

RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE



2018 STUDY THEME



Teams of Our Lady

Equipas de Nossa Senhora • Equipos de Nuestra Señora

On the cover: This painting belongs to the mural of the greater chapel of the Augustinian Sisters from the Monastery of the Conversion in Beceril de Campos (Palencia). This painting was done by one of them, Sister Francis.

On the occasion of Easter 2010, in the apse of the chapel of the monastery of Palencia, the Priors entrusted the work to Sr. Francis, who in just three days designed and finished the magnificent work. This is a mural painting, made with acrylics, of narrative type that represents the parable of the prodigal Son (Luke 15: 11-32). This work has great expressive power, influenced by the Hispano American paintings from the second half of the twentieth century from Ecuadorian Oswaldo Guayasamin, in which we can see a sequencing of large-format scenes and perceive some similarity with the works of The Age of Tenderness. This serves as an inspiration to the young artist in the main scene where the father bends down to embrace his son kneeling before him. It is an original work in its composition, innovative and rejuvenating to the topic, intimate, recognizable and understandable for the viewer.

Fco. Javier Borda

TEAMS OF OUR LADY
STUDY TOPIC 2018
RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE

Dear members and collaborators: The study topic that we present to the movement today has as its title the same motto as that of the XII International Meeting, "RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE". This title echoes our experiences during the short but intense week during which we were able to live the grace and the profound meaning of our divine kinship, its gratuity and, above all, the immeasurable mercy of the Father.

This Parable of the Merciful Father and the Prodigal Son, on which the theme of our study is developed, is perhaps the most poignant of all the parables presented in the Gospels, and in particular that of Luke, the only Gospel which includes it.

The story, which is simple and understandable to any reader, is used by Jesus to take us to the spiritual depth of divine love. This theme is contrasted with the attitudes of all the characters in this story. As we read about the actions of the parable's characters, we cannot help but see our own incarnated reflection in our attitudes and actions. Through the mirror of its plot, we recognize our own fallibility.

Throughout the nine chapters that make up the text of this study, we identify our Father in Heaven, represented in the father of the parable. It is He who comes to meet us and engage us in a personal dialogue about our own human lives that are filled with personal joys and sufferings. The parables generously share powerful testimonies from which we glean invaluable understanding of the teachings of Our Lord. Within the exchange that occurs in the team meetings, we cannot help but to grow and blossom from our human state of weakness to become the beloved children of God. As stated clearly in the dogmatic constitution on divine revelation, *Dei Verbum*, Vatican 2: "In the Sacred Books, the Father who is in Heaven comes lovingly to meet his children and talks to them."

The readers of this study topic, prepared by a team from Ecuador to whom we express our gratitude, will find in this book what Pope Francis invites us to recover: "the grammar of simplicity, capable of giving warmth to the heart of the people". The study takes us through that simplicity and through discernment in the community of the team, to reach a greater theological and spiritual depth.

In addition to the reflections of each chapter upon the testimonies of life and upon some quotations from the catechism and other Church documents, the authors have included a "hidden treasure" for team members around the world: the text of the reflection on the parable of the Prodigal Son from our founder, Father Henri Caffarel.

As it was presented in the letter to the Fatima Meeting, we the members of Teams of Our Lady are far from perfect. However, we are given the perfect gift of the movement, with the charisma of Conjugal Spirituality. This beautiful gift allows us,

imperfect men and women, to recognize and to utilize more fully our own strengths and weaknesses. As we do so, we can assume the missionary and healing role to which the Church and the world call us. The study of this book will help us develop a critical and merciful look upon our own frailties which can be healed through opening our hearts to experiencing the mercy of the Father. We can, thus, become disciples with a greater capacity to forgive and to heal which is possible only because *"he who has experienced the joy, peace and inner freedom that comes from being forgiven, can open himself to the possibility of forgiveness."*

We wish you an enriching and fruitful journey of reflection.

