothers bowing down before him. These dreams further inflame their hatred. The brothers conspire to kill him,

but in the end they sell him to merchants who take him to Egypt. “Come, let us sell him to the Ishmaelites... after all, he is our brother, our own flesh” (Gen 37:27).

Once again, the family drama is repeated: favoritism, envy, deceit, and violence among brothers. But this time, the story will take a new direction.

In Egypt, Joseph endures slavery, slander, and imprisonment. Yet his gift for interpreting dreams brings him before Pharaoh, who appoints him governor over all Egypt.

When famine strikes, Joseph’s brothers go down to Egypt in search of food, without recognizing him. Joseph tests them and, at last, reveals himself: “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. And now do not be distressed or angry with yourselves because you sold me here, for God sent me before you to preserve life” (Gen 45:4–5).

Joseph forgives, embraces, and saves. In him, the history of violence and resentment is transformed into reconciliation. Where there was once hatred, there is now grace. In Joseph, inherited evil comes to an end, and forgiveness inaugurates a new beginning.

Joseph, figure of Christ

Joseph's story anticipates Jesus' story. His life is a prophecy in action. Joseph is Jacob's beloved son; Jesus is the Father's beloved Son. He is sold for pieces of silver; Jesus is also betrayed for money. He is falsely accused and imprisoned; Jesus is condemned while being innocent. He gives bread to his people; Jesus gives Himself as the Bread of Life. In Joseph the figure of Isaiah's Suffering Servant is fulfilled (Is 53): "Despised and avoided by men, a man of sorrows... mistreated, he voluntarily humbled himself and did not open his mouth."

Just as Joseph saves his people from hunger, Christ saves all humanity from sin and death.

With Joseph, the chain of jealousy, lies, and violence is broken. His forgiveness overcomes the curse of family inheritance and opens the horizon of a new reconciled humanity. God, once again, writes straight with crooked lines. His love transforms sin into salvation, pain into promise, and wound into blessing.

Also today, our families—marked by tensions, wounds, or silences—can find in Joseph a mirror and a hope. The story does not end in conflict: mercy has the last word.

"Perhaps we are not always aware of it, but it is precisely the family that introduces fraternity into the world. From this first experience of brotherhood, nourished by affections and family education, the style of fraternity radiates as a promise to all society" (Amoris Laetitia, 194).

Joseph, figure of the crucified and risen Christ, stops the evil of history and makes way for the love that redeems. In him the final promise is fulfilled: "Behold, I make all things new" (Rev 21:5). And thus, in the midst of our own families, God continues to write His history of salvation.

Words of Father Caffarel

A father's heart

Parents, as we have just seen, learn from their children the attitudes that the Father in Heaven wants to find in them. This is not the only benefit: thanks to them they acquire a father's heart and a mother's heart. If they listen to their heart, they will perceive the beats of another heart: God's. A father tells us his experience. "That day, I had asked my nine-year-old daughter: 'Let's see, have you done your homework?' Monique, hesitant, answers: 'Yes.' At eleven o'clock at night I enter the girls' room to see if they are sleeping well. On the chair next to Monique's bed, I find a message on a small board where I read: 'Dad, I apologize for lying when I said I had reviewed my lessons because it's not true. I ask for forgiveness and will try not to do it again. I am very ashamed, I would have wanted to say no. You can wake me up if you want to talk to me, I want you to. Good night DAD... Monique.'"

"I read it, erase what she has written and respond: 'My dear little Monique, I love you very much, very much, because you wrote to me to ask for forgiveness. I forgive you with great joy and happiness, because I have seen that you ask me for forgiveness because you love me. Of course, it is not good to tell a lie; but since you confess it and ask forgiveness for it, it is erased as if you had not lied. Every time you regret having made me suffer and ask me for forgiveness for it, I will forgive you, even if it is very often. This is how the Good God does it, because he loves us. I wanted to wake you up last night, as you asked me, but I could not manage it because you were sleeping so deeply. I quickly wrote you this letter so that you would find it when you woke up and would know immediately that I have forgiven you. I love you very much, my dear big daughter. Continue making many efforts: dad, mom, Jesus are happy. I hug you with all my strength. Dad.'"

This father told me that the feelings of his heart that night had served to help him understand God's fatherhood in an extraordinary way. And what an admirable symbol the board is! What remains eternally of a sin that God has forgiven us? Nothing, except, in its place, one more manifestation of the Father's wonderful mercy. "O happy fault!" sings the Easter liturgy.

Christ himself, if I may say so, had put parents on the track: "If you, being evil as you are, know how to give good things to your children, how much more will the Father in heaven give the Holy Spirit to those who ask him!" (Lk 11:13).

Questions to Prepare for the Sit-Down

When you experience suffering, contradictions, adverse circumstances, etc., within your family, in what do you notice that you distrust and doubt that God is making a true history of salvation? Can you give an example in which you have experienced that distrust?

Do you recognize and discover in your marriage, in your children, or in your siblings, the transmission of certain dynamics, such as behaviors, attitudes, wounds or suffering, that you already saw in your parents or experienced with your siblings? Do you think that, unintentionally, there may have been transmission in the ways of positioning oneself from one generation to another?

Do you believe you can be like Joseph for your family? Give examples of the situations you have faced in your family. Can you stop some tide of hatred, resentment, grudge, division, confrontation, criticism, judgment, envy, etc., in your family? In what sense? Can you cut the chain of evil and suffering that you may be living in your family and in your home? In what sense? What do you think you can do?

Meeting Development

Reflection Points for Sharing

Sharing is a very special moment in the life of the team. It is the opportunity to share, from an unusual depth in daily life, what has been experienced during the month from a perspective of faith.

Staying only with what has happened to us, while true that it helps us get to know each other, does not help us get out of the loop of immediacy and superficiality in which life usually installs us.

In what situations experienced this month do we perceive that "history repeats itself" and that, despite this, God makes his way through the difficulties?

Participation

We propose some points for participation, like everything else, use them to the extent that they help you. The points of effort become the necessary help to let God "make all things new." How do the concrete points of effort help us not to automatically repeat dynamics inherited from our family history (silences, comparisons, judgments, resentments, escapes...)

Listening to the Word allows us to recognize how the Lord writes his history of love even in moments of conflict, distance or misunderstanding. Through the Word we learn to look at our family history with God's eyes, who does not stop before sin or fragility, but transforms them into a path of salvation. At what moments has listening to the Word allowed us to reread a painful family situation from faith and not only from the wound? Has something changed in our perspective or in our way of reacting?

Conjugal prayer is the place where, like Jacob, we can present our struggles and let God bless us. There marriage becomes holy ground: we place before the Lord our wounds, differences and weariness, and we let ourselves be reconciled by his love. Conjugal prayer teaches us to look at the other as a gift, not as a rival; to ask for forgiveness and to forgive; to let the Lord "make all things new." How does conjugal prayer help us to present before God the stories we don't understand, the wounds that come from far away or the conflicts that repeat themselves, without blaming ourselves or resigning ourselves?

The sit-down helps us not to repeat the stories of division, silence or resentment that we sometimes drag from our own families. It is a time to speak with simplicity, to listen to each other with the heart and to discern together how God wants to act in our history. Like Joseph with his brothers, we learn to break the circle of evil with the strength of love, to recognize God's action even in what has made us suffer. In the sit-down, are we capable of speaking about our family history with truth and mercy, without accusing, without justifying ourselves and without fleeing? What concrete fruits are we discovering when we do so?

Prayer

We read the biblical text proposed for this chapter.

We take a few moments of silence. Let this scene of reconciliation touch our own history. Like Joseph, we too carry wounds that come from afar: misunderstandings, comparisons, judgments, words not said... Let us ask the Lord for the grace to look at our family and marital history with his eyes, discovering that even in the most painful, He has been working to give us life.

We can pray aloud with a simple formula, for example:

"I give thanks to the Lord for the times he has brought good from evil in our history..."

"I ask the Lord for the grace to forgive and let myself be forgiven, like Joseph with his brothers..."

"I entrust to the Lord this wound of our family, so that He may transform it into a blessing..."

(A time of silence or spontaneous prayer by team members is left.)

We all pray together

Lord Jesus, You who transformed betrayal into salvation and turned Joseph's tears into embrace and forgiveness, also enter into our family history. Give us the grace to recognize your hand in all that we have lived, to forgive each other unconditionally and to write with you a new history.

Make our families a sign of your reconciling love, capable of stopping evil with good, and of announcing that, even on the crooked lines of life, You continue to write your history of salvation. Amen.

We end the prayer with the Our Father

Exchange of Ideas About the Theme - Some Points

During this month, the points of effort can help us remember our family and marital history in the light of the Word. From them we can share in the team and comment on the following points or those you consider most appropriate for your team.

We can ask ourselves:

- What caught your attention about this theme proposal?
- Based on it, have you been able to contemplate your history and that of your family with mercy?
- What experience of conjugal prayer or sit-down has helped me live this hope?
- The figure of Joseph occupies a central place in this chapter. Which trait of his (patience, believing reading of history, forgiveness, capacity not to return evil for evil...) has challenged you most? Why?
- After working on this theme, what new hope do you discover for your own family, even where you see limitations, wounds or situations that seem to have no solution?

Chapter 4 - Returning to Communion

"I will betroth you to me forever" Hos 2:19

Objectives

- To understand the profound relationship between monotheism and monogamy as an expression of God's unique and faithful love reflected in marriage.
- To recognize the cycle of infidelity and reconciliation in the history of Israel and how this process is reflected and applied in marital and family life.
- To identify and deepen in the fundamental pillars of marital love: fidelity, memory and forgiveness, understanding their importance and growing in the covenant.
- To strengthen trust in God's transforming action in family wounds and difficulties, opening the way to reconciliation and to a history of salvation lived in daily life.

Reading of the Word

Reading from the book of Isaiah, Is 54:1-10

Exult, O barren one who did not give birth; break into song, rejoice, you who had no labor pains: for the abandoned one will have more children than the married one—says the Lord—. ² Enlarge the space of your tent, spread out the curtains of your dwelling, do not restrict them, lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes, ³ for you will spread to the right and to the left. Your offspring will inherit the nations and will populate deserted cities. ⁴ Do not fear, you will not have to be ashamed, do not feel outraged, for you will not have to blush. You will forget the shame of your maidenhood, you will not remember the affront of your widowhood. ⁵ The one who espouses you is your Maker: his name is Lord Almighty. Your redeemer is the Holy One of Israel: he is called 'God of all the earth.' ⁶ Like an abandoned and dejected woman the Lord calls you; like a wife of youth, repudiated—says your God—. ⁷ For an instant I abandoned you, but with great affection I will gather you. ⁸ In a surge of anger, for an instant I hid my face from you, but with eternal love I love you—says the Lord, your redeemer—. ⁹ It happens to me as in the days of Noah: I swore that the waters of Noah would not cover the earth again; thus I swear not to be angry with you or to threaten you. ¹⁰ Though the mountains may change and the hills may falter, my love will not change, nor will my covenant of peace falter—says the Lord who loves you

Commentary

The History of Salvation and God's Faithful Love

Until now, we have journeyed together through the beginning of the history of salvation through the book of Genesis. We have seen how God created man and woman and called them to love from the beginning. Thus he established the first marriage as a model and prototype for all who would come after. We have also addressed the theme of sin and its consequences, observing how this human reality affects life and relationships, without this breaking God's loving promise.

Furthermore, we have accompanied the great characters of the history of salvation: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph, who, despite their fragilities and errors, are witnesses of God's fidelity, who fulfills his promises. In the midst of their lives we see how God does not give up in the face of our human poverty, but with patience and tenderness continues to form a family, the great family of salvation.

This is God's way of acting: to make himself known and save humanity, He wants to form a family that grows and strengthens throughout history.

Prophetic Books

After having traversed Genesis and the foundations of our faith, we now enter into the prophetic books, which open the door for us to the profound experience of God's love with his people, expressed through the image of marriage.

In the history of the people of Israel we find a dynamic that reflects their experience and also ours. Israel goes through cycles in which it faces profound difficulties: it feels lost and without identity, like a "non-people." In those moments, God hears their cry and responds with mercy. The people open themselves to God and experience peace and trust, but over time they forget that this well-being comes from Him and begin to distance themselves, seeking false gods and securities.

This distancing leads Israel to infidelity, which provokes suffering and loss. In the midst of this spiral, the prophets emerge as brave voices, called by God to denounce infidelity, warn about its consequences and, above all, to call to conversion and to return to the Covenant with God. They use symbolic language and, often, harsh, because their message disturbs those who hold power.

The central message of the prophets is always the same: Be faithful to the Covenant that God made with Israel when he freed them from Egypt! That Covenant, expressed in the Law, is the basis for a free and full life.

The Relationship Between Monotheism and Monogamy

One of the most profound contributions of the Old Testament to our understanding of God and the family is the intimate connection it establishes between monotheism and monogamy. God is one, unique, and this divine unity is reflected in the unique and definitive love that marriage must live. It is not simply a social agreement or a cultural rule, but a gift revealed by God, where the exclusive love between two people does not close in on itself, but opens to the community and to life.

