

CONFERENCE – Saturday 25th October 2025

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"God said: Christian couple, you are my pride and my hope. When I created the sky and the earth, and in the sky large luminaries, I saw, in my creatures, traces of my perfections and I thought that it was good. When I covered the earth with a large mantle of fields and forests, I saw that it was good; when I created the countless animals, according to their kind, contemplating in these lively and abundant beings, a reflection of my overflowing life, I thought that it was good! From all of my creation, a great, solemn and jubilant hymn then ascended, celebrating my glory and my perfections. However, I did not see anywhere the image of what is my most secret, my most fervent life. Then the need rose in me for revealing the best of myself: and it was then my most beautiful invention. It was thus that I created you, human couple: to my image and resemblance" and I saw, and this time, I thought that it was very good. In the midst of this universe, where each creature sings my glory, celebrates my perfections, love had emerged in order to reveal my Love. Human couple, my beloved creature, my privileged witness, do you understand why you are so dear to me among all creatures? Do you understand the immense hope that I deposit in you? You are the bearer of my reputation, my glory, you are for the universe the great reason for hope, because you are love."

These words of father Henri Caffarel belong to his conference entitled "The Teams of Our Lady in the face of atheism" delivered on May 5, 1970, the day after Paul VI's speech at the IV International Meeting in Rome, then called a pilgrimage. In front of 2,000 couples and 200 priests and spiritual advisors, Pope Paul VI recognized father Caffarel's intuition and affirmed the proper vocation of the couple united by the sacrament of marriage as a path to holiness. In his text, father Caffarel, having recourse to French writers, as he so often did, was fully convinced of the power of Christian marriage as an essential source of hope. He was following the style of the French

philosopher, poet and essayist Charles Péguy (1873-1914) in his book *The Portico of the Mystery of the Second Virtue* (1912), who considered hope as one of the most difficult virtues, but the one

most dear to God: "The faith I love most, says God, is hope". And today we are going to talk about hope and the Christian couple.

A first logical reaction to these words that introduce our communication would be: "No, please, no more of the same", or as we say in a Spanish proverb: "It rains on a wet ground"; we have heard this a thousand times. But we may have heard father Caffarel's words, we may have read them, but we need to update them today to our reality and to that which currently configures the Teams of Our Lady in the world, for which we are responsible. We are responsible for their care, formation, and animation. It is up to us to deeply internalize and convincingly practice that the two realities, Christian marriage and hope, are indissolubly united.

We have precisely chosen this theme today, expanding on the reflection that the Teams in Belgium asked of us at the ERI meeting last March. We were asked to answer how the Teams of Our Lady could be a hope for marriage and the family in this Jubilee year. If we go back to the words of father Caffarel, we will realize that the Christian couple itself, united by the sacrament of marriage, is the real reason for hope.

Today again we want to share from our deepest conviction that we are certain that the Teams of Our Lady are a hope for the couple and the family, not only in this Jubilee year, but in all the years ahead of us, and that this certainty does not end with the end of a responsibility or a service, or with the end of a Jubilee.

Hope is a word that comes from Latin and is closely linked to expectation. It acquires its meaning when we are convinced that we expect something to happen; it is a hope in confidence because we see it as probable. For Christians, it is a disposition of the soul that leads people to consider in the future an important good that is desired and that is believed and can be realized. It loses its meaning, or is much more difficult to believe in, if we expect the impossible.

If we transfer this thought to the initial question, how Teams are a hope for the couple

and the family, the first thing we must consider is whether we believe this to be so, whether we are convinced of it.

And we might indeed think that most of the elements play against us. And that to have hope in the couple and the family today is impossible. If we only think of all the problems: the lack of vocation to marriage, the difficulties of young people, the fear of commitment by many, the failure of relationships, we are already defeated in advance. Our only hope would be based on the impossible, which would be to think that all this would have to be solved for the Teams to work. And we would be idealistic if we thought we were going to solve these problems, or naive if, on the contrary, we did not want to see them. Above these problems must be our initial conviction that this project is worthwhile and that it is good in itself, not only good, but a grace. Therefore, hope will not be based on something we hope for in an impossible future, but will be a current and living reality.