International Responsible Team

Translated by Teams of Our Lady member Liliana de Castro, USA

**TEAMS OF OUR LADY
STUDY TOPIC 2018
RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE**

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY TOPIC 2018 - 2019

The Prodigal Son

And He said, "A man had two sons. The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them. And not many days later, the younger son gathered everything together and went on a journey into a distant country, and there he squandered his estate with loose living. Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he was overcome by poverty. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he was sent into his fields to feed swine.

"And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him. But when he came to his senses, he said, 'How many of my father's hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger! I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.'

"So he got up and traveled home to his father. But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet; and bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found.' And they began to celebrate.

"Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what was going on. And the servant replied to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.' But he became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.'

"And the father answered him, 'Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found'" (Luke 15:11-32).

This parable of the Gospel of Luke, known as the parable of the "prodigal son," should rather be called the "good father" or, better yet, the "merciful or compassionate father." It could also be known as the parable of the "lost son", because it is preceded by two other parables that deal with loss: "the lost sheep" (Luke 15: 4-7) and "the lost coin" (Luke 15: 8-10); however, independent of the name, this parable has been qualified as the masterpiece of all the parables of Jesus, in which the evangelist comments on situations that contain varied human and family attitudes, such as freedom, responsibility, longing, return, joy, celebration, reconciliation, grace, etc., which are universal features of life.

Luke, who writes the Gospel of the marginalized, gives a key interpretation with a very characteristic theme for him which is forgiveness, represented in the father as a symbol of God's own love. He loves with an unconditional, open, unlimited mercy. This is witnessed, not only when he turns to the sinner (younger son), rushing out to greet him joyfully in person; but also when he reacts to the eldest son, who is the stubborn critic, obstinate in not wanting to understand his father's love. However, the father, despite everything, remains immovable in his insistence upon generosity, especially when it comes to opening wide the doors of the Kingdom to a sinner who has decided to return to Him.

Through the eight chapters of this study, we have broken down the parable into themes that we consider to offer deep reflection for spiritual growth, both individually, as a couple and as a team.

The First Chapter: refers to the Christian meaning of freedom.

The Second Chapter: reflects on the purpose of the gifts received.

The Third Chapter: raises the crisis as an opportunity for conversion.

The Fourth Chapter: focuses in recognizing our fragility.

The Fifth Chapter: deals with the pain of our faults.

The Sixth Chapter: addresses mercy and forgiveness as signs of love.

The Seventh Chapter: compares the sense of human justice with divine justice.

The Eighth Chapter: by consciously changing the order of the verses, it focuses on the joy of the reunion.

The study ends with the Evaluation Meeting.

As an item of special interest, life testimonies, generously shared by two couples of the Movement, are broken down and presented throughout the first eight chapters of the book. The individuals narrate their experiences and feelings related to each study topic. In the same way, Father Caffarel's homily on the prodigal son, "*Le Fils Prodigue*", has been transcribed, almost in its entirety, through the nine chapters, coinciding with the topic of each chapter.

The layout of each chapter follows the general structure of the study topics of Teams of Our Lady. It consists of five parts: the first four parts are for the couple's monthly assignments at home, and the fifth part is for the team meeting. During the month, each

married couple will have texts for listening to the Word, for the introduction of the chapter, for reflection, and guidelines for prayer and dialogue. They will also have suggestions and guidelines for the team meeting. Each chapter has an annex of bibliographical references for those who wish to delve into the topic in more detail.

We thank God for having called us to serve and to love Him more through this book.

The Editing Team

The Team Meeting Format

SIMPLE MEAL WITH LIGHT SHARING (about 60 minutes)

- Host couple says Grace
- Each person shares highs and lows of the month
- We listen in silence, respecting each other's right to share without comment
- We commit ourselves to each other in love

TIME FOR SCRIPTURE (about 45 minutes)

- Read the Word of God
- Meditation and reflection (voluntary prayerful reflection)
- Prayer intentions (pass cross around)
- Liturgical prayer (Psalms) Couples read verse or stanza

DEEP POOLING (when needed)

- A time to share on "heavier" thoughts or when the input of the group is requested
- We mutually support and listen with strict confidentiality
- Sometimes it will be a carry over from the highs and lows