This idea was revolutionary in the context of the ancient Middle East, where polytheism and polygamy predominated. Israel, on the other hand, proclaims the existence of one true God and, at the same time, practices monogamy, making it a visible sign of the exclusive love of the one God. The book of Genesis gathers this

novelty in the account of the creation of man and woman: "Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave to his wife, and they shall become one flesh" (Gen 2:24). This unity expresses not only the couple, but the very image of the unique relationship between God and his people.

Israel did not arrive at this understanding from a simple family analysis, but because the prophetic experience of God as unique and faithful was expressed in the model of marriage and human love. In other words, monotheism and monogamy were being configured simultaneously in the history of Israel, mutually influencing each other.

This dynamic teaches us something fundamental: the human being finds his identity, his vocation and his meaning to the extent that he understands himself in the light of God. As the Second Vatican Council affirms: "Christ reveals man to man himself" (GS 22). Only in the light of Christ do we understand our true value, the meaning of our relationships, the significance of the family and the deep longing for faithful and unique love.

We Are Made for Unity!

We are made for a unique, indissoluble, faithful and exclusive love. That is the deep longing that beats in our heart every day. Have we not perhaps suffered at some time the painful experience of a rupture, the wound of interior adultery or the tearing of a divided heart?

This desire is not a human whim nor an imposition of the Church. It is the expression of something fundamental: we are made in the image and likeness of God. Therefore, we long to live in full communion in marriage, because our heart is configured for a love that is faithful, unique, that does not lie or disappoint, a love that does not promise and then abandon. If God is One and in Him dwells the fullness of love, it is logical and necessary that our heart unceasingly seeks that unique and indissoluble love. Monogamy, understood as a faithful love lived from unity and communion, reveals to us who God is and, therefore, who we are.

The Bible speaks to us repeatedly of this desire that God has for man and of man's desire for God. The image that runs through the entire history of salvation is, precisely, monogamy seen as the definitive marriage: God espouses his people in a personal and definitive covenant. From the beginning, Scripture begins with a marriage—that of Adam and Eve, image of humanity—and then narrates God's covenant with Israel as a sacred betrothal. Israel is God's chosen bride, called to live marital fidelity in a relationship of mutual love and constant enrichment.

However, the history of Israel is also the history of an unfaithful wife who departs from her husband and enters into idolatry, betraying the covenant. The prophets, with harsh and moving words, denounce this infidelity and call to conversion. In spite of everything, God does not abandon his bride. Despite her betrayals, God continues to love her, call her and wait for her. This experience of God's

unconditional fidelity in the face of Israel's infidelity is what reveals to us the true face of God: a God who does not give up, who forgives and who always opens a door to hope.

The Deuteronomistic Cycle and Marital Life

The biblical account shows us how, throughout its history, the people of Israel live a repeated cycle that theologians call the "Deuteronomistic cycle." This cycle describes a sequence that repeats itself throughout the Old Testament and that we can summarize in four stages:

1. Oppression and distancing from God: The people, comfortable with well-being or distracted by external securities, forget God and turn to idols. This distancing leads to oppression, to the loss of freedom and identity.

2. Cry and conversion: In the midst of suffering, the people cry out to God, recognizing their sin and begging for his mercy.

3. Liberation: God hears the cry of his people and sends a liberator (a judge, a prophet, a king) who restores freedom and justice.

4. Peace and well-being: The people experience peace, trust and security... until they forget God again and the cycle restarts.

This cycle is not just a description of Israel's history, but a mirror of human experience in general and, in particular, of marital and family life. How many times in a marriage do we also live similar cycles? Moments of closeness and deep communion with our spouse, followed by periods of distancing, routine or even crisis. Times when we feel comfortable and forget the foundations of our love, until a difficulty awakens us and calls us to conversion and reconciliation.

Just as God does not abandon his people despite their infidelities, in marriage the call is to not give up in the face of difficulties, but to trust that God also acts in our history, calls us to conversion and offers us his grace to renew the covenant of love.

The Prophets: Oseas, Jeremiah and Isaiah

The prophets play a fundamental role in this history of love between God and his people. They are not only denouncers of sin, but also heralds of hope and reconciliation. Let us look at three of them who speak to us most deeply about this marital love between God and Israel.

Hosea: The Prophet of Faithful Love

The prophet Hosea lives in his own flesh the drama of God's faithful love in the face of his people's infidelity. God asks him to marry a prostitute, Gomer, who will be

unfaithful to him. This marriage becomes a living sign of the relationship between God and Israel.

Despite Gomer's repeated infidelities, Hosea does not abandon her. On the contrary, he seeks her, rescues her and restores her as his wife. This gesture reveals the heart of God: a God who does not give up, who pursues his beloved even when she betrays him, and who is willing to forgive and restore the broken relationship.

Hosea 2:16-20 expresses this promise of restoration in moving words:

"Therefore, behold, I will allure her, and bring her into the wilderness, and speak tenderly to her... And in that day, declares the Lord, you will call me 'My Husband,' and no longer will you call me 'My Baal.'... And I will betroth you to me forever. I will betroth you to me in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love and in mercy. I will betroth you to me in faithfulness. And you shall know the Lord."

This passage reveals to us that God's love is not conditional or temporary, but eternal and unconditional. Even when we are unfaithful, God continues to love us and calls us to return to him.

Jeremiah: The Prophet of Memory

Jeremiah is the prophet of memory. In a time of crisis and exile, he invites the people to remember the first love, the love of the beginnings, when Israel was faithful to God in the desert.

Jeremiah 2:2 says: "I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown."

Memory is essential in the life of faith and also in marital life. Remembering the first love, the moments of grace, the promises made, helps us to renew our commitment and trust in God and in our spouse. Memory is not nostalgia, but a force that sustains us in the present and projects us toward the future.

Jeremiah also proclaims the promise of a new covenant, written not on stone tablets but on the hearts of people (Jer 31:31-34). This new covenant, which will be fulfilled in Christ, is the definitive expression of God's faithful love that transforms hearts and renews the relationship.

Isaiah: The Prophet of Hope and Restoration

Isaiah is the prophet of hope. In the midst of the exile, when the people feel abandoned and humiliated, Isaiah proclaims that God has not forgotten his bride. On the contrary, he will restore her and make her fruitful again.

The text of Isaiah 54:1-10, which we have read at the beginning, is a proclamation of hope for a people that feels barren and abandoned. God promises to enlarge the space of their tent, to strengthen their stakes, and to restore their dignity as a beloved bride.

"For your Maker is your husband, the Lord of hosts is his name... For a brief moment I deserted you, but with great compassion I will gather you. In overflowing anger for a moment I hid my face from you, but with everlasting love I will have compassion on you, says the Lord, your Redeemer" (Is 54:5-8).

This promise of restoration is also for us. In our marriages and families, even when we feel that everything is broken, God continues to act and offers us his grace to restore and renew the covenant of love.

The Three Pillars of Marital Love: Fidelity, Memory and Forgiveness

From the prophetic teaching we can draw three fundamental pillars that sustain marital love and that are also essential in the life of faith:

1. Fidelity

Fidelity is the foundation of the covenant. It is the commitment to remain, to not give up, to love even when it costs. God is faithful to his promises, even when his people are unfaithful. This fidelity of God is the model for marital fidelity: a love that does not depend on circumstances, but on the decision to love unconditionally.

Fidelity is not only about not committing adultery, but about cultivating a daily love, caring for the relationship, renewing the commitment and choosing the other day after day.

2. Memory

Memory is what keeps love alive. Remembering the first love, the moments of grace, the promises made, helps us to not lose sight of the meaning of our covenant. In the Bible, God constantly invites his people to remember: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord freed you" (Dt 5:15).

In marriage, memory is also fundamental. Remembering the moments of encounter, of joy, of grace, helps us to renew our commitment and trust. Memory is a force that sustains us in difficult times and projects us toward the future with hope.

3. Forgiveness

Forgiveness is the expression of God's unconditional love. Despite Israel's infidelities, God forgives and restores the relationship. Forgiveness is not forgetting the offense, but choosing to not let it define the relationship. It is the decision to open a door to hope and reconciliation.

In marriage, forgiveness is essential to overcome crises and renew love. It is not about minimizing the offense, but about trusting that, with God's grace, it is possible to restore the relationship and build a new future together.

Conclusion: God Makes All Things New

The history of salvation is a history of love between God and his people, expressed through the image of marriage. Despite infidelities, betrayals and crises, God does not give up. He calls to conversion, offers forgiveness and renews the covenant.

This same dynamic is reflected in our marriages and families. We also live cycles of closeness and distance, of fidelity and crisis. But the invitation is to trust that God also acts in our history, calls us to conversion and offers us his grace to renew the covenant of love.

The three pillars—fidelity, memory and forgiveness—are the foundations that sustain marital love and that help us to live the covenant with God and with our spouse. If we cultivate these pillars, we will be able to face any difficulty and experience that, truly, God makes all things new.

As St. Paul says in his Letter to the Ephesians: "Husbands, love your wives, as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). This is the model of marital love: a love that gives itself, that forgives, that renews and that makes all things new.

And finally, all salvation history culminates in the wedding feast of the Lamb, where Christ, the bridegroom, unites definitively with his bride, the Church. This is our ultimate hope: that our love, purified and renewed by God's grace, will participate in the eternal wedding feast where God will be all in all.

Questions to Prepare for the Sit-Down

The relationship between monotheism and monogamy reveals that we are made for a unique, faithful and indissoluble love. In your marriage, how do you experience this call to unique and exclusive love? What difficulties have you encountered in living this fidelity, and what has helped you to remain faithful to the covenant?

The Deuteronomistic cycle describes how, in Israel's history, there are moments of distancing and infidelity, followed by a cry for help, liberation and restoration. After the distancing, God calls to conversion and reconciliation, and restores the relationship again. Can you identify in your marriage similar cycles: moments of

distancing, crisis or rupture, followed by a call to reconciliation and renewal? What has been the experience of that "return to love" in your relationship? What has sustained you in those moments of crisis?

The prophets teach us that faithful love is sustained by memory and forgiveness, which together allow the renewal of the covenant of love. Of these three pillars (fidelity, memory and forgiveness), which one has most strengthened your marriage and why? In what aspects do you feel you could grow so that these pillars are more present in your conjugal life?

Hosea, symbol of total fidelity

God, who is love, makes us participants in His own love. Marriage cannot be sustained solely on our human love, because it goes much further: it is about God's own love, revealed and lived in sacramental union. This is what it means to marry in the Church, not just to be married by the Church.

Hosea, prophet of the Old Testament, lives and preaches fidelity at a time of great crisis for Israel, around 800 B.C. His name, which means "salvation," connects with figures like Joseph and Joshua, who represent salvation and restoration in Israel's history.

In a world where fidelity seems obsolete and commitment fleeting, speaking of "forever" in marriage can seem strange or impossible. Today infidelity is not only common, but facilitated by platforms that promote the breaking of commitment with discretion. Current society even sees infidelity as a solution to marital crises, normalizing a behavior that is a virus for relationships.

Faced with this, Hosea shows us a God who loves with unbreakable fidelity. Although his wife Gomer is unfaithful, he forgives her and seeks her with passionate love. Hosea is called to live God's fidelity in the midst of his people's infidelity, teaching us that fidelity is a supreme act of freedom that is only possible with God. To love without expecting anything in return is impossible without Him.

Jeremiah and the Call to Remember

Jeremiah prophesies during difficult times for Judah, in the final years before the exile (Jer 1:1–3). He denounces false religiosity and deceptive trust (Jer 7:3–11): seeking refuge in idols—"they have forsaken me, the fountain of living water, and have hewn out cracked cisterns that hold no water"—thus exposing the people's infidelity as they seek refuge in idols and display piety without true commitment. Using the image of marriage, he shows how Israel has forgotten God's first love (Jer 2:11–13).

In moments of crisis, when everything seems dark and meaningless, it is essential to remember: to recall the promises and past encounters with God that sustain us.

This grateful remembrance makes it possible to overcome despair and keep moving forward, even when there are no visible reasons to do so.

“I remember the devotion of your youth, the love of your betrothal, when you followed me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.” (Jeremiah 2:2–3)

God invites Israel to remember the liberation from Egypt, the giving of the law, and the wonders performed throughout history.

“They did not say, ‘Where is the Lord who brought us up from the land of Egypt, who led us through the wilderness, through a land of deserts and ravines, through a land of drought and deep darkness, through a land where no one travels and where no one lives?’” (Jer 2:6)

This call to “return to the beginning” is also for us: in faith and in marriage, remembering decisive moments strengthens commitment and hope.

“But the days are coming—oracle of the Lord—when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant I made with their ancestors when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt—a covenant they broke, though I was their Lord—oracle of the Lord. But this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel: I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. No longer shall they teach one another, or say to one another, ‘Know the Lord,’ for they shall all know me, from the least of them to the greatest—oracle of the Lord—for I will forgive their iniquity and remember their sin no more.” (Jer 31:31–34)

Ezekiel: Forgiveness and Restored Fidelity

When human memory proves insufficient to sustain a relationship because of repeated infidelities, forgiveness comes into play.

