



Teams of Our Lady

## Promote the Spirituality of Christian Marriage

The Holy Father John Paul II

Rome 2003

### TO THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY

Dear Friends,

1. On the occasion of your international meeting in Rome, I am happy to welcome you, Regional Couples of the Teams of Our Lady (*Équipes Notre-Dame*), your International Spiritual Advisor Mgr. Fleischmann and the other priests who have come with you. I thank the International Leaders of the movement, Mr and Mrs de Roberty, for their cordial greeting.

#### **Fr Henri Caffarel's intuitions**

2. First of all, how could I not recall the person of Fr Henri Caffarel, your founder, who guided so many couples and initiated them to the prayer of contemplation. On the centenary of his birth, I am happy to join in your thanksgiving. Fr Caffarel taught the greatness and beauty of the vocation of marriage, and, anticipating the fruitful orientations of the Second Vatican Council, he highlighted the call to holiness linked to married and family life (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 11). He knew how to bring out the major aspects of a specific married spirituality that flows from Baptism and that underlines the dignity of human love in the plan of God. The attention he gave to people involved in the sacrament of marriage led him to put his gifts at the service of a "spiritual movement for war widows" that became the "*Hope and Life*" movement and gave him the impetus to create the first *Centres for Preparation for Marriage*, centres present everywhere today. Later on the "Teams of Our Lady for Young People" were created out of his concern to support young people in their faith journey.

#### **Marriage, covenant, sacrament of communion**

3. In the face of the threats that weigh upon the family and the factors that weaken it, you have chosen a timely topic for your meeting: "Couples Called by Christ to the New Covenant". Indeed, for Christian people, marriage, that was elevated to the dignity of a sacrament, is by nature a sign of the covenant, of the communion between God and the human person, and between Christ and the Church. So, for the duration of their lives, Christian spouses receive the mission to manifest in a visible way the indissoluble covenant of God with the human race. Christian faith presents marriage as Good News: the total, reciprocal, unique and indissoluble relationship between man and woman, called to give life. The Spirit of the Lord gives to spouses a new heart and makes them capable of loving each other as Christ has loved us, and of serving life by living out the Christian mystery, for in their union "the Paschal Mystery of Death and Resurrection is being accomplished" (Paul VI, *Address to the Teams of Our Lady*, 4 May 1970, n. 16).

#### **Centrality of the Eucharist**

4. As mystery of the covenant and of communion, the spouses' [married] commitment is an invitation to draw strength from the Eucharist, "source of Christian marriage" (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 57) and model for their love. Indeed, the different phases of the Eucharistic liturgy invite spouses to live their married and family life after the example of that of Christ who gives himself to human beings out of love. They will find in the sacrament the necessary courage for mutual acceptance, forgiveness, dialogue and communion of hearts. It will also be a valuable aid for facing the inevitable difficulties of family life. May the members of Teams be able to be the first witnesses of the grace that one can find in regular sharing in the sacramental life of the Church and of Sunday Mass, the "celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his

people" (Apostolic Letter, *Dies Domini*, 31 May 1998, n. 31; cf. also n. 81) and "antidote for confronting and overcoming obstacles and tensions" (*Discourse to the Members of the 15th Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Council for the Family*, 18 October 2002, n. 2).

### **Support young persons**

5. Nourished by the Bread of Life and called to be a light to "those who seek the truth" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 35), notably, their children, spouses will be able to exercise fully the grace of their baptism through their own mission within the family, in society and in the Church. Such was the intuition of Fr Caffarel's who did not want anyone to join "a team to become isolated ... but to learn how to give him/herself to others" (*Monthly Letter*, February 1948, p. 9). Rejoicing in all that you have undertaken, I exhort all team members to participate more fully in the life of the Church, especially with young people, who wait to receive the demanding and exalting Christian message of human love. In this perspective, team members can help them to live the time of their youth and of their engagement to be married in faithfulness to the commandments of Christ and of the Church, allowing them to find true happiness in the maturing of their emotional life.

### **Conjugal and Family Prayer**

6. Your movement has developed its own formative way, based on the "Endeavours" which help you as a couple to grow together in holiness. I encourage you to live them out carefully and perseveringly in order to love in truth. I invite you especially to develop personal, conjugal and family prayer, without which a Christian is liable to go into decline, as Fr Caffarel used to say (cf. *L'Anneau d'Or*, March-April 1953, p. 136). Far from turning them away from their action in the world, genuine prayer sanctifies the couple and their family, opens the heart to the love of God and of brothers. It also makes them capable of building history according to the plan of God (Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, Letter on Aspects of Christian Meditation, *Orationis formas*, 15 October 1989).

### **Support couples in difficulty ; support special vocations**

7. Dear friends, I thank God for the fruitfulness of your movement throughout the world, encouraging you to witness untiringly and explicitly to the beauty of human love, marriage and the family. At the end of this audience, my prayer goes out to couples in difficulty. May they find on their path witnesses of God's tenderness and mercy. I wish to reiterate my spiritual closeness to separated persons, divorced persons, and to divorced and remarried people who, as baptized persons, are called to participate in Christian life, in conformity with the laws of the Church, (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 84). Finally, I express my gratitude to the Spiritual Counsellors who make themselves available to you. They contribute their competence and experience to your lay movement. Through their collaboration, priests and couples learn to understand, appreciate and help one another. You who experience the grace of a priestly presence, pray for vocations and without fear hand on to your children the call of the Lord. Entrusting you, your teams and their families to the intercession of *Our Lady of the Magnificat*, invoked each day by team members, and also to the Blessed Spouses Luigi and Maria Quattrocchi, I impart to all an affectionate apostolic blessing.

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