SHARING OF ENDEAVORS (about 15 minutes)

- We work to live out our Catholic faith
- We strive to embrace the structure the Endeavors give us
- We mutually support and lovingly challenge each other to live out our TOOL life

DISCUSSION ON THE STUDY TOPIC (about 45 minutes)

- We prepare the topic and respond in writing
- We discuss it with our spouse prior to the meeting
- Through the study topic, we study the truths of our faith and the teachings of the Church
- We work to understand our faith more fully and respond to the call of the Holy Spirit

ADMINISTRATIVE MATTERS (about 10 minutes)

- Schedule meetings
- Retreat planning

THE FINAL PRAYER

- *The Magnificat* is recited together

A FINAL BLESSING IS GIVEN BY A PRIEST OR DEACON

TEAMS OF OUR LADY STUDY TOPIC 2018

RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE

CHAPTER 1

THE CHRISTIAN SENSE OF FREEDOM

1. LISTENING TO THE WORD.

And He said, "A man had two sons. "The younger of them said to his father, 'Father, give me the share of the estate that falls to me.' So he divided his wealth between them" (Luke 15, 11-12).

MEDITATION

In the time of Jesus, the Jewish law established, in the case of this parable, that the firstborn was to receive two-thirds of the inheritance, while the youngest was to receive one-third (Deuteronomy 21:17). The benefit of the inheritance went directly to the father, who could establish the distribution however and whenever he wanted (Galatians 4,1-3).

The young man in the parable, without caring about the customs of his ancestors and the pain he caused to his father when asking for his inheritance in life, makes use of his free will and strips himself and his family of a part of their means of sustenance and enjoyment of the safety of their home.

This is an unprecedented and contradictory action within the tradition of that time. The way the son requests his inheritance and then leaves was equivalent to wishing the death of the father.

The father surely experienced profound sorrow at the selfish attitude of his youngest son, who did not care about his father's life and wellbeing. He accepts his son's desire for freedom and, not only shares the inheritance, but freely gives the money that should probably should have remained under his control to insure the continuation of the household until his death. What a huge disappointment it must have been to realize that his son wanted to separate himself totally from the family bond! How disillusioned he must have felt seeing his son depart, leaving the warmth and love of the family, without considering the consequences of his action. Despite his trepidations and doubts, the father agrees to give the son the freedom he requested. Once the son has left, there is no way for the father to ensure the son's safety. Nevertheless, the father gives the son the

money, thus demonstrating a love greater than the pain of seeing him leave.

The desire to make the right to freedom a viable reality requires preparation. Realistically, in order to ensure that the freedom that the son desires results in a good life, someone must have taken responsibility for his actions. Obviously, the son does not have the will or knowledge to use his inheritance wisely.

2. - INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER AND ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

The objective of this chapter is to reflect on the true meaning of freedom in making fundamental decisions in our personal and conjugal life.

At the present time, humanity is often deceived and confused with mistaken concepts of freedom, human dignity and truth. Instruments of society have enticed individuals to act in manners contrary to their beliefs for the benefit of a few political ideologies or powerful economic groups. Those who think and act according to Christian principles and values are too often few and far between. Those who set aside the current sensationalism and preoccupations of the media to discern freely their decisions to seek the truth are now, unfortunately, a minority.

Spiritual discernment is a tool that every Christian must know and use continuously in his life. *“For St. Ignatius, discernment is a process whose purpose is to choose, in prayer, from several good choices, the one that most leads us to the service and praise of our Lord, and our salvation. Discerning is not choosing between good and evil, but between the good and the best .-”* Individuals have the ability to discern wisely. The conditions for a good discernment are a sincere desire to follow Jesus; to achieve inner freedom; to cultivate a life of prayer; to recognize the action of spirits (consolation and desolation); to define the subject of discernment; and to become informed in order to better know our possible options. Using these conditions, an individual can make a wise choice. (Gustavo Calderón, S.J., School of the Central Province of the SR Hispano-America of the ENS, Bogotá, January 29, 2016).