Ezekiel offers a powerful image of a wounded and abandoned people, yet cared for and loved by God. The prophet shows us how God forgives and renews the covenant despite the people’s infidelity:

“I will take you from among the nations, gather you from all the foreign lands, and bring you to your own land. I will sprinkle clean water upon you, and you shall be clean; from all your idols I will cleanse you. I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you; I will remove from your flesh the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezek 36:24–26)

This divine forgiveness—contrary to the human logic of “an eye for an eye” (Ezek 18:21–22)—is free and scandalous, because it is not based on merit but on God’s unconditional love:

“If the wicked turn away from all the sins they have committed, they shall surely live; they shall not die. None of the offenses they have committed shall be remembered against them; they shall live because they have turned from injustice.” (Ezek 18:21–22)

Forgiveness is not only a divine act but also a human experience. It requires acknowledging our faults, asking for help, and walking toward healing. It is a gift that opens up hope and allows love and fidelity to be reborn even amid the deepest wounds.

The history of salvation reveals that God, in his infinite love, calls us to live a faithful love, as he is faithful:

“But I will remember my covenant with you in the days of your youth, and I will establish for you an everlasting covenant.” (Ezek 16:60)

God invites us to build our relationships on three fundamental pillars: fidelity, grateful remembrance, and the gratuitousness of forgiveness. These sustain not only marriage but also our relationship with Him and with others. Thus we discover that true love is not a passing feeling, but a daily decision sustained by the grace of God and nourished by the hope of the eternal covenant

Henri Caffarel

"But if he knows how to forgive with that forgiveness, unique and true, which consists in welcoming the other again with total trust, he will live an admirable and unexpected experience. That of the prophet Hosea, whom God asks to take back his unfaithful wife. When Hosea did so with an unreserved heart, he needed only to draw on his personal experience the day he had to refer to the Lord's fidelity, tenderness, mercy toward His adulterous people. If the prophet had not known how to forgive, he would not have known how to enter into the secrets of God's heart, and we would not have some of the most moving verses in the Bible: 'I will not give way to the heat of my anger... I will win her back again, lead her into the wilderness and speak to her heart... There she will respond as in the days of her youth' (Hos 2:16-17)."

Henri Caffarel, Anneau d'Or, 117-118, Marriage, path to God, May-August 1964

Questions to prepare the sit-down

In the cycle of Israel's history we see how, in the face of infidelity and distancing, God calls to conversion and reconciliation, and restores the relationship again. Can you identify similar cycles in your marriage: moments of distancing, crisis or rupture, followed by a call to reconciliation and renewal? What has the experience of that "return to love" been like in your relationship? What has sustained you in those moments of crisis?

The prophets teach us that fidelity is sustained by memory and forgiveness, which together allow the renewal of the covenant of love. Of these three pillars (fidelity, memory and forgiveness), which has been the one that has most strengthened your marriage and why? In what aspects do you feel you could grow so that these pillars are more present in your conjugal life?

Meeting Development

Reflection Guidelines for Sharing

Sharing is a special moment to share from faith how God acts in our marital history. Staying only with what has happened to us helps us to know each other, but does not allow us to get out of the repetitive cycle of difficulties nor to deepen in the experience of God in the midst of them.

Therefore, in what we have lived in our marriage and family, at what moments have we seen how "history repeats itself," with crises or distances, but also how God opens a way, calls to conversion, and renews hope and love?

Participation

We propose some points for participation, which can be a help to let God transform our lives and relationships. In light of this theme, how do the concrete points of effort help us to guard unity and fidelity in our marital and family life, especially in moments of wear, routine or interior distance?

Listening to the Word opens us to the experience of God's faithful love, which is maintained even in the midst of infidelity and crisis. Through the prophets we learn to look at our marriage and family with God's eyes, who always calls to conversion, to fidelity and to hope, transforming pain into a path of salvation. This month, in what way has listening to the Word helped us to remember the first love, to recall where we come from and who has called us? Has it allowed us to reread some situation of interior infidelity (discouragement, escape, double life, hardness of heart...)?

Grateful memory invites us to remember the moments of grace and encounter with God in our personal and marital history, strengthening our commitment and trust to move forward. Conjugal prayer, as a sacred space, allows us to present our wounds and differences, receive God's blessing and learn to forgive, making our love a reflection of God's unconditional love. How does conjugal prayer help us to return to God together when we feel hurt, tired or tempted to give up? Do we experience it as a place of reconciliation and new beginning?

The sit-down is a time to break the cycles of infidelity, forgetfulness and resentment that we sometimes drag. Like Hosea or Jeremiah, we learn to live the fidelity, memory and forgiveness that renew us. It is a space to listen, share from the heart and discern together how God wants to act in our history of love and covenant. Are we capable of speaking truthfully about what threatens our communion (forgetfulness, reproaches, silences, lack of forgiveness...), without fear and without accusations? What concrete steps do we see that the Lord invites us to take to 'return to communion'?

Prayer

Let us take a moment of silence to let ourselves be touched by God's promise that Isaiah brings us

"Exult, O barren one who did not give birth; break into song, rejoice, you who had no labor pains, for the abandoned one will have more children than the married one—says the Lord—" Isaiah 54:1

Like that woman who seemed without hope, we too can feel in our family and marital history moments of abandonment, wounds, pain and shame. But the Lord assures us that we should not fear or feel humiliated, because He is our Maker and Redeemer, who with eternal love gathers and restores us.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to look at our history with his eyes, recognizing that, although for a time it may seem that he has turned his back on us, his love never fails or tires. He wants to enlarge the space of our tent, lengthen our cords and strengthen our stakes, so that our family may grow in peace, love and hope.

Guided Prayer

We can pray aloud with a simple formula, for example:

"I give thanks to the Lord, our God of all the earth, because in the midst of our difficulties He extends his love and hope..."

"I ask for the grace to accept his eternal love and to open ourselves to his reconciliation, like the woman who is reborn and rejoices in the Lord's promise..."

"I trust that He will transform our wounds into blessing and that his covenant of peace will remain forever..."

Prayer

Lord Jesus, You who are the God of all the earth, who with eternal love love us and gather us, also enter into our family history.

Give us the grace not to fear, to enlarge the space of our home, and to trust that You are the Redeemer who transforms betrayal into reconciliation, shame into joy, and loneliness into communion.

Make our families a living sign of your faithful and pacifying love, capable of healing wounds, stopping evil with good, and announcing that in You there is always a new beginning. Amen.

We end the prayer with the Our Father

Exchange of Ideas About the Theme - Some Points

- Have you recognized in your family or marital life a moment where, as in the Deuteronomistic cycle, there was a distancing from God but then a new call to fidelity? How did you experience that process?

- What does the relationship between monotheism and monogamy tell you about the profound meaning of unique and faithful love in marriage? How do you live it or would you like to live it in your family?

- Of the three pillars (fidelity, memory and forgiveness), which one has helped you most to face difficulties in your relationship or family? How? In which one do you feel you need to continue growing? To what extent? Which of the three pillars do you feel is most urgent to care for today in your marriage and in your family? Why?

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- After reflecting on God's action in history and in our family history, what hope or trust would you like to carry with you to strengthen your marriage or family?

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The text presents the history of Israel as a succession of ruptures and returns. At what moments in your marital or family life do you recognize this same dynamic? What helps you not to lose hope and to start over?

Chapter 5 - Total Communion in Love

"Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, come!" (Song 2:10)

Objectives

- To rediscover the sacred value of human love
- To value sexuality as a gift and path of communion
- To learn to integrate love, pleasure and fruitfulness
- To renew the gaze of faith on the body and the relationship

Reading of the Word

Reading from the book of the Song of Songs 2:10-13

"Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, come!

See, the winter has passed, the rains have ceased and gone.

Flowers spring up in the land, the time of singing has come,

and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

The fig tree puts forth its shoots, the vines in bloom give off their fragrance.

Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, come!"

Commentary

Introduction

Until now we have traversed the great moments of the history of salvation: from Genesis to the Prophets, discovering how God forms a family, remains faithful despite our infidelities and always calls us to renew the covenant.

Today we approach a different book: the Song of Songs. It belongs to the Wisdom or Poetic Books—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Wisdom and Sirach—where Israel gathers the wisdom learned in its relationship with God. When there are no longer prophets who speak, the people learn to remember and keep the word received, making memory so as not to forget the covenant.

The Song of Songs is "the Song par excellence," the most beautiful poem in the Bible. Although attributed to Solomon, its language and style point to a later period. It has always been considered an inspired text and, in the Christian tradition, has been read as an allegory of the love between God and his people, and later between Christ and his Church.

At first glance it seems like a poem of human love: two lovers who seek each other, lose each other and find each other, expressing their desire with images from nature—flowers, perfumes, gardens, honey. But under that passionate language hides a divine mystery: the love of God who seeks man, calls him by name and unites with him forever.

The Song of Songs thus celebrates the beauty of conjugal love as a sign of God's Love: a faithful, strong and passionate love, called to reflect the eternal covenant between Christ and his Church.

Meaning of the Song of Songs

It is curious that a book as brief and beautiful as the Song of Songs is, at the same time, one of the least known and least understood books of the Bible. There has often been an attempt to "spiritualize" its content, as if human love—with its tenderness, desire and surrender—were not worthy of being considered sacred. However, the Word of God is not afraid to speak of human love, because in it the mystery of God is manifested.

The Song is not a prophecy in the style of Hosea or Ezekiel, where God's Love is expressed in the relationship between Him and Israel. Nor is it, in its literal sense, an allegory of Solomon's betrothal to Wisdom. Its language is more direct and human: it speaks of the love of two people who seek each other, desire each other and give themselves with fidelity and passion.

This song celebrates faithful and total love, that which Israel did not always know how to live in its relationship with God. Human love, when lived in truth and fidelity, thus becomes a visible and eloquent sign of God's Love.

Fray Luis de León already affirmed in 1561 that the Song "means no more than what it sounds like": it speaks of human love in all its depth. If the Bible wants to reflect all human experience, it cannot silence the language of falling in love or of desire. In the kiss, in the search and in the union of lovers, something of the divine longing for communion is revealed:

"Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! Your love is better than wine!" (Song 1:2-3)

Thus, the Song of Songs teaches us that human love is not an obstacle to God, but one of the privileged paths to understand his Love. In the conjugal experience—as in the spiritual—true love unites body, soul and spirit, making visible the tenderness of God in the concrete history of each couple.

Originality of the Song of Songs

Among the many riches offered by this book, the Song of Songs shows some features of surprising originality and profoundly inspiring for understanding human love and the conjugal vocation in the light of faith.

Through poetic and symbolic language, the text reveals essential aspects of love between man and woman that also illuminate the life of Christian marriages and conjugal spirituality, the charism of the Teams of Our Lady.

The Absolute Value of Woman

In an ancient world where the feminine voice was barely heard, the Song bursts forth like a silent revolution. The protagonist is a free woman, who expresses her feelings, her desire and her joy of loving without fear. She is not the passive muse of other poems: she is the main voice of the story.

"I am dark and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem... Do not look at me because I am dark: the sun has tanned me" (Song 1:5-6).

She is not ashamed of her body or her history. She does not need her brothers to decide for her; she knows who she is and whom she loves. Her word and her desire become symbols of the dignity and freedom of every woman, created in the image of God.

The Song proclaims, in a poetic and prophetic way, the radical equality between man and woman: both are protagonists of love, both seek and give themselves. In the voice of the Shulammite echoes the echo of Genesis: "God saw that everything was very good" (Gen 1:31).

Beauty and Purity of Sexuality

In many Christian contexts, modesty has been confused with shame. But modesty, well understood, protects the beauty of love; it does not hide it, but preserves it from banality.

The Song celebrates the human body with a luminous and poetic purity, without falling into puritanism or vulgarity. It is a song to the shared joy between spouses who love each other.

"How beautiful you are, how charming, O love, in your delights! Your stature is like a palm tree, your breasts like clusters..." (Song 7:7-10).

The body is not an object of commerce or instrument of manipulation, but a place of communion and tenderness, a space where it becomes visible and true. In the Song, human sexuality appears as a blessing, a way of saying with the body: "I belong to you and I receive you as a gift."

Personal Union: Balance Between Puritanism and Libertinism

The Song sings of human love in all its fullness. Its language is natural, free and profoundly human. In a people that had known exile and pain, this book dares to say that love can remake life and redeem the world.

The lovers discover the goodness of creation by contemplating each other's beauty. Spring, gardens and fruits become metaphors for union. Love, lived with

authenticity, frees from the rigidity of puritanism and also from the emptiness of libertinism.

The Song teaches us that human love, when it is true, humanizes and divinizes. It does not separate from God: it brings us closer to Him, because God is Love (1 Jn 4:8).

Sexuality: Gift and Communion

The Song introduces an essential novelty: sexuality is not reduced either to procreation or to the "remedy" for concupiscence. It is, above all, an expression of interpersonal love and of the good of the spouses: "I am my beloved's and his desire is for me" (Song 7:11). "His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me" (Song 8:3).

Here sexuality is gift, communication and language of the soul, the most human way of expressing the total self-giving of love. It is a reality purified by God. Human love is thus a divine flame, a fire that comes from God Himself: "Love is as strong as death, its flames are flames of fire, a flame of the Lord" (Song 8:6). Nothing can extinguish it, neither waters nor rivers (Song 8:7). To love thus—with fidelity, tenderness and totality—is to let a spark of God's eternal love burn in us.

