



The Holy See

**ADDRESS OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY
ON THE SPIRITUALITY OF THE CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE**

Monday, 20 January 2003

Dear Friends,

1. On the occasion of your international meeting in Rome, I am happy to welcome you, the regional leaders of the *Teams of Our Lady* (*Équipes Notre Dame*), your international spiritual advisor Mons. 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.
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 to marriage, and, anticipating the fruitful directions of the Second Vatican Council, he set forth the call to holiness set integral to marital and family life (cf. *Lumen gentium*, n. 11). He knew how to proclaim the major traits of the marital spirituality that derives from Baptism and underlines the dignity of human love in the plan of God. The attention he gave to the persons who were involved in the sacrament of marriage led him to put his gifts at the service of the "spiritual movement for war widows" that became the "*Hope and Life*" movement and gave him the impetus to create the first *Centres for the Preparation for Marriage* 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.
3. In the face of the threats that weigh upon the family and the factors that weaken it, you have chosen a pertinent topic for your meeting: "Couples Called by Christ to a New Covenant". In fact, for the 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 them, and of serving life by living out the Christian mystery, for in their union "the Paschal Mystery of the Death and Resurrection is being accomplished" (Paul VI, *Address to the Teams of Our Lady*, 4 May 1970, n. 16).

4. Mystery of covenant and communion, the responsibility of the spouses invites them to draw their strength from the Eucharist, "source of Christian marriage" (Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 57) and model for their love. In fact, the different phases of the Eucharistic liturgy invite married couples to live their marital 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 acceptance, pardon, dialogue and communion of hearts. It will also be a valuable aid for facing the inevitable difficulties of family life. May the members of the Teams be able to be the first witnesses of the grace that one can find in a regular participation in the sacramental life of the Church and of Sunday Mass, "celebration of the living presence of the Risen Lord in the midst of his own 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).

5. Nourished by the Bread of Life and called to enlighten "those who seek the truth" (*Lumen gentium*, n. 35), notably, their children, the spouses will be able to release fully the grace of their baptism through their own mission within the family, in society and in the Church. This was the intuition of Fr Caffarel, 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 the team members to participate more fully in the life of the Church, especially with young people, who want to receive the exacting and exalting Christian message of human love. In this perspective, the team members can aid them to live the period of their youth and engagement in fidelity to the commandments of Christ and of the Church, allowing them to find true happiness in the maturing of their affective life.

6. Your movement has developed its own pedagogy, based on the "concrete points of effort" which help you as a couple to grow together in holiness. I encourage you to live them carefully and perseveringly in order to love in truth. I invite you especially to develop personal, marital and family prayer, without which a Christian risks being lost, 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 the 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).

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 the tenderness and mercy of God. I wish to repeat my spiritual closeness to separated persons, divorced persons, and the divorced and remarried, who, like the baptized, are called, in respect for the laws of the Church, to participate in Christian life (cf. Apostolic Exhortation *Familiaris consortio*, n. 84). Finally, I express my gratitude to the spiritual counselors who make themselves available for you. They bring their competence and experience to your lay movement. By means of 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 fearlessly 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 the members, and also to the Blessed Spouses Luigi and Maria Quattrocchi, I impart to all an affectionate apostolic blessing.