With respect to marriage, it must always be remembered that from the moment a couple gets married, their life is not the same. They must, therefore, learn to discern, especially in regard to behaviors and decisions, always respecting the freedom of the other, thus maintaining the trust that gives stability to the relationship.

If in practice we consider how freedom develops within the conjugal life, we must first be aware that decisions no longer belong to one, but belong to both. Many things should be agreed upon. There are obviously actions of minor moral importance which do not require mutual agreement. However, with time, a couple should come to an understanding about the behaviors and actions that must be discussed and decided upon together. The relationship requires that both individuals know how to share their ideas and desires in order to identify anything that might not be a good decision. If we take unilateral action, we commit an act of injustice. We take advantage of a situation that no longer belongs

to us in its entirety.

3. – DOCUMENTS FOR REFLECTION

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER CAFFAREL ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON "L'ENFANT PRODIGUE"

PART 1

I am going to slowly comment on a passage of the Gospel that you know very well. However, the Gospel must always be read as if it were being read for the first time. By doing so, it always contains new discoveries.

This passage is the parable of the Prodigal Son. Perhaps it is better to call it "the parable of the Father's generosity", "of the Father's mercy". And I love to read this page of the Gospel from this perspective. It is Christ who reveals to us what He thinks of the Father. And making use of all the resources of his imagination, because He has an extraordinary imagination, Christ calls on all his ingenuity so that, developing his gift as a narrator, he talks to us about what most reaches his heart.

We are going to try reading this parable, verse by verse, to keep ourselves within this perspective. May this prayer always be in our interior: "Lord, make me understand a little, let me glimpse a bit of your greatness and your Father's love".

It is necessary to be sure that Jesus Christ is there in our midst and is willing to see that we open ourselves to his great confidence.

"He said: A man had two children." *They were undoubtedly less than eighteen years of age, since in general the Jews married at the latest at eighteen years of age and left their father's house.*

"Father, give me the part of the farm that belongs to me." *This was something that was commonly done. You could have donations or inheritances between living people: the eldest was entitled to 2/3 of the inheritance and was in charge of the house, to take care of his mother, his sisters and brothers; and the youngest was entitled to only 1/3. Normally, the father donated the properties, but the profits were for him, and he arranged them. Children could not make use of the capital either.*

The youngest son expects his father to consent and proceed beyond what was customary, that is, to allow him to dispose of the estate, of the part of his inheritance. It was a bit discourteous. We could say that he was even insolent and disrespectful of the father. It meant truly telling him that as a son he wanted his freedom, in short, that he wanted to end his dependence. But the father does not protest; he distributes his property to him.

You will see throughout this passage that Christ is brief. He goes to the essentials. He does not use any literature or speak with eloquence. He says only what is imposed--what is

necessary.

TESTIMONY OF BIANCA AND ANTONIO

PART 1

Bianca and Antonio: We are a couple with six children, whom we educated in love and faith, always trying to develop their sense of freedom and self-esteem, so that, when they reached adulthood, they could choose the path of their vocation and their life.

Our eldest son, however, at the end of his high school education, and after academic and behavioral struggles, began to surround himself with friends who had questionable interests and histories of poor decisions. His life seemed to have no direction, and, little by little, he began to make wrong decisions which led him to use drugs and alcohol. His actions resulted in a huge change in his personality and in his personal confidence; his relationship with us and his brothers deteriorated, causing more and more problems. Finally, one day he left our house, taking with him the inheritance of love, values and faith that we had given to him over the years.

Bianca: We began to understand the disease of addiction. We consulted specialized doctors to understand the condition of our son and the diagnoses were getting worse. As he was diagnosed with bipolar and dual personality disorder, the prognosis was not good. We were informed that the scenario would become worse over time. For a time, he was institutionalized as a psychiatric patient. He could not even be trusted to take his own medication. Even his medication had to be given to him. It was a disheartening picture.