The Song of Songs is, at its core, an act of faith in the goodness of creation and in the God who is love. It invites us to look at the other with the eyes with which God looks at us: with respect, admiration and tenderness.

Human love, lived in truth, becomes a sacrament of divine love, a lighted torch that reveals the face of God in the face of the beloved.

Sexuality, language of conjugal love

Sexuality is part of God's creative project: it is not an addition, but an essential dimension of the person. In it is expressed the profound unity between body and spirit, between human love and divine love. In marriage, sexuality is called to be a sign and sacrament of communion, a space where spouses give themselves totally to each other, and where love becomes fruitful, joyful and faithful.

The unitive aspect

The sexual relationship is the most complete language of conjugal love. Through it, spouses express the total and reciprocal gift of themselves: body, soul, and spirit. In the physical gesture, the interior self-giving becomes visible; bodies speak with truth what hearts have already promised: "I belong to you, I receive you, I trust in you."

This union is not only biological or physical, but profoundly spiritual. Each encounter of authentic love renews the covenant of the matrimonial alliance,

unites what the Lord has joined, and makes present the mystery of Christ and the Church (cf. Eph 5:31-32).

The procreative aspect

Conjugal love, when it is true, does not close in on itself. Its maturity is manifested in openness to life: the desire to share the love received by engendering new life, physical or spiritual.

The child, when he or she arrives, is not the end of love, but its fruit. Love does not say "I want a child," but "I want a child with you." And if that fruit does not come, fruitfulness can be expressed in many ways: in welcome, service, accompaniment, or shared mission.

Thus, the couple learns that their love is not measured by offspring, but by the capacity to love and give life. Fruitful love opens to others, overflows, creates community, engenders hope.

The playful aspect

God, who is Love, has willed that the union of spouses should also be a source of joy and tenderness.

The pleasure that accompanies mutual self-giving is not an end in itself, but a natural expression of love when given with respect, generosity, and care for the other.

Integrating desire into donation helps bodily joy to also be a joy of the soul, a reflection of God's love that "fills all things with beauty."

Therefore, sexuality reaches its fullness in marriage, where love has been sealed in fidelity and total self-giving.

Before and in marriage, chastity is not a negation of love, but a path of growth and freedom, a school for learning to love without possessing, preparing the heart for a true and lasting self-giving.

Words of Father Caffarel

"Love is a very great, very holy reality, which is rooted in the most carnal part of being, but which must flower in the most spiritual. This human love of a man and a woman for each other, even when it is situated in external zones, is an introduction to a totally interior love. We are made in such a way that the sensible initiates the spiritual. Sexuality, about which people easily speak ill, is an incitement to leave egoism, an orientation toward each other of two beings who ran the risk of remaining each in their ivory tower. This carnal attraction—well lived, it is understood—causes beings to meet and, little by little, to access a love of an ever

higher level, even to that love completely bathed in God's love that is called conjugal charity."

Anneau d'Or, November-December 1958, Toward a Spirituality of the Married Christian

Questions to Prepare for the Sit-Down

In the Song of Songs, the beloved and the lover seek each other, admire each other, lose each other and find each other again. Their love is not perfect, but it is true and passionate. In couple life, how do you cultivate that mutual search? What gestures, words or times help you to find each other again when routine or tiredness extinguish tenderness and desire? Is there something you feel the Lord is inviting you today to "reawaken" in your love?

The Song celebrates the beauty of the body and human love as something willed by God. Your union is also a reflection of that "divine flame" that is not extinguished (Song 8:6). How do you live the bodily and affective dimension of your love in the light of faith? At what moments have you felt that your intimacy united you more deeply and made you experience something of God's love? How are you living it currently?

Sexuality, lived in the marital covenant, is a language of communion, openness and self-giving. It is not reduced to pleasure or procreation, but expresses all the love of the couple. In your journey, how do you discover the balance between the desire to love and the desire to be loved? What concrete steps could you take so that your sexual relationship is more fully an expression of God's faithful, tender and fruitful love? Are we capable of speaking with truth and respect about our affective and sexual life, our desires, difficulties or fatigue, without fear or reproaches? What fruits do we see when we do so from faith? What have we discovered or rediscovered about our way of expressing our love in the sexual relationship?

Meeting Development

Reflection Points for Sharing

Sharing is a moment of grace to share how the Lord makes himself present in human love, in tenderness and in the communion of our couples. The Song of Songs reminds us that true, human and sensible love can be the place where God reveals himself and speaks to us. Therefore, in sharing, we can focus on the moments this month when we have felt God's presence in our human love.

Participation

We propose some points for participation, which can be a help to let God transform our lives and relationships.

The Song of Songs invites us to rediscover human love as a space where God reveals himself. Through the Word, prayer, dialogue and small life commitments, we learn to care for the "flame of love" that the Lord has kindled in our marriage.

Listening to the Word of God. The Song is a Word of love that God addresses to us, showing us his tenderness through the human language of desire, beauty and communion. Listening to this Word helps us look at our spouse with a new, grateful and believing gaze, discovering in the other a gift and a mystery. In what way has listening to the Word helped us to purify our perspective on love, the body and sexuality?

Through conjugal prayer, human love, with its tenderness and desire, can become prayer when we offer it to God. In conjugal prayer we present our affective life, our joys and fragilities, letting the Spirit renew our union. We invite you this month to conclude your conjugal prayer by praying together "Set me as a seal upon your heart" (Song 8:6), asking the Lord to strengthen your bond and teach you to love with fidelity.

The Rule of Life, understood as that small concrete step that helps us... can become a more conscious gesture of tenderness, a kind word instead of a reproach, a time reserved alone to share, or the commitment to pray together more faithfully. It is not about doing more things, but about living with more love.

Prayer

Let us take a moment of silence to let ourselves be enveloped by the Lord's tenderness, who in the Song of Songs tells us:

"Arise, my beloved, my beautiful one, and come. For the winter has passed, the rains have ceased, flowers appear in the land" (Song 2:10-12).

Like the awakening of spring, our love is also called to renew itself each day. There are winters in couple life—times of tiredness, routine or distance—but God invites us to arise and go out again to meet the other with the same passion as in the beginning, with a mature tenderness that knows how to forgive, wait and rejoice.

Let us ask the Lord for the grace to rediscover in our marriage the beauty and joy of loving each other as He loves us: with a free, faithful, fruitful love full of hope. May our bodies, our words and gestures be a reflection of his creative love, source of communion and praise.

We can pray aloud with a simple formula, for example:

- "I thank you, Lord, for the love that unites us and for your presence that makes it fruitful and faithful."

- "I ask you, Lord, to renew in us the joy of looking at each other with love, as in the beginning, and of discovering you in the everyday."

- "I offer you, Lord, our conjugal life: make our love a visible sign of your tenderness in the world."

We all pray

Lord Jesus, Spouse and Friend, You who revealed in human love a reflection of your own love, make our marriage a garden where tenderness, fidelity and joy flourish.

Teach us to love each other with a patient and generous love, to care for the small gestures that nourish union, and to recognize in the other your kind and close face.

May your Spirit renew in us passion and tenderness, so that we may be witnesses that true love does not go out or run out, because "love is as strong as death" (Song 8:6). Amen.

We end the prayer with the Our Father

Exchange of Ideas About the Theme - Some Points

The Song of Songs has invited us this month to rediscover the beauty of human love in all its dimensions: spiritual, affective and bodily. In God's gaze, sexuality is not a taboo or something profane, but a sacred language that expresses the total gift of two people who love each other. This time of reflection and prayer may have helped us recognize aspects of our conjugal life that need to be renewed, reconciled or celebrated with gratitude.

We propose some questions to share from the experience lived during the month:

The Song shows us a love that seeks and lets itself be found. How has it helped us improve closeness, tenderness and deep communication as a couple?

Sexuality is a language of love. What have we discovered or rediscovered about the way we express our love sexually? What aspect of this chapter has helped you to reconcile faith and corporeality, human love and God's love?

Conjugal love is called to be fruitful. Beyond biological fruitfulness, has the theme helped us recognize the fruitfulness of our love? To what extent? In what way can we open ourselves more to a spiritual fruitfulness that transforms our environment? Have you discovered any concrete call to better care for total communion in your marriage? In respect, tenderness, listening, desire or openness to life?

Chapter 6 - The Family, Heart of the Kingdom

"Whoever does the will of my Father... that one is my brother, my sister and my mother." (Mt 12:50)

Objectives

- To rediscover in the Gospels the familiar face of God.
- To understand how Jesus resituates the family and to recognize in Mary and Joseph models of family vocation.
- To learn to live the family as domestic Church.

Reading of the Word

Reading from the Holy Gospel according to Saint Luke 2:39-52

When they had fulfilled everything prescribed by the Law of the Lord, they returned to Galilee, to their city of Nazareth. The child grew and became strong, filled with wisdom; and God's grace was upon him.

His parents went every year to Jerusalem for the Passover feast. When he was twelve years old, they went up according to the custom of the feast. And when they returned, after the days were over, the child Jesus stayed in Jerusalem, without his parents knowing.

Believing he was in the caravan, they traveled a day's journey and looked for him among relatives and acquaintances. When they did not find him, they returned to Jerusalem looking for him.

And after three days they found him in the Temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions; and all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.

When they saw him, they were astonished, and his mother said to him: "Son, why have you done this to us? Look, your father and I have been searching for you anxiously." He answered them: "Why were you looking for me? Did you not know that I must be about my Father's business?" But they did not understand what he said to them.

He went down with them, went to Nazareth and lived subject to them. His mother carefully kept all these things in her heart. And Jesus grew in wisdom, in stature and in grace before God and before men.

Commentary

Introduction

After traversing the Old Testament, we have been discovering how the family appears as the invisible thread that unites the entire history of salvation. In the

patriarchs we saw how God calls a man and a woman—Abraham and Sarah—to make of their descendants a people.

Now, as we enter into the Gospels, revelation reaches its fullness: God himself enters into a human family. The mystery of the Incarnation happens in the warmth of a home, in Mary's yes, in Joseph's obedience, in the house of Nazareth. It is no coincidence: in becoming man, the Son of God chooses the family as his first temple, his first school and his first community of love.

The family of Nazareth thus becomes the synthesis and fulfillment of the entire Old Testament: the home where God dwells, where his Word becomes flesh, where the Covenant is renewed in the silence of daily life. There Jesus grows, learns to call God "Abba," experiences human love and prepares himself to reveal to the world the face of the Father.

In the Gospels, Jesus' gaze toward the family is surprising and new. He does not idealize it, but neither does he deny it. He purifies it, opens it, expands it. Jesus assumes the family reality of his time—with its lights and shadows—but illuminates it from within with the truth of the Kingdom. Faced with a closed conception, based on blood, honor or law, Jesus reveals a family founded on listening to the Word and fulfilling the will of God (Mk 3:35).

In this way, the family is no longer just the place to which one belongs by birth, but the space where one learns to love and serve as sons and daughters of the same Father.

The Gospels show us that Jesus lives and acts within family: he shares life in Nazareth, participates in weddings and meals, enters the houses of the sick and sinners, consoles weeping mothers, returns children to their parents, reconciles brothers. In his daily gestures, Jesus restores to the family its original dignity: to be a place of encounter with God, of tenderness and reconciliation.

In the light of this key, the Gospels reveal themselves as an authentic Gospel of the family. The home of Nazareth, the houses of Bethany, Zacchaeus' table, the wedding at Cana, the widow of Nain, the parable of the prodigal son, the children welcomed and blessed by Jesus... all are faces and scenes of the same mystery: God wants to dwell among us as in a family, as a visible sign of the Kingdom of God.

Commentary

The Family Context in Jesus' Time

Jesus was born and grew up in an era marked by great social, economic and religious changes.

After the Hasmonean domination came the Romans and, with them, a profound economic and political crisis. To the instability were added natural disasters, famines and inequalities, which generated a society with three large family groups:

- 10% of well-off families, extended, with power and servants.
- The majority (75%), simple families, peasants or artisans, who lived in adobe houses, sharing courtyards and minimal resources.
- 15% marginalized, made up of slaves, the sick, widows, orphans, the disinherited... without home or family.

Jesus lived among the poor and the marginalized, and precisely with them he had his greatest closeness.

The world awaited God's intervention, a salvation "from on high." In that climate of apocalyptic hope and human vulnerability, Jesus' message is situated.

Jesus' Family Experience

Jesus knew the joy and pain of family. He lived in Nazareth, in a simple home, where he learned love and faith. His relationship with Mary and Joseph marked him profoundly: in that home he discovered what it means to call God "Abba," Father.

But he also knew family suffering: the probable death of Joseph, the bewilderment of his relatives, the solitude of his mission.

Therefore, Jesus understands the pain of broken families and approaches with tenderness those who suffer.

His gaze toward the family is not moralizing. Jesus enters homes, not to police families' lives, but to heal them from within. In Capernaum he heals Peter's mother-in-law (Mk 1:29-31), in Nain he returns the son to the widow (Lk 7:11-17), in Bethany he welcomes the friendship of Martha, Mary and Lazarus (Jn 11). Each of his gestures restores family life: he heals the body, but also cures the wounds of the soul and relationships.

His word and his presence restore what was broken: forgiveness between brothers, reconciliation between parents and children, hope in those who have lost their loved ones. As Malachi prophesies (Mal 3:24): "He will turn the hearts of parents to their children and the hearts of children to their parents." Jesus fulfills that promise.