When we reread father Caffarel's texts of the 1950s and 1960s, we see that he evoked similar problems - we could say that they are more urgent now. And he said that, despite everything, it was necessary to look with immense hope towards Christian couples. In the Teams' monthly letter in April 1967, he wrote: "*If couples and homes were to become aware of the mission of the Church incumbent upon them under the sacrament of marriage, if they were to come many to place the powerful human and supernatural energies of conjugal love at the disposal of the Church, would we not see the Church have at her disposal a power of penetration and expansion unknown until then? (...) It is estimated that 120 million homes are founded on the sacrament of marriage! If they knew its mission and its power...*"

Father Caffarel, always demanding, with a language that may seem militant, and was convinced of the value and strength of Christian marriage. Are we convinced?

For us, giving an account of our hope is a personal commitment and not a structural or circumstantial one that concerns society or Teams as a movement. It is our daily conjugal commitment that leads us to live in depth the call made to us in Teams. We invite you to make an examination: how do we live the endeavours? Are they something substantial for our couple and our life as Christians? Do they help us to live more deeply our commitment as responsible couples for the Movement? Do they open us to find the truth about our personal and couple life? Do they help us to live the

encounter and communion in our work as responsible couples, among ourselves, with the people of our service teams, with the other regional or sector leaders, with the spiritual

counsellors who accompany us in our mission? In the endeavours, there is neither dispersion nor arbitrariness. There is a whole pedagogy that unites these different endeavours from the perspective of a more evangelical lifestyle. They have an inner coherence that is at the basis of the whole methodology of the Teams at the different levels, a logic that unites them, and goals that integrate them with each other.

We invite you to examine: how do we prepare our meetings? Are we willing to train ourselves, to read and reread the Teams Guide to be clear about things, to ask questions when in doubt, to try to know in depth what is happening in our SRs and RRs? Are we enthusiastic about what we transmit? What do we transmit? Simple information, or do we transmit feelings, life, what helps us? How do others see us in the exercise of our responsibility, anxious and overwhelmed? Animated and happy, although conscious of the work? Self-sufficient and wanting to do it all ourselves, or working in true collegiality? All these questions will demand a personal and conjugal meditation and a serious discernment about our way of being members, and in our case, of being responsible for the Teams of Our Lady.

As responsible couples, many times, unintentionally, we focus more on the difficulties, on the things that do not work. It is logical because we are the ones who are told about the problems, and we are the ones to whom the sufferings are transferred. But we must also make an effort to see all the hope that exists in the small and big things in life. In a marriage that remains united in difficult times, in a team that supports those who are having a hard time, in a pilotage that starts in a city where there were no teams before or in a place devastated by war as it is happening in the Democratic Republic of Congo, that has started a new pilotage in Bukavu, or in Ukraine; in a new team emerging in de Christianized, secularized, and faithless country – without mentioning any in particular, because we believe that many of you could believe that we were referring to your country. We could draw up an immense list. All of this, all of this, is a very great reason for hope. Let us be especially attentive to all these signs of hope, the great ones that affect the Movement and its structures, and the even greater ones that affect individual people. We are responsible for people, and we want to take care of people. These

reasons for hope are what gives us the immense joy of being part of the Teams.

Our life in the Teams of Our Lady helps us to announce the happiness of our conjugal vocation for life; it allows us to announce that the Movement helps us to welcome love, to take care of it, to share with other couples and with priests a full life in freedom. We hope that this love welcomes us as we are, with our limits and inconsistencies, but with the certainty of being loved. And we want to share with people all that we live. Our sharing is often silent, with signs, with attitudes. But it is good that our families see that we forgive each other, that we are happy to meet other couples, that we are respectful with people from different countries and cultures, and that we are called to work for others for free. All this would have been impossible or much more difficult for us without the Teams. Each one of us must conduct their own reflection and recognize why, for them, Teams are a sign of hope. We are not going to give a general answer valid for all; each one of us must arrive at their certainties. And in our case, we would like all of us to apply hope for our responsibility, each one in the place and moment of responsibility in which he/she finds himself/herself. And this same hope in the couple is also a call to the spiritual counsellors who accompany us to trust in the capabilities of couples, to support us because we need your help and prayer, to guide us in discerning what our SR and RR need at this moment, what our work team needs, what we may need as a responsible couple.