Despite this grim prognosis, we began to find a new way of living. At its center was a profound, unconditional love that we discovered for him. Yes, it was still very difficult to live not knowing whether or not our son would be okay. This situation lasted for many years of our lives. Somehow we were blessed with the experience of discovering a truly unconditional love towards him. It was very hard for me to get used to not knowing about my son, to think about him without knowing if he was okay or not.

The vulnerability of a child who lives on a day to day basis with the hardships of severe mental illness calls for great compassion and understanding from a mother. When our son was consuming drugs and alcohol, he became violent. Many times we became angry and full of resentment because we did not know how to best handle the situation. Life at times seemed beyond our control. Constant prayer was the only thing that fueled our hope.

Antonio: As a father, I had dreams and expectations regarding what my eldest son could attain as an adult man. I had many plans for him: university studies, work, sports. I realize now that somehow I saw myself projected in him. As I understood the problems he was having, I had to put aside all my dreams and expectations. I had to focus only on the love I had and have for him. I had to try to help him. Before his decision to leave, I tried to reassure him. I told him not to worry about being different from me. The important

thing was to remain faithful to the values that we had always taught him. I asked him to see these as a valuable inheritance that should not be wasted. Despite everything we tried, one day, in search of freedom and independence, he left. Then we could only pray for him.

TESTIMONY OF MARIO AND MARITZA

PART 1

Mario and Maritza. When we decided to receive the sacrament of marriage in the Catholic church, we did so by our own choice. We were a nineteen and twenty-one couple in love. We had dated for a little less than two years when we learned that we were expecting our daughter. We started our married life with economic limitations. We lacked experience in life and were completely ignorant about adult life. We were facing the beginning of university studies, married life, and the shock of a new baby together at the same time. At that time our parents did not agree with our plans to marry. This was made even worse because we were pregnant. This brought confusion and doubt about our real reason for getting married. Now after years together, we have clearly confirmed that the real reason for our union was our love. Our decision to marry was made out of love and was for the rest of our life.

Maritza. We did not know the true meaning of marriage; it was just a fulfillment of a stage of life. However, I was sure that I loved my husband. I was full of illusions, emotions, and was convinced that it was the right thing to do.

Unfortunately, as a young, inexperienced couple that had decided to get married, we were faced with a series of problems—challenges to our married life. We became more and more distant from God. We received the Eucharist with great effort. We did not pray or place our lives in God’s hands. Mario dedicated his life to work, leaving the house early and returning late—usually only to get a few hours of sleep. I was completely dedicated to our daughters. Over time, we grew more and more apart. We did not know how to communicate. We had no idea how to resolve our differences through a dialogue. We turned our backs on the one that could sustain us: GOD. The freedom that He gave us we misunderstood. We distanced ourselves, and we did not trust in Him.

GAUDIUM ET SPES CONSTITUTION. VATICAN COUNCIL II. 1965

“Excellence of freedom”

17. Man's orientation towards good is only achieved through the use of freedom, which

has a value that our contemporaries extol with enthusiasm. And with all reason. Frequently, however, they instigate it or stir it up in a depraved way, as if it were pure license to do anything, as long as it delights, even if it is bad.

True freedom is an eminent sign of the divine image in man. God has wanted to leave man in the hands of his own decisions so that he will spontaneously look for his Creator and, adhering freely to it, reach the full and blissful perfection. Human dignity requires, therefore, that man act according to his conscience and free choice, that is, moved and induced by personal inner conviction and not under the pressure of a blind inner impulse or of mere external coercion.

The Christian image of men must be re-evaluated among us; individuals have to rethink and reevaluate the meaning of that word with its lofty ideals that has been magnified in significance and essence over time: FREEDOM. We must remember that freedom is both a gift and a task. It comes with great responsibilities. We must recall that it is, in a valid sense, the goal of mankind according to our faith. "For freedom, Christ has freed us" (Galatians 5: 1). We must be ever mindful that we have life in abundance as "children of God and co-heirs with Christ himself" (Romans 8: 17).

Encyclical Charter VERITATIS SPLENDOR. JOHN PAUL II. 1993

31. The human problems most debated and resolved in a diverse way in contemporary moral reflection are related, albeit in a different way, to a crucial problem: the freedom of man.