Jesus also frees the family from cultural chains... so that it ceases to be a closed or self-referential space and becomes an open, inclusive and compassionate home.

He also looks at the family as a seed of the Kingdom, called to reflect God's own communion. In his words and gestures, he invites building relationships based not on blood or merit, but on listening to the Word and the will of the Father (Mk 3:31-

35). Thus he expands the horizon of the family: from the house of Nazareth to the great family of God's children, the Church.

Jesus Dignifies the Members of the Family

The Father

In the figure of Saint Joseph, the family finds a model of fidelity, trust and silent self-giving. With the heart of a father—as Pope Francis presents him in *Patris corde*—Joseph teaches that authority does not impose, but protects; that strength is shown in service, and that love often manifests in the silence of work and prayer.

Joseph is not a biological father, but he is father in the most complete sense: he welcomes, cares for, educates. His fatherhood is pure gift, total dedication. He teaches that being a father is not a matter of blood, but of heart and mission.

The Mother

Mary is the mother who treasures everything in her heart (Lk 2:51). She does not always understand what is happening, but she trusts. She accompanies, sustains, intercedes. Her motherhood is not possessive: she knows how to let go so that Jesus fulfills his mission.

In Mary we discover that being a mother is learning to give life and also to give freedom. It is to sustain with prayer, to accompany with tenderness, to trust even when one does not understand.

The Child

Jesus welcomes children as signs of the Kingdom (Mk 10:14-16). Against a culture that despised them, Jesus raises them up, blesses them, embraces them. He teaches that the child is not just a "project" or a "possession," but a person with dignity, worthy of love and care.

Furthermore, Jesus himself experienced growth and obedience in the family (Lk 2:51-52). He did not arrive "complete," but grew in wisdom and stature. This teaches us that childhood and youth are not stages to overcome as soon as possible, but times of grace where faith, love and humanity are learned.

Jesus reframes the meaning of family

At first glance, some of Jesus' sayings may sound demanding or even disconcerting: "Whoever loves father or mother more than me is not worthy of me" (Mt 10:37); "Let the dead bury their own dead" (Lk 9:60). But these words are not a rejection of family, but rather a call to free it from absolutism. Jesus does not

destroy the family bond: he purifies it, orders it, and opens it to God's love. Only the Father can occupy the absolute center of existence; everything else—including family—is understood from Him and in reference to Him.

In Nazareth, Jesus lived the daily beauty of home: he "increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man" (Lk 2:52). There he learned obedience and tenderness, work and silent self-giving. But his mission led him beyond the limits of kinship: to form a new family, that of those who "hear the word of God and do it" (Lk 8:21; cf. Mk 3:35).

Jesus does not break with the family: he renews it from the Gospel. He defends marital fidelity (Mt 19:3-9), not as a rigid norm, but as an expression of a true communion that respects the dignity of both, especially of women, so often relegated in his time. He preaches in homes, eats with families, enters into their stories and wounds. He sends his disciples with a family greeting: "Whatever house you enter, say: Peace to this house" (Lk 10:5). In his ministry, the house becomes a place of encounter, of faith, and of mission.

In the society of Jesus' time, the family was built upon blood, patrimony, and honor. Jesus proposes another foundation: one Spirit that unites, one promise, one salvation history. One no longer belongs by birth, but by faith. "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Mt 12:50). The bonds of the Spirit expand those of the flesh and open to a universal fraternity.

In this way, the family becomes a means, not an end: a school of departure, of self-giving, of service to the Kingdom. In Nazareth one learns to love; in public life one learns to give that love away. The family is truly Christian when it forms free persons, capable of loving and serving, when it teaches people to live facing God and open to the world.

As Pope Francis reminds us, "families are the smiling face of the Church and the place where God dwells with joy" (*Amoris Laetitia*, 1). Strong societies are built upon strong families.

Words of Father Caffarel

"It would be wrong to limit the mystery of the union of Joseph and Mary to the fact that it was the setting for the childhood and adolescence of Jesus. It is much more. This union, which the Son of God wanted to belong to and wanted to be born from, is the one he renewed inwardly each day by the holiness and love he introduced into it. It is in this union that Christ began his work of redemption and salvation; it is in it also, as in its source, where the Church begins; it is finally in it where Christ

inaugurates, with his Church, an intimacy that will have no end. Yes, the union of Joseph and Mary is already the Church, because it is the first human community saved by Christ, the first delivered to the action of his transforming love, from the first day and throughout the long years of common life.

Let us contemplate this man and this woman who, at nightfall, have just had dinner with their now grown son. They listen attentively as 'he interprets to them what concerns him in the Scriptures, beginning with Moses and going through all the prophets' (cf. Lk 24:27); with him, they are silent, they adore the Father in Heaven; with him, they intercede for the immense world. It is the primitive Church, it is the mystery of the Church, of the union of Christ and the Church. Then what we must accept without seeing was visible: the presence of Christ in the midst of his own. But then this nascent Church was perfectly holy: its members were not accomplices of evil—although Joseph was not, like Mary, preserved from original sin and its consequences. Moreover, they were completely given over to the torrent of grace that, in anticipation, came to them from that cross toward which their son was walking. The union of Joseph and Mary remains for Christianity as the great reference: the Church glimpses what it should be and do by contemplating how Joseph and Mary behaved with Jesus. This union is also a reference for all homes, because every Christian home must be, following the example of Nazareth, an image, a new realization, a manifestation of the holiness of the union of Christ and the Church."

Henri Caffarel, Number 123-124, May-August 1965, special issue. Do not be afraid to receive Mary, your wife

Questions to Prepare for the Sit-Down

In the Gospels, the family of Nazareth appears as a simple home where God dwells in the everyday. Mary, Joseph and Jesus live love, obedience and faith in the midst of work, worries and the joy of each day. In your home, how do you discover God's presence in the small things, in daily tasks, in the education of children, in caring for grandchildren, in moments of tiredness or peace? What concrete signs help you recognize that your house can also be a Nazareth, a place where God becomes close?

Jesus, by growing up in Nazareth, learned to love, to listen, to obey and to serve. But his mission took him further, to expand family ties to include all who do the will of the Father (Mk 3:35). In your life, how do you experience that your family is called to open itself to others, to welcome, to serve, to share? What space does solidarity, hospitality or participation in the community have in your way of living as a Christian marriage and family?

Jesus does not annul the family, he renews it. He frees it from selfishness and directs it toward the Kingdom. He teaches that the family is not a closed end, but a school of love that impels one to go out of oneself. What aspects of your family life do you need to "reposition" from the Gospel? What does the Lord ask of you so

that your family does not close in on itself, but is a sign of communion and a house open to God's will?

Meeting Development

Reflection Points for Sharing

In this meeting, we want to contemplate the light that flows from the Holy Family and discover how Jesus, Mary and Joseph teach us to live the Gospel in our own families: in mutual listening, patience, forgiveness and openness to God's will.

In sharing we can focus on how we have experienced God's presence in our home during this time, in moments of joy or difficulty, and how we have experienced God's presence during this time and how the example of Nazareth illuminates our life.

Participation

In light of this theme, how do the concrete points of effort help us to live our family as a place where the Kingdom of God becomes present, especially in the everyday and simple?

When contemplating the life of the Holy Family in Nazareth, we are impressed to discover that God chose to reveal himself in the everyday: in work, in obedience, in slow and silent growth. Jesus lives subject to his parents and Mary keeps everything in her heart (Lk 2:51-52). There are no extraordinary gestures, but everything is full of God.

In Mary we discover that keeping things in the heart is a form of deep listening to God's Word even when she did not fully understand it. Her heart is the place where the Word is not judged or controlled, but is welcomed and allowed to mature over time. Thus, listening becomes faith and faith becomes daily life. In what way has listening to the Word helped us this month to keep in our heart some aspect of our family? Has it helped us to value more the place and dignity of each family member?

Through conjugal prayer, we, like Mary and Joseph, present to the Lord what we live, what brings us joy and what bewilders us, without rushing to understand everything. We invite you this month to conclude your conjugal prayer by placing your family in the Father's hands and asking for the grace to listen to his will and welcome it with confidence, as in Nazareth. Has it helped you to present it to the Father as it is, with its fatigue, tensions and joys? Has it helped you to recognize your family as a gift from God?

The Rule of Life can help us live our home as an everyday Nazareth; the small steps we can live will configure our home as a true domestic Church, a sacrament of God's love open to his will and to the service of the Kingdom. Could we set

ourselves a rule of life this month that serves to help in some concrete aspect whoever needs it most at this moment in our family?

Prayer

Let us take a moment of silence to enter the home of Bethlehem, that simple place where God wanted to be born, and let ourselves be illuminated by the Word that tells us:

Reading from the Gospel according to Saint Luke, Lk 2:1-7

¹It happened in those days that a decree went out from Emperor Augustus ordering that the whole Empire be registered. ²This first registration was made when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³And everyone went to be registered, each to his own city. ⁴Joseph also, being of the house and family of David, went up from the city of Nazareth in Galilee to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, in Judea, ⁵to be registered with his wife Mary, who was with child. ⁶And it happened that, while they were there, the time came for her to give birth ⁷and she gave birth to her firstborn son, wrapped him in swaddling clothes and laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. Lk 2:1-7

Reader: Lord, You enter our history without making noise, on the road, in precariousness, in a family that trusts.

All: Make us capable of recognizing you in the simple and in the everyday.

Reader: Joseph and Mary find no place, but they do not stop or rebel: they accept reality and move forward.

All: Teach us to trust when we do not understand your ways.

Reader: Jesus is born in a poor family, in a home that does not have everything, but that offers everything.

All: Make our families a place where You can be born.

Reader: In Bethlehem, the family becomes the first Church, a space of welcome, faith and hope for the world.

All: May our homes be an open house and a sign of your Kingdom.

We can add spontaneously brief petitions or thanksgivings

Like Mary, we want to learn to interpret what we experience not from fear, but from thanksgiving and praise. Therefore, united with her and with all the members of the world, we raise our praise to the Lord: My soul proclaims...

Exchange of Ideas About the Theme - Some Points

All of us have surely lived family experiences, or know firsthand experiences of some families that can be discouraging or not very motivating when it comes to

transmitting in our own families these values of light, truth and fidelity to which we are called. At the same time, we surely know these virtues in our most immediate environment. Looking at both scenarios:

1. What moment do you keep in your hearts as a treasure of family experience in which Christ's presence became crystal clear for all or for some members of your families?
2. Have you lived any experience of expanding family horizons in which other people, without blood ties to your family, have made Christ's love present in your closest environment?
3. Do you believe that any of the experiences you have remembered could help any family you know that needs a little light at this time?

Chapter 7 - The Evangelizing Family

"Paul... to the Church that meets in your house" (Phlm 1:2)

Objectives

- To discover the newness of the Gospel in Saint Paul's teaching on the family.
- To recognize the family as domestic Church, the first community of faith and love.
- To deepen in love as a gift that gives shape to all family relationships.
- To understand the Pauline texts on marriage from the perspective of mutual self-giving in Christ.

Reading of the Word

Reading from the first letter of the Apostle Saint Paul to the Corinthians 13:1-10

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have faith so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions to feed the poor; if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. ⁴Love is patient, love is kind; love does not envy, does not boast, is not proud; ⁵it is not rude, not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears.

Commentary

Introduction

Throughout our journey through the history of salvation we have contemplated how God's Love is revealed and incarnated in human life: from creation, where man and woman are called to reflect his image in communion; through the covenant, where God commits himself to his people as a faithful spouse; until reaching the fullness of love in Christ, who gives himself for humanity and renews all human relationships.

On this path we have discovered that the family is not only a natural reality, but a divine vocation, a theological place where God's Love becomes visible and credible. In the Song of Songs, that human love was revealed as a space where God manifests himself.

With Saint Paul we now take another step: we enter the stage of the nascent Church, where the Gospel begins to transform homes and family relationships

from within. Saint Paul does not write systematic treatises, but in his letters—born in the midst of concrete communities, with their lights and tensions—we find a profound vision of love and family in the light of Christ.

Paul understands that the Gospel does not destroy daily life, but transfigures it. His message penetrates the most basic structures of the ancient world—the house, marriage, relationships between parents and children, masters and servants—to fill them with the Spirit of Christ. Thus, the family, which was the fundamental social cell of the Roman Empire, gradually becomes a "domestic Church," where love is learned as gift and service, and where each relationship finds its measure in Christ.

Saint Paul

Paul, a Jew of the diaspora trained in Hellenistic culture and a Roman citizen, could move freely through the cities of the Mediterranean. His horizon was broad, but his heart remained rooted in the faith of Israel. Everything changes radically in his encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus: there he understands that the Crucified One, who seemed cursed, is in reality the Messiah and the Son of God. This paschal experience opens his eyes and renews his mind: he no longer sees God from the law, but from grace; he no longer conceives salvation as human merit, but as a gift of gratuitous Love. In that encounter he discovers that God's strength is manifested in weakness and that the cross reorders the entire scale of human values.