We come to the last part of this talk, invoking once again father Caffarel, who had an enormous faith in the couple. In a text in the review *L'Anneau d'Or* of May-August 1947, entitled: "Caring for love, for homes that suffer" — look at the date, just before the proclamation of the Founding Charter of the Teams of Our Lady — he wrote:

"In conclusion, I would like to speak to you about the most powerful reason for your hope: your sacrament of Matrimony. (...) What will enable this great sacrament to exercise its full efficacy is your trust. Multiply your acts of faith in its virtue, in order to obtain its healing, pacifying, comforting, and unifying grace. Pius XI himself wrote: 'You have a right to the help of actual grace'. Do you understand what is marvellous in these words: You have the right? The defeat of a marriage is often due to the defeat of its faith. The true Christian knows that there are no desperate situations: if he strikes the rock, a fountain can spring from it; the hardest heart can open; the desert can blossom. Ah, how beautiful it is, this love after the trial, much stronger, purer, and more

transparent than the first day! How nice it is under this roof!"

And in these times of difficulties and problems that are undeniable, we believe that those of us who want to remain firm in the Teams must have recourse to the sources that sustain us and know the foundations that can cement this hope. Therefore, the important thing is to have a clear vision of our charism and our foundations, and from there, to progress in other aspects that are necessary to try to get closer to all those who may need a source of hope for their couple and their family life. We can innovate in the way we offer information, in the communication strategies with new formulas that are more attractive, in the activities, or in the training and animation sessions that we propose for our sectors and regions. But keeping clearly in mind that our project is conceived for the Christian couple. We can be open to other realities that surround us, that we can accompany, but we cannot fail to recognize what our intrinsic reality is. From this anchoring on a solid rock, we can, in a much clearer way, be faithful and convinced of the deep roots of the Teams of Our Lady project.

To help us in this formation, this year we have prepared a study theme that has its fundamental basis in texts by father Caffarel, "*Love is much more than love*". As we wrote in the introduction to the theme, we find ourselves before the immense opportunity to go to the roots of the profound thought that revolutionized the concept and ideal of the sacrament of marriage in the Church, and that today is more alive than ever. As team members, we cannot be content with rereading a few sentences or paragraphs isolated from their context and involving extracts that we cut out as we please. If we want to be faithful to our vocation as Christian couples, we must be well formed and be able to give a reason for the richness of our sacrament. We may get confused and think that we have dealt with this subject many times in the history of teams. But we assure you that working a whole year with these texts will place us at the deepest root of our conjugal vocation. And that in return will allow us to focus on the orientation of this second year: **Called to live in communion with our spouse**. A life of full marital communion strengthens us for our mission as a Christian couple in the world around us, we feel more solid as a couple to be a sign of God's presence in a world that needs us. And in our case, we feel strengthened as responsible for the service of greater love for others to which we have been called.

We invite you to welcome with absolute respect and admiration these texts, which are

suitable for everyone, from young newlyweds to those who have already been married for a long time. It will also help the spiritual counsellors and advisors to enter into the very heart of marriage. We must be aware of the language of the time in which father Caffarel wrote, which cannot be denied, of his style with constant references to French literature, as we have seen at the beginning of our talk, which may require us to make an extra effort in our reading. Indeed, it will not allow a glance at the last moment, but it is no less true that it would be a real waste not to make a slow study of the subject, to savour it, to ruminante on it, to treasure it. His texts, as well as all the proposals for this year's sit-downs, will make this course a real time of revision, deepening, and awareness of our reality of Christian marriage, which should lead us to strengthen our mission, wherever each one of us is carrying it out. We encourage you to make a strong appeal to your SRs and RRs to make this theme a reality. If we, as leaders, consider that it is too difficult or that they will not want to do it, we are already defeated from the start, as we said at the beginning of our presentation. We are the first ones who should know about it, so that we can encourage it to be an instrument that nourishes us and gives us strength. Father Caffarel, "prophet of marriage", can help us, in this year 2025-26, to renew our "yes", to better understand the springs of human love enlightened by our Lord Jesus Christ, while at the same time he can give us new graces for our sacrament of marriage. And in doing so, as father Caffarel wrote it, the study of this theme will also help us to grow in our love for God.

In conclusion, *you have a right* to believe that our sacrament of marriage is one of the forces that allow us to announce hope to couples and the family. We thank the Teams of Our Lady for being able to live our sacrament in this Movement that supports and encourages us.

Thank you very much.