There is no doubt that today there is a particularly lively awareness of freedom. "The men of our time have a growing awareness of the dignity of the human person," as the conciliar declaration **Dignitatis humanae**, stated about religious freedom [52]. Hence the vindication of the possibility that men "act according to their own criteria and make use of a responsible freedom, not moved by coercion, but guided by the conscience of duty."

Other recommended readings can be found in Annex 1.

4. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE COUPLE'S REFLECTION/SIT DOWN

What differences do we find between liberty and libertinism (a disregard for moral or religious restraints)? Do we ask our children what freedom means to them?

Do we feel free to make our own decisions within our marriage and family, or are we

coerced or influenced by current individualistic currents? How far should we admit a space of freedom from the other?

What difference do we think there is between making decisions with and without our Lord Jesus Christ?

5. TEAM MEETING

A. - GENERAL SHARING

We suggest, at this time during the team meeting, that it would be beneficial for a couple to share about a time when they have not felt free to make an important decision, whether it be as an individual, a couple, or a family. This may also apply to the workplace.

B. - PRAYER TIME

THE WORD OF THE LORD: PROCLAMATION:

Galatians 5: 1; 13-15

"It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm, then, and do not let yourselves be burdened again by a yoke of slavery.

You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other."

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE WORD:

After reading the Word, we recommend a few minutes of silence so that we can meditate and then freely share what the Lord has spoken to us, how he challenges us, and how this affects our lives.

It is proposed that we reflect if there is a concern to make our gifts fruitful.

INTENTIONS : COMMUNITY PRAYER.

A cross may be passed around so that each person has a chance for prayer.

We suggest for each couple to make a brief prayer. It can be done according to personal or community needs or by choosing a segment of the biblical passage.

At each request that is freely made, we will respond: "Lord, hear our prayer."

LITURGICAL PRAYER

(Ecclesiastes 15, 11 – 18)

R / How great is the wisdom of the Lord.

"Do not say: "For the Lord I have departed ", that what he detests, he does not.

Do not say: "He has lost me," because he has not needed the sinner.

R /How great is the wisdom of the Lord.

Every abomination hates the Lord, nor do those who fear him hate it.

He was the one who at first made man, and left him in the hands of his own will.

R / How great is the wisdom of the Lord.

If you want, you will keep the commandments, to remain faithful to their good pleasure.

He has put you before fire and water, wherever you want you can take your hand.

R /How great is the wisdom of the Lord.

Before men life is and death, what each one prefers, will be given to him.

How great is the wisdom of the Lord, strong is his power, all he sees. "

R /How great is the wisdom of the Lord.

C. –THE ENDEAVORS: PARTICIPATION

Every path of holiness requires effort and sacrifice, not only as an offering to God, but also as a personal good that strengthens our self-control and helps us to improve as individuals, in our conjugal relationship, and in all areas of our life. We do so while being close and in permanent relationship with God. His presence should be at the center of our lives.

Therefore, we ask: Are we willing to live all the endeavors, in a free way and as an expression of love for God and our spouses?

We recommend during this month, to emphasize "Listening to the Word" and suggest to begin with the reading of the Parable of the Merciful Father (Luke 15: 11 – 32), considering that the entire study will be based on this Gospel passage.

We also recommend reading the letter of St. Paul to the Galatians 5, 1; 13-15 that is related to the theme of this first chapter, and that will be meditated upon at future team meetings.

D. - QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY TOPIC

These are the same questions that we recommend for couple reflection in point 4 of this chapter.

The ideas presented are important to consider and to recognize if we are to live a life filled with true freedom.

E. FINAL PRAYERS:

FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, HENRI CAFFAREL AND THE
MAGNIFICAT

APPENDIX 1**OTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS**

SPEECH BY PAUL VI TO THE TEAMS OF OUR LADY.

“WALK IN LOVE” MAY 4, 1970. IN THE BASILICA OF SAN PEDRO DE ROMA.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. No. 1739, 1740 and 1744.