From then on, his gaze on humanity becomes radically new: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus" (Gal 3:28). In this statement beats the core of his understanding of the Church as a new universal family, born of baptism and sustained by grace. In Christ, social, ethnic or family divisions are relativized, because a new type of brotherhood emerges: that of the sons and daughters of God.

In his apostolic mission—which had Corinth and Ephesus as main centers—Paul encountered a plural and fragmented society: merchants, philosophers, artisans, slaves, families of different origins... There, in the midst of that human mosaic, the Apostle of the Gospel announces Good News that not only changes beliefs, but also forms of coexistence and family bonds. His proposal does not consist of a new morality, but of a humanity renewed in Christ. Therefore, before the "house"—the social nucleus of the era and symbol of all human relationships—Paul offers a renewed horizon: the home becomes a small domestic Church, a place of communion, mutual service and transmission of the faith.

In his letters, especially to the Ephesians, Colossians, Corinthians and Philippians, we find the keys to that vision: the family is not based only on blood, but on the Spirit; it is not governed by the law of power, but by the logic of self-giving love; it does not seek success or perfection, but fidelity and communion. In this sense, the Church, the body of Christ, is the great family where every Christian family

finds its meaning and mission: to be a reflection of God's Love, a space of reconciliation and a foretaste of the Kingdom.

The House/Family: The Ecclesia Domestica

In the ancient world, the house (oikos) was the heart of social life. It was not just a private home, but an economic, educational and religious unit, where relationships of kinship, work and faith were intertwined. The "pater familias" (Father of the family) was the guarantor of order and domestic worship, and on him rested almost absolute authority over all members.

In this context, the house was the structural nucleus of the Empire and of Greco-Roman society. Questioning its patriarchal order was seen as a threat to social equilibrium. Paul, however, chooses a surprising path: he does not destroy the house, but evangelizes it. By announcing Christ in homes, he converts that everyday space into a theological place, a living cell of the new People of God.

When he arrives in a city, Paul does not begin his mission by building temples or founding institutions, but by seeking homes open to faith. In them he preaches, prays, celebrates the breaking of bread and establishes communities that meet "in the house of..." Aquila and Priscilla, Phoebe, Philemon or Nympha are some examples of these hosts and leaders of the first communities.

"The churches of Asia greet you. Aquila and Priscilla, together with the church in their house, send you hearty greetings in the Lord" (1 Cor 16:19). "To Philemon, our dear fellow worker, to sister Apphia, and to the church that meets in your house" (Phlm 1:1-2).

Thus, the house becomes Church: a place of communion, prayer and mission. Around the table and the Word, believers experience a new brotherhood that relativizes social hierarchies and privileges.

The letter to Philemon is a paradigmatic example of this transformation. Paul intercedes for Onesimus, a slave, and asks that they receive him "no longer as a slave, but as a beloved brother" (Phlm 16). He does not directly denounce slavery—impossible in his context—but introduces a new principle that deactivates it from within: brotherhood in Christ.

In this way, the house ceases to be only a structure of power and becomes a space of grace where one learns to live the reciprocity of Christian love. Family and social relationships are reinterpreted in the light of Trinitarian communion: in marriage, in the parent-child relationship and in fraternal coexistence, the face of God is made transparent.

Therefore, Christian houses are called domestic churches: small communities where the faith is lived, celebrated and transmitted.

The church: a new family in Christ

Paul's proclamation is not limited to the household as a social sphere, but opens a broader horizon: the Christian community as God's new family. His experience of the risen Christ leads him to understand that the strongest bond is not that of blood or of the Law, but that of the Spirit who makes all believers brothers and sisters. "You are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God" (Eph 2:19).

The Church is, therefore, a new family reality where divisions are overcome and one learns to live in communion. In it, each believer occupies a unique place, but all are united by the same Spirit and called to build up the Body of Christ.

In his letters, Paul constantly uses family images to describe ecclesial life: brothers and sisters, sons and daughters, fathers in the faith... He himself presents himself as a mother who gives birth to her children in the Gospel (cf. Gal 4:19) or as a father who exhorts with tenderness (cf. 1 Thess 2:11).

This family dimension is neither sentimental nor symbolic: it is the concrete form in which faith becomes flesh. The Christian community is a "dwelling place of God" (Eph 2:22), where each member actively participates in the common life and mutual service. In it, one learns to love, to forgive, to share goods, and to live the faith in the midst of the world.

In this sense, the Church is a family of families, called to be a sign of God's Love in history. Each Christian family prolongs and embodies in daily life the communion of the great ecclesial family. That is why Paul exhorts:

"Clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with one another and forgive one another if anyone has a complaint against another. And above all, love, which is the bond of perfection" (Col 3:12-14).

The Christian newness consists precisely in this: that daily life becomes a space of grace. Family relationships—husband and wife, parents and children, brothers and sisters—are transformed into places where Christ's love is experienced. In this sense, the ecclesia is, for Paul, a great house inhabited by God, a family where all are welcomed, including the weakest and most vulnerable.

Family and Church: "Submit to one another" (Eph 5:21)

One of the most well-known and, at the same time, most misinterpreted passages of Saint Paul is the one that says:

"Wives, submit to your husbands, as to the Lord... Husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:22,25).

Read outside its historical and theological context, this text has been used for centuries to justify the subordination of women to men. However, nothing could be further from the Apostle's intention. To understand it correctly, it is necessary to read it from its center: the verse that introduces it and gives meaning to the entire passage:

"Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ" (Eph 5:21).

This verse is the hermeneutical key. Paul does not propose a relationship of domination, but a relationship of reciprocity and mutual service. The submission he speaks of has nothing to do with servile obedience, but with the attitude of love that places itself at the service of the other, imitating Christ, who "came not to be served but to serve and to give his life" (Mk 10:45).

The Apostle uses the language and categories of the Greco-Roman "household code"—a deeply patriarchal social model in which the pater familias had authority over wife, children, and slaves—but introduces into it a revolutionary principle: the Love of Christ. He does not destroy the structure; he subverts it from within. Instead of imposing power, he proposes communion; instead of forced obedience, he proposes mutual giving.

Thus, when he says "wives, submit to your husbands," he is not legitimizing inequality, but inviting them to live the conjugal relationship as a space of faith and communion. And when he says "husbands, love your wives as Christ loved the Church," he elevates the man to an unprecedented demand for his time: to love unto total self-giving, unto the cross.

The center of the text is not submission, but the model of love that is proposed: Christ himself.

Paul calls spouses to reflect, in their reciprocal relationship, the mystery of Christ the Bridegroom and the Church the Bride: a gratuitous, tender, and fruitful love, where no one dominates and no one passively submits, but both give themselves in freedom and in faith.

That is why he concludes: "This is a great mystery, and I am speaking in reference to Christ and the Church" (Eph 5:32).

In this "great mystery," the family becomes an icon of Trinitarian communion. Marriage is not an institution of power, but a sacramental sign of God's Love, where husband and wife, different but equal in dignity, give themselves to one another as Christ gives himself to his Church.

In this way, Saint Paul is neither misogynistic nor conservative, but profoundly transformative. His message cannot be read as a defense of patriarchal structures, but as a seed of the Gospel that, over time, germinates into a new vision of woman, of man, and of the relationship between them.

The Christian principle of mutual self-giving in love, rooted in Christ, contains in seed form the overcoming of every form of inequality.

Therefore, this text should not be feared, but reread in the light of the Spirit: what Paul meant to say was not "let one command and the other obey," but "let both love as Christ loved us."

Where love is mutual and gratuitous, true equality flourishes; and where Christ is the center, the family becomes a sacrament of the Kingdom.

Love that bears all things" (1 Cor 13)**

Saint Paul does not reduce love to the emotional realm. When he writes to the Corinthians, he does so to a living but divided community, full of gifts and conflicts. In that context, he reveals to them "the most excellent way" (1 Cor 12:31): love as charity, agape, which is the very love with which God loves.

This love is not the fruit of moral effort, but a gift of the Spirit (Rom 5:5). It is the love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7). It is a love that does not seek its own, is not provoked, keeps no record of wrongs. In marriage and family, this charity is the concrete face of Christian love: patience in difficult times, joy in service, the capacity to begin again and to forgive.

When Paul describes this love, he does so thinking not only of the ecclesial community, but also of domestic communities, of households where the same tensions, wounds, and reconciliations are lived. The love with which Christ loves the Church thus becomes the measure of conjugal love (Eph 5:25).

Therefore, for Saint Paul, love is the form of every virtue and the fulfillment of the law (Rom 13:8-10). In the family, this love is expressed in very concrete gestures: tenderness that does not humiliate, words that console, patience that sustains, forgiveness that rebuilds. The Christian home thus becomes a small laboratory of God's Love, where each member learns to love "not only in word, but in truth and in deed" (1 Jn 3:18).

Words of Father Caffarel

"I leave you, in closing, with the example of this couple who should be the model of Christian hospitality: Aquila and Priscilla. These Jewish tentmakers settled in Corinth received one day the visit of one of their compatriots in search of work. They agreed to hire him, and their new employee did not take long to make himself known. It was Paul, recently arrived in the great cosmopolitan port and without

resources. Their worker, their guest, and he would become their teacher and spiritual father. Through his word and example, they converted to Christ and opened their home to the neophytes of the great city. When Paul left for Ephesus and later for Rome, they accompanied him. And they always did so to fulfill the same service: to have an open dwelling so that new converts would feel at home. The Eucharist was celebrated there. It pleases me to think that the profound insight that Paul developed about the greatness of marriage matured slowly thanks to the years he spent in the home of these spouses, who were his friends and collaborators. Was it not in the mirror of their mutual love that Paul saw reflected the marriage of Christ and the Church?

Today, as twenty centuries ago, priests cannot do without the collaboration of spouses and their families: the priest is Christ who goes out to meet people to transmit the Lord's message to them; the home is the Church that welcomes into her bosom to protect, nourish, and give life to those whom the missionary word has won for God."

Henri Caffarel, *Anneau d'Or*, no. 111-112, Marriage, that great sacrament, May-August 1963, pp. 275-287, "Aquila and Priscilla"

Questions to Prepare for the Sit-Down

The first Christians gathered in homes to pray, share life and celebrate the faith. Saint Paul speaks of "the Church that meets in your house" as a living reality. In what way is your home a space of faith? How do you live prayer, the Word and hospitality as a family? What concrete gestures could help you make your home more like those first domestic Churches that Paul knew?

Saint Paul's hymn to love (1 Cor 13) describes a concrete and demanding love: patient, kind, without envy, that does not boast... In your relationship, which of these features of love do you most recognize, and which ones cost you more to live? What situations this month have helped you experience that love is not only a feeling, but a decision and a gift that is renewed day by day?

Saint Paul invites us to look at love with Christ's eyes: "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph 5:25). It is not about domination or submission, but about a love that gives itself freely, that seeks the good of the other before one's own. In your relationship, how do you live this love that gives itself and does not impose? At what moments have you experienced that loving the other leads you to resemble Christ more? What everyday gestures could you care for so that your love is more service than demand?

Meeting Development

Reflection Points for Sharing

In this meeting, we want to let ourselves be illuminated by Saint Paul's teaching and discover how the Gospel transforms family life from within, making the home a place where Christ dwells and acts.

In this month's sharing we invite you to share how during this time between the previous team meeting and this moment, in what concrete situations we have recognized our family as a space of faith; how the patient and self-giving love that Paul speaks of has been present in our daily life; and how the experience of belonging to the great family of the Church helps us live our family relationships with a more evangelical and hopeful gaze.

Participation

When listening to Saint Paul, we discover that the Gospel is not lived only in the temple, but in the home. The first Christian communities were born around family tables, in open homes where people prayed, shared life and learned to love like Christ. This helps us look at our family not only as a private space, but as a small domestic Church, called to make God's Love visible in the everyday.

This theme invites us to recognize how, in our own experience, listening to God's Word gradually shapes our way of living as a family. It is not about great moments, but about the simple prayer and reflection on the word of each day, about sharing among ourselves what the Sunday readings have resonated... so that we let the Gospel illuminate what we are and what we live. How has it helped us to become aware that our family is called to be domestic Church, not by what it says, but by how it loves, forgives and welcomes?

Conjugal prayer then appears as a privileged place to learn the love that Saint Paul speaks of: a patient, serving love, capable of forgiving and starting over. When we pray together, our life gradually lets itself be transformed by that love that "believes all things, hopes all things and endures all things," and that makes the conjugal relationship a living sign of Christ's love. How does it strengthen us to live our marital vocation trusting more in the action of the Spirit than in our own strength? Is it helping us in some way in our evangelizing vocation?

The Rule of Life, for its part, helps us translate this love into concrete choices. Not as an added demand, but as a simple support that orients our family life toward greater coherence between the faith we profess and the way we relate, welcome and serve.

Prayer

Let us take a moment of silence to welcome the Word that Saint Paul addresses to the community and that today resounds in our homes and in our families:

Reading from the first letter of Saint Paul to the Corinthians (1 Cor 13:1-10)

¹If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. ²If I have the gift of prophecy and know all mysteries and all knowledge; if I have faith so as to move mountains, but have not love, I am nothing. ³If I give away all my possessions to feed the poor; if I deliver my body to be burned, but have not love, it profits me nothing. ⁴Love is patient, love is kind; love does not envy, does not boast, is not proud; ⁵it is not rude, not self-seeking; it is not easily angered; it keeps no record of wrongs. ⁶Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. ⁷It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. ⁸Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. ⁹For we know in part and we prophesy in part, ¹⁰but when perfection comes, the imperfect disappears. (1 Cor 13:1-10)

In the light of the Word we have heard, we leave a moment of silence to recognize that the love Saint Paul speaks of is not an idea or a distant ideal, but a work of the Spirit that is incarnated in our conjugal and family life.

