



Equipes Notre-Dame

My Dear Couples,

During the various trips that I have made in the Movement's service, I have found it comforting to discover so many Team members who recognise me, because my face and my thoughts are known to them through the photo and messages that I regularly send you in the International Leading Team's Letter. I find this recognition stimulates me to continue writing these messages that are part of my priestly service to motivate and confirm my brothers and sisters in the faith. In this case, motivating and confirming in the faith consists of my helping you to maintain your eagerness to live out our Movement's charism and spirituality in creative fidelity, that is to live out the holiness of the marriage sacrament. But this charism and mystique cannot be seen as if they were the property or a patent that our Movement or the Church have on this way of experiencing marriage. We are not the owners, merely the servants of this mystery. Our service and mission is to bear witness to the dignity of "natural" marriage, because the sacrament is based on the natural properties of marriage, that is, it presupposes the anthropological dignity of marriage in and of itself. Now the natural properties of marriage are unity and indissolubility, for any marriage between a man and a woman (unity) is by nature indissoluble (indissolubility), until death separates them. We say "natural" because it is independent of the culture and religion we profess. There is such anthropological dignity that it becomes the natural basis of Christian marriage. In its natural dignity, marriage belongs to human nature and so, "*no longer depends on human decision alone.*" (*Gaudium spes*, 48) If marriage is celebrated between Christians, it becomes a sacrament, that is, a sign of Christ and the Church, "*This is a great mystery, but I speak concerning Christ and the church.*" (Eph 5:32)

Our charism and mission is to experience and bear witness to this mystery. The Movement's pedagogy, that is apparent in the Endeavors, constitutes a method, a 'rule' to help couples live out their marriage in holiness. Our mission is to make this mystery shine for the Church and the world, a mission that is all the more necessary because we live an environment that is hostile to it. In answer to doctrines, especially those professed by Luther (1483-1546), the Council of Trent (1545-1563) declared as a dogma that marriage was one of

the sacraments instituted by Our Lord Jesus Christ (DS 1601) and indicated the formal and material conditions according which it ought to be celebrated, above all to counter a true social plague of those times, namely “secret marriages.” (DS 1813-1814)

As members of Teams of Our Lady, our mission consists of proclaiming that this ideal of Christian marriage, as a path to holiness, is not the exclusive property of Catholics. We have no entitlement. We are sent, as Pope Francis asked, to bear witness to the fact that the Christian manner of living marriage corresponds to what all people desire in the depths of their hearts, and that consequently, it is a path of joy and happiness for people today.

We all recognise that “*the constant fulfilment of the duties (of marriage) demands notable virtue*” (GS 49), indeed a high degree of heroism. And yet, far be it from us to have any ambition to present ourselves as heroes. The disciples statement applies also to us, “*If that is how things are between husband and wife, it is better not to marry.*” (Mt 19:10) But Jesus’ answer is equally valid, “*With men this is impossible, but for God all things are possible.*” (Mt 19:26) In order for this impossibility to become possible, our Movement offers us the means to help us obtain it, the Endeavors, and I would insist particularly on the importance of couple prayer and the Sit-Down.

Throughout this year of preparation for Fatima, let us ask Our Lady for the grace to be faithful to our charism and our mission, and that she intercedes for us, now and at the hour of our death, the two great decisive moments in our life. She always shows us the right path to follow, what we ought to do, like with the servants at the Marriage at Cana, “*Do whatever he tells you.*” (Jn 2:5) And then we will savour the *new wine* of the goodness and holiness of marriage as a source of happiness and hope for the Church and for today’s world.

I invoke God’s most abundant graces and blessings for you and your families,

Father José Jacinto Ferreira de Farias, scj
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