



Equipes Notre-Dame

My very dear Couples,

Within our Movement, we have spent much time recently discussing the meaning of our *mission* within today's Church. Moreover, this coincides with Pope Francis' recent calls, with his messages to families and very concretely, as far as we are concerned, to the Gathering of Responsible Couples in Rome in September 2015. Incidentally, this is really only a fulfilment of what he wishes for the whole Church and for every Christian. Since *Evangelii Gaudium* (2013), Pope Francis continually repeats that every Christian must be a *missionary disciple*.

Vatican II says that the laity's mission consists of the sanctification of temporal affairs, by ordering them according to God's plan. (*Lumen gentium*, 31) If we look at ourselves, as a Movement, it is above all a question of spiritual deepening within the sacrament of marriage. We could say that this is our original grace, our charism and our mission, that the Holy Spirit inspired Father Caffarel and the first couples to focus upon. In those times, the primary preoccupation was *spiritual*: helping couples to live and experience Christian holiness as couples. Today this preoccupation continues to be current, but in a more intense fashion, because of the fact that we are experiencing within the Church, as well as in society, a crisis without precedent, which effects the essential attributes of marriage, as a human and Christian nobility, just as they were formulated in St John Paul II's *Familiaris consortio* (1981) or in Pope Francis' *Amoris laetitia* (2016).

So when we talk about *mission*, we ought not to fix our attention only on *doing*, as if it were merely a case of doing things in the meaning that we generally give to the *lay apostolate*, which is very important and ought not to be forgotten. However, the emphasis ought to be placed on *being*. In other words, *bearing witness to the joy of unconditional consent given to the spouse at the moment of the marriage celebration; bearing witness to the joy of the indissoluble unity of love that is stronger than death; bearing witness to the joy of accepting and welcoming children as a gift of God, that do not impair either financial resources or a mother's health*. This is how couples becomes God's helpers in the work of creation and preserving the world, by populating heaven and earth with children (Gen 1:28)! Truly the human couple and above all the Christian couple, because they are the image of Christ and the Church, are the *masterpieces* of Creation!

There, very dear Couples, is the perspective towards which we ought to orientate our attention when talking today about the meaning of our mission as a Movement: it

is not only a question of *going out*, but of *passing on* a testimonial that we can give as we live and experience it. But this is not easy, as we well know. Whether we are Spiritual Counsellors or couples, we all need to be founded and based on Grace, according to the Lord's word, "*...for without Me you can do nothing.*" (John 15:5) It is in order to help you in this spirituality and in this mission that the Movement makes available the *methodology of the Endeavours*, two of which, as you know, I highlight constantly. Be faithful to all the Endeavours, but especially to *couple prayer* and the *Sit-Down*.

May God bless and protect you, through Our Lady's intercession.

Father José Jacinto Ferreira de Farias, SJ
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