At this moment, we give thanks to God for the different ways in which his love has become concrete in our couple and in our family, as fruit of his grace in us.

Each team member can choose a thanksgiving that reflects their experience; as it is something very personal, they can be repeated as many times as needed:

- We thank you, Lord, for patient love, which has sustained us in times of waiting and difficulty.
- We thank you, Lord, for kind love, which has been expressed in simple gestures of care and attention.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that does not envy and has allowed us to rejoice in the good of the other.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that does not boast or become proud, and has helped us live with humility.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that is not selfish, which has taught us to go out of ourselves.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that is not easily angered, and has brought peace in moments of tension.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that keeps no record of wrongs, and has opened paths to forgiveness.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that rejoices with the truth, and has helped us live with sincerity.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that always protects, when we have known how to understand fragility.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that always trusts, and has allowed us to trust again.

- We thank you, Lord, for love that always hopes, even when the future seemed uncertain.
- We thank you, Lord, for love that always perseveres, and has remained faithful in the trial.
- We thank you, Lord, because this love never fails, and we know it is your gift and the work of your Spirit.

We end the prayer with the Our Father

Exchange of Ideas About the Theme - Some Points

"The Church is a family of families, called to be a sign of God's Love in history. Each Christian family prolongs and incarnates in daily life the communion of the great ecclesial family."

"In marriage and family, this charity is the concrete face of Christian love: patience in difficult times, joy in service, the capacity to start over and forgive."

These two quotes from the theme could be a summary in "headlines" of the content of this chapter. They speak of communion, joy and the capacity to forgive and be reborn. For Saint Paul, family life is fundamental to understanding the Kingdom, because it is there where Christ's love is manifested.

However, each family has its customs, its culture and its way of showing its love. And every time a man and a woman begin the adventure of founding a family, they are going to put into play what they have lived, how they have lived it and, at the same time, they are going to make it new. This experience can be one of the most beautiful in the lives of the new spouses or it can become an insurmountable obstacle if one does not know how to contribute and respect simultaneously. What memories do you have of the difficulties overcome in those foundational moments of your families? How did you know how to start over and forgive? Did prayer or any of the concrete points of effort (endeavors) help you, if you were already members of Teams? Did any members of your families of origin or close friends help you? Father Caffarel speaks to us about hospitality and originally it was one of the obligations of the Founding Charter, what place do welcome and hospitality occupy in your home?

Chapter 8 - The Transmission of Faith in the Family

"These words... you shall repeat them to your children" (Dt 6:6-7).

Objectives

- To rediscover the family as the first place where faith is transmitted and celebrated.
- To live family love as a concrete expression of the Gospel.
- To learn to trust in God, recognizing that faith is a gift that grows in freedom and time, beyond our hands.

Reading of the Word

Reading from the second letter of the apostle Saint Paul to Timothy 1:3-7; 3:14-17

I give thanks to God, whom I serve with a clear conscience as my ancestors did, because I remember you constantly in my prayers night and day.

Remembering your tears, I long to see you so that I may be filled with joy. I recall the sincere faith that is in you, that faith that first lived in your grandmother Lois and your mother Eunice, and I am sure that it also lives in you.

For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of fear, but of power and love and self-control. Remain in what you learned and believed, knowing from whom you learned it, and that from childhood you have known the Sacred Scriptures, which can give you the wisdom that leads to salvation through faith in Christ Jesus.

All Scripture is inspired by God and useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

Commentary

Introduction

Throughout this journey we have been contemplating, step by step, how the family traverses the entire history of salvation as its invisible thread and living heart. From the beginning, the Bible reveals to us that human life is not understood in solitude: "It is not good for man to be alone" (Gen 2:18). In the communion between man and woman—image and likeness of God—the very mystery of the Creator is manifested, who is love and communion. The family is thus born from the divine design as a space where love becomes fruitful, where life is welcomed, cared for and transmitted.

In the patriarchs we discover that the history of salvation begins in a house, in a tent that sets out on a journey. God calls Abraham and Sarah to leave their land, and in them he makes of a family the seed of a people. In their history—full of lights and shadows, of promises and waiting—we learn that faith is transmitted not so much by biological inheritance, but by trust in the promise. God's blessing passes from generation to generation, despite all their sin, as we saw in Isaac and Jacob, weaving a network of covenants that sustain the hope of the people.

The prophets, later, reveal the passionate face of that Love of God, comparing it to spousal love between a man and a woman: a faithful, jealous love, that does not resign itself to losing the beloved. In Hosea, Isaiah or Ezekiel, the history of Israel is understood as a family history: God the husband, his people the unfaithful wife, and a covenant always renewed. In the Song of Songs, that image reaches its poetic summit: human love—with its tenderness, its desire, its waiting and its surrender—becomes a mirror of divine Love. The house and the heart become a temple where God allows himself to be found.

Upon arriving at the Gospel, revelation reaches its fullness: God himself enters into a human family. The mystery of the Incarnation happens in the home of Nazareth, in Mary's yes, in Joseph's obedience, in the hidden life of the Son. The family becomes the place where God dwells and where humanity learns to call God "Father." The family is no longer just a blood bond, but a space of communion in the Spirit, open to universal love.

With Saint Paul, the gaze expands even more. The Apostle, profoundly marked by the experience of the risen Christ, discovers that all Christian existence has a family form. In his letters, Paul invites communities to live as "the household of God" (1 Tim 3:15), to recognize themselves as brothers and sisters in Christ, to love each other with a love that "bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things" (1 Cor 13:7). In the Greco-Roman world, where the house (oikos) was the center of social and religious life, Paul announces that the Christian home can become a domestic Church: a small community where Christ is Lord, where bonds are transformed into service and power becomes gift.

And so we arrive at the end of our journey. After traversing creation, the patriarchs, the prophets, spousal love, the home of Nazareth and the Pauline mission, we have understood that the family is not only a setting for faith, but its privileged channel. The Christian family is called to be a living memory of the Gospel, a place of transmission and witness, a school of faith, hope and charity.

Since the origins of the people of God, faith has been transmitted in the setting of a table, a feast, a home: this happens at Passover, when children ask and parents narrate the wonders of God (cf. Ex 12:26-27). Today too, each Christian family celebrates its daily "passover" when it prays, when it forgives, when it sustains hope in the midst of trials. In the home one learns to believe not so much through lessons, but through gestures, through silent fidelities, through the love that educates and accompanies.

Therefore, the family continues to be the heart of the Church and its first school of evangelization. There where a father or mother teaches their children to pray, where bread is shared and one learns to forgive, where one trusts in God in the midst of life, there faith becomes history. And although sometimes that faith may seem asleep or extinguished, it remains a living seed, deposited in the heart by the Spirit, who will know how to make it sprout in due time.

Commentary

A Family History of Salvation

Faith has been born and grown within families. God reveals himself in the midst of a domestic history: that of Abraham, Sarah and their descendants. The promise passes from generation to generation like a family blessing, an invisible thread that unites the faith experience of parents with that of children.

The first school of faith was not a synagogue or a temple, but the home. There, in daily life, parents taught children to bless, to give thanks and to trust in the Lord. The book of Deuteronomy expresses it forcefully:

"These words that I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall repeat them to your children, you shall speak of them when you are at home and when you go on the way, when you lie down and when you rise" (Dt 6:6-7).

Transmitting faith is not first of all teaching some ideas, but sharing a living experience: the memory of what God has done and continues to do. Faith is communicated as love is transmitted: by contagion, by witness, by closeness.

The family is the first place where the human being learns to believe, because there one experiences trust, fidelity, the love that sustains. It is no coincidence that the great moments of the history of salvation are marked by family gestures: a mother who protects (Moses and his mother), a father who blesses (Isaac), a son who obeys (Samuel), a wife who trusts (Ruth)... In the family one learns the language of love, which is the same language of faith.

Transmitting Faith is a Commandment

Transmitting faith is not a voluntary initiative or a gesture of good will from the most pious parents: it is a divine commandment, inscribed in the very heart of the Covenant. The "Shema Israel," the core of the faith confession of the Hebrew people, inseparably unites love for God and its transmission to children. "Listen"—shema—is not a passive invitation, but an active call to welcome and incarnate the Word. In the heart of the chosen people, faith is transmitted by commandment: "These words that I command you today shall be in your heart; you shall repeat them to your children" (Dt 6:6-7).

Deuteronomy thus shows that the transmission of faith is not an occasional act or a pedagogical program, but a way of life. Faith is transmitted not in extraordinary moments, but in the everyday: "when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise" (Dt 6:7). It is transmitted at the table, on the road, before sleep and upon waking. The family becomes the natural environment where faith is breathed, where God's presence impregnates the whole of existence.

This mandate is not a burden, but a privilege: to be instruments through whom God's promise reaches new generations. Parents do not transmit their own faith, but the faith of the Church, the faith received and lived. In this way, each family becomes a link in the long chain of believers who, from Abraham to us, have kept alive the flame of hope.

How Faith is Transmitted

Faith is not transmitted like an object that is passed from hand to hand, nor like a lesson that is memorized. Faith is communicated by witness, by contagion, by the coherence between what is said and what is lived.

Children learn to pray by seeing their parents pray. They learn to trust by experiencing that their parents trust. They learn to forgive by being forgiven. Faith is transmitted, above all, by the example of a life that is sustained by God's love.

But faith is also transmitted through the Word. Family prayer, reading the Bible together, narrating the great stories of salvation, celebrating feasts and sacraments... all these are concrete ways in which faith is made present and alive in the family.

The letter to Timothy shows us a beautiful example of this transmission. Paul reminds Timothy of the faith that first lived in his grandmother Lois and his mother Eunice, and that now lives in him (2 Tim 1:5). Faith has passed from generation to generation, not as an imposition, but as a gift received and welcomed. Timothy has learned to believe not only through words, but through the living witness of two women of faith who accompanied him with their love and their example.

Transmitting Faith in Freedom

One of the greatest challenges in transmitting faith is respecting the freedom of those who receive it. Faith cannot be imposed; it can only be proposed. Parents can witness, accompany, educate, but they cannot believe for their children. Each person must make their own journey, ask their own questions, and find their own personal encounter with God.

This requires parents to exercise a special trust: to sow without controlling the fruit, to accompany without possessing, to wait without despairing. Sometimes that faith seems to be lost, especially in adolescence or youth. But the seed sown

in childhood often germinates years later, when the person finds in their memory the gestures of love, the words of faith, the silent fidelity of their parents.

Saint Monica is a moving example of this patient and trusting love. For years she prayed for the conversion of her son Augustine, without losing hope, without ceasing to love him, without judging him. Her tears and her fidelity bore fruit: Augustine not only returned to the faith, but became one of the greatest Doctors of the Church.

The Family as Domestic Church

The Second Vatican Council recovered the ancient expression "domestic Church" to refer to the Christian family (Lumen Gentium 11). This does not mean that the family is a complete church in itself, but that it is the first place where one learns to be Church: to pray, to celebrate the faith, to live charity, to transmit the Gospel.

In the family, children learn to call God "Father," to recognize themselves as brothers and sisters, to share, to forgive, to serve. The home becomes a school of communion and mission, a space where the Kingdom of God is anticipated.

Family prayer is one of the most precious treasures of the domestic Church. Praying together—at table, before sleep, on Sundays—creates bonds that go beyond the everyday and opens the heart to God's presence. It is not necessary for it to be long or elaborate; what matters is that it be sincere, simple and constant.

Trusting When We Do Not See the Fruit

One of the greatest sufferings for many parents is seeing that their children distance themselves from the faith. After having transmitted it with love, after having prayed and accompanied, it seems that everything has been lost. In those moments, it is important to remember the parable of the sower (Mk 4:3-9).

The sower goes out to sow, and the seed falls on different types of soil: some falls on the path and is eaten by birds; some falls on rocky ground and withers for lack of roots; some falls among thorns and is choked. But some falls on good soil and bears fruit: thirty, sixty, a hundredfold.

This parable teaches us that not everything depends on us. The sower sows generously, without selecting the soil, trusting that some seed will bear fruit. Parents are called to sow with love, patience and fidelity, but the fruit does not belong to them. The fruit is of God, who makes the seed germinate in his time.

Sometimes it takes years, even decades, for that seed to bear fruit. But God's fidelity is greater than our limitations. What matters is not to stop sowing, not to stop loving, not to stop trusting.

Conclusion: Faithful Love is the Best Catechesis

At the end of this journey, we discover that the best way to transmit faith is to live it with joy, coherence and fidelity. Children do not learn to believe from perfect parents, but from parents who love, who trust in God, who know how to ask for forgiveness and start over.

The Christian family is not a model to imitate, but a space of grace where God acts. There, in the midst of fragilities and limitations, God's love is made concrete, forgiveness is learned, hope is sustained.

And when it seems that everything is lost, we can remember the parable of the prodigal son (Lk 15): to wait, to trust, to always welcome. Victory is not for the one who is right, but for the one who loves most. That patient and faithful love is, in itself, the best catechesis and the deepest confession of faith.

Words of Father Caffarel

"Very soon the couple becomes a family. Conjugal prayer naturally becomes family prayer. I do not say that it disappears, replacing conjugal prayer, but rather it expands (...)

Family prayer should give a significant space to the Word of God (...) on condition that this reading is not chosen at random, but is prepared. After having listened to God who speaks in the Bible, we must respond to him, but first we must let that Word penetrate each one. For this, a time of silence is necessary. It is of capital importance to learn to be silent together before God. (...) However, it would be a mistake to set aside vocal prayers. (...) Quite often children like to say their petitions aloud, which allows them to take an active part in prayer. They greatly appreciate the intentions that their parents express, when they concern the great concerns of the Church and the world. We can add that parents through family prayer find a privileged means to better understand their children's souls.

Personal prayer spoken aloud is an extraordinary means of teaching children to speak to God. Children who hear only already constructed prayers will never acquire the spontaneity of a filial soul addressing its Father. These various parts of prayer can follow one another in a relatively short time. It is good that family prayer be short, maximum ten minutes, lively, simple and varied. (...) There are difficulties that are very real and cannot be ignored. Some are due to the simultaneous presence of young and older children in family prayer. One should not align with the younger ones, if one does not want the older ones to soon abandon prayer. Others are a consequence of adolescent psychology. These in general show little enthusiasm for participating in family prayer. Achieving it is a great art that some homes know how to practice by themselves, or else they do it with the help of an appropriate and attractive method that combines psychological and spiritual knowledge. What is important is not to feel guilty about that distance. It is not the parents' fault nor always the children's either."

Henri Caffarel, Anneau d'Or, 111-112, May-August 1963. Family prayer.

Questions to Prepare for the Sit-Down

Transmitting faith is not, above all, teaching things about God, but living in such a way that God can be discovered in daily life.

- When you look at your marital and family life, what real place does faith occupy in your daily life? Is it integrated naturally or relegated to specific moments?
- In what concrete gestures, attitudes or decisions do you believe your family transmits faith, even without words? And in what aspects do you feel there are inconsistencies or silences that cost you?
- Before the new generations (children, grandchildren, young people close to you...), what fears, doubts or resistances appear in you when it comes to speaking about God or proposing a path of faith? What helps you not to give up on this mission?

Meeting Development

Reflection Points for Sharing

In this sharing we invite you to something different; it is not about talking about what has happened this month, but what we have lived in the history of our family.

At this moment it is important to situate ourselves from trust and not from guilt. The transmission of faith is not a result that is measured, but an act of love that is offered. Jesus himself taught us this in the parable of the sower: the sower goes out every morning to sow, without controlling where the seed will fall or what fruit it will bear.

Some seeds fall by the wayside and the birds come and take them away. Also in the lives of our children "big birds" appear: influences, words, experiences or wounds that seem to erase what we have lovingly sown. Other seeds fall on rocky ground: moments of superficial enthusiasm, of fragile faith, that has no roots and is extinguished when difficulties come. Others fall among thorns: worries, disappointments, sufferings or conflicts that choke what seemed to grow.

And yet, the sower does not stop sowing. He does not select the soil, does not become discouraged, does not reproach himself for the fruit. He continues going out every day, trusting. Sometimes, without knowing how or when, some seed falls on good soil and bears fruit.

Our children or grandchildren go through all these soils throughout their lives, as we ourselves do. Transmitting faith does not mean guaranteeing the result, but

remaining faithful to the gesture of sowing: a word, a prayer, a witness, a loving presence. The fruit does not belong to us. Time does not either. Both are God's.

Participation

The family is the first place where the Word is heard, where prayer is learned and where everyday gestures educate in trust in God. Therefore, when we now share participation, we are invited to look at our points of effort as concrete channels of transmission of faith.

We propose some guidelines for participation. Like everything else, use them to the extent that they help you.

- In light of this theme, how do the concrete points of effort help us to create a family climate where faith can be welcomed and transmitted with freedom and joy?
- This month, in what way has listening to the Word nourished our personal and conjugal faith, making it more alive and, therefore, more transmissible?
- How does conjugal prayer help us to assume together the responsibility of transmitting faith, not as a burden, but as a mission entrusted by God?
- In the sit-down, are we capable of speaking truthfully about our faith: about what we believe, what we doubt, what it costs us to transmit? What fruits do we see when we do it together?

Prayer

Let us take a moment of silence to place ourselves in the Lord's presence, recognizing with humility and trust the work He has accomplished in our families throughout this journey.

We listen in our hearts to the words of the apostle Paul:

Reading from the second letter of the Apostle Saint Paul to Timothy, 2 Tim 1:3-5

"I give thanks to my God whenever I remember you in my prayers... I recall the sincere faith that is in you, that faith that first lived in your grandmother and your mother, and I am sure that it also lives in you" (cf. 2 Tim 1:3-5).

We read this prayer in silence and each make it our own

Lord, before You we place our family history, with its lights and shadows, with the seeds sown with love and with those that seem to have been lost along the way. You know our desires, our wounds and also our silent hope.

Like Paul, we want to begin by giving thanks. Thank you, Lord, for the faith received, for the people who transmitted it to us—parents, grandparents, parish, teams, communities—for the simple words, the everyday gestures, the shared prayers and the silences inhabited by You.

We thank you, Lord, because You have placed in our families a spirit not of fear, but of power, love and self-control.

Thank you for sustaining us when we doubt, for lifting us up when we feel fragile, for continuing to work even when we do not see fruits.

Today we want to present to you our children and grandchildren. We entrust them to you as they are, on the paths they travel, in their searches, their questions and their resistances.

Free us from guilt and discouragement; teach us to sow without appropriating the fruit, to love without conditions, to wait without imposing times.

We ask you, Lord, to help us remain in what we have received, to care for the Word that dwells in our home, to let the Scriptures continue to educate our heart and give wisdom for life.

Make our families homes where your Word is heard, where prayer has a simple and true place, where lived love is the first announcement of the Gospel.

Each one can repeat aloud the phrase or phrases that have helped them most from this prayer.

We finish by praying the Our Father

Exchange of Ideas About the Theme - Some Points

We find ourselves before one of the themes that causes the most pain among many of us, since we all have experience of "failure" in the transmission of faith among our children and grandchildren. However, as we have just read, it is not for us to assess the result but to remain faithful in sowing. Our children will develop in their lives their experience of faith in their way, not in ours. In their times, not in ours and, surely, the worst thing we could do is to falter or weaken. Being faithful to Jesus' love and being faithful to the love we have for each other and that we have shown them will be the best way to transmit faith, which is a word that has the same etymology as fidelity. Let us therefore live fidelity in order to transmit faith, without setting goals or objectives. What each of our sons and daughters lives in their hearts will be closely linked to this fidelity that we show.

- What has caught your attention most about this theme on the transmission of faith?

- Share how well we trust God to tend the seeds of faith we have planted in the lives of our children. Share how we continue to "scatter seeds" in their lives. What can we learn from St. Monica's example regarding St. Augustine?"
- After working on it, how do you understand today your responsibility — personal and family — in the transmission of faith, beyond visible results?
- What concrete call do you take away to care for faith in your home and allow God to continue writing a history of salvation in your family?
- At what moments have you discovered that faith is transmitted more by what is lived than by what is said?
- From the text of the theme, what concrete experiences can you share about family prayer as a source of unity, meaning or reconciliation?
- What real difficulties do you encounter today in transmitting faith in your family (fatigue, lack of time, generational distance, rejection, indifference...)? How do you live them from faith?

Chapter 9 - Review

"The one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion" (Phil 1:6)

Proposal

This chapter has a different structure from the rest of the team meetings we have had throughout this course, and its purpose is to review the personal, couple and team journey in the light of what has been lived. This review meeting is proposed as a time of reflection lived all together, under God's gaze, to give thanks for the journey traveled this year. It is a Sit-Down of the team, the moment to share and to help each other in a climate of prayer, truth and communion.

The proposal starts from the Reading of the Word and its commentary.

An outline for preparing this meeting is also suggested. Each team can choose to focus on those parts that are most appropriate for their current situation. What is important is to prepare this meeting as a couple. Together, at the end of the course, we will take stock of what we have lived, identify strengths and weaknesses, and prepare ourselves for the election of the new responsible couple. Another possible option is for this meeting to take place within the framework of a final Eucharist lived as a team and to adapt the proposals to the various parts, as the team deems appropriate.

Reading of the Word

Reading from the letter of the Apostle Saint Paul to the Philippians 1:1-11

¹Paul and Timothy, servants of Christ Jesus, to all the saints in Christ who are in Philippi, with the bishops and deacons. ²Grace to you and peace from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. ³I give thanks to my God every time I remember you; ⁴whenever I pray for you, I always do so with great joy. ⁵Because you have been my partners in the work of the Gospel, from the first day until today. ⁶This is our confidence: that the one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion by the day of Jesus Christ. ⁷This feeling I have for you is fully justified: I carry you in my heart, because both in prison and in my defense and confirmation of the Gospel, you all share in my grace. ⁸God is my witness of the deep affection with which I love you, in Christ Jesus. ⁹And this is my prayer: that your love may continue to grow more and more in knowledge and all discernment, ¹⁰so that you may approve what is excellent. Thus you will arrive at the day of Christ pure and blameless, ¹¹filled with the fruits of righteousness, through Jesus Christ, for the glory and praise of God.

Commentary

Saint Paul does not begin this letter by pointing out deficiencies or correcting errors, but by giving thanks. When looking at the community of Philippi, the first

thing that springs from his heart is gratitude and joy. This is a very important key for our review of the course: to look at the journey traveled from thanksgiving, not from what "we have not achieved."

Paul gives thanks "every time I remember you." Believing memory is not a tally of failures, but a place where God's work is recognized. At the end of this course, we too are invited to remember the themes, the meetings, the difficulties and the small advances, not to judge ourselves, but to discover how God has been present from the first day until today.

The apostle recognizes something fundamental: "you have been my partners in the work of the Gospel." He does not speak of spectacular results, but of faithful collaboration. So too this journey has not been lived in solitude: we have traveled it as marriages, as teams, as Church. Every effort to listen to the Word, to pray together, to care for the relationship, has already been participation in God's work, even if it has been fragile, intermittent or silent.

The central verse illuminates everything: "The one who began a good work among you will bring it to completion." Here we are freed from a heavy burden: it is not we who carry the weight of growth, neither in our spiritual life, nor in marriage, nor in the transmission of faith to children. God is the one who initiates, sustains and leads the work. Our role has been—and will continue to be—to offer availability, to persevere, to start over.

Paul says something very beautiful: "I carry you in my heart." The Christian journey is not a program of ideas, but an experience of communion. This course has not been just a set of themes, but a shared history, woven of bonds, listening and mutual accompaniment. There is already fruit of the Spirit there, even if it is not always seen.

When Paul prays for the community, he does not ask for success or effectiveness, but that "love may continue to grow in knowledge and discernment." This phrase summarizes very well the spirit of the entire curriculum: it is not about doing more, but about loving better, with a love increasingly discerned, more incarnated, more evangelical in the concrete reality of family life.

Finally, he speaks of "fruits of righteousness," not as one's own merit, but "through Jesus Christ." The fruits—if there are any—are not personal trophies, but signs of God's faithfulness. And if we still do not see them clearly, this word sustains us: the process remains open, the work is not finished.

Team Meeting

Welcome

The welcoming couple prepares a basket with blank papers on which the names of the couple we propose as responsible for the next course will later be written. The

basket or container will be present throughout the meeting until the moment we decide to make that election.

Sharing

We invite you to share:

- A biblical character in whom you have seen yourselves reflected
- A prayer that has touched your heart
- A proposal that has helped you
- An idea that has illuminated your path
- A team moment that has moved you

Participation

We invite you to share which point of effort has been most difficult for you to live or which one you have rediscovered.

Study Theme

How have we lived the study theme of this year? Has it helped us to live family life in a different way?

Movement Experience

How have we lived our relationship with the rest of the Movement? How has our participation been in sector events, the services requested or the use of the website and social networks? Do we feel part of a broader Movement?

From everything we have lived this year:

- What should we continue doing the same way?
- What should we change?

The Election of the Responsible Couple

The election of the responsible couple for the next course can also be carried out in this climate of prayer.

The responsible couple of this course can comment on how they have lived their responsibility. The team can comment on whether they expect any particular "animation" from the new responsible couple.

We can finish by praying all together:

"Lord, we are gathered in your name. We are with the person to whom we have been united by the sacrament of marriage. We are with the couples and chaplain of our team to be attentive to one another and to carry them also 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 may be each day more a fraternal community at your service." Amen

Magnificat

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

Magnificat

My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord;
and my spirit exults in God my Saviour,
because he has looked upon his lowly handmaid.
Yes, from this day forward all generations will call me blessed,
for the almighty has done great things for me.
Holy is His name, and His mercy reaches from age to age for those who fear Him.
He has shown the power of His arm.
He has routed the proud of heart.
He has pulled down princes from their thrones and exalted the lowly.
The hungry He has filled with good things, the rich 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.

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)