PUEBLA DOCUMENT. III GENERAL CONFERENCE OF THE LATIN AMERICAN EPISCOPATE.
Nº 321, ABOUT FREEDOM. 321.

TEAMS OF OUR LADY
STUDY TOPIC 2018
RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE

CHAPTER 2

THE PURPOSE OF THE GIFTS RECEIVED

1. - LISTENING TO THE WORD

“After a few days, the younger son collected all his belongings and set off to a distant country where he squandered his inheritance on a life of dissipation” (Luke 15: 13).

MEDITATION

Although this text does not describe the reasons for the decision of the youngest son to leave his family and travel to a distant country, it is worth reflecting on why he wanted to get away so much. What ideas caused him to leave? Why did he ask for his inheritance and then squander it? We can ask ourselves, could it be that he never felt free? Did he want to know what it was like to have his own resources? Why did he live a lifestyle characterized by such self-indulgence and lack of restraint that he recklessly threw away a significant inheritance? Was it just because of a lack of maturity? What did he want to prove to others and himself? There are so many questions that we have that are not answered in this succinct narration. We cannot answer them with certainty; however, without a doubt, we can recognize the grief and pain of a father who loses a child.

We can recognize the same type of difficult situations in actual families in our modern society. And these difficulties are observed not only between parents and children, but also between spouses.

The message of this gospel is very profound and is based on the actions and consequences that are generated by our estrangement from God, an estrangement that so clouds our judgment that we lose sight of the true motives of unity, stability and permanence in relationships.

Saint Ignatius wrote: *“Changing places does not change behavior: as long as the imperfect person does not leave himself, it will hardly be better elsewhere.”*

There are four verbs describing the prodigal son’s behavior that can guide us in meditation.

Received. The youngest son gathered all the goods that his father had freely given him. We can, by analogy, identify the goods of the inheritance with the gifts that we receive from the Holy Spirit by the grace of the Lord. We all receive gifts-- some receive many, others few and others even less. God blesses us with a bounty of gifts or charismas during our lives, many of which we have not, as yet, discovered or learned to identify. At times we may believe we possess talents when, in reality, we don't. It is important that each one of us, through time, with the help of the Lord, with the practice of assiduous prayer, and with works of mercy and the sacraments, come to know and realize our own gifts and charismas in order to better serve God.

Marched. The son, says Lucas in the parable, left for a distant country with all the goods he received. He made the decision to leave, that is, he undertook an action. In the same way, when we discover the gifts that the Lord has given us, when we know the many things we can do with them, we must make the decision to take an action in order to take advantage of the talents that are freely received by us.

Wasted. Unfortunately, the youngest son misused his property, chose the path of evil, distanced himself from God, and squandered his property. By becoming aware of the graces received from the Lord, we Christians have to take action which can be directed towards doing good or, on the contrary, doing evil. It is also important to realize that in this dualism of good and evil, there is a position that is also bad, that can result in a sense of comfort and false security. We can choose instead to not do anything—to just not use these gifts. This leads us to recall another parable, the parable of the talents. The servant buried the gold talent and then was chastised by his master for not using it wisely.

Lived. The path chosen by the younger son to handle his inheritance was clearly egregious. He lived a life stilled with debauchery and had the false perception of freedom to indulge in worldly pleasure. The son could have chosen wisely to invest his inheritance and become a man of means and prominence. He could have then returned home as a source of pride for his family.

In our cases, whether as individuals or as married couples, we must, once we have discovered our gifts and charismas, decide what kind of lives we want to live. Do we want to live a rich life in union with God? Do we select to take advantage of our gifts and graces, and to utilize them in the service of others; or, on the other hand, do we select a life away from Him, using our gifts for evil? Or do we choose to simply be comfortable, wasting our gifts, doing nothing? The decision is ours.

2. - INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER AND ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

The objectives of this chapter are to recognize that, through the grace of God, we all receive gifts--personal and conjugal--and to consider the Christian meaning of the good use of them.

It is intended that we learn to recognize the goods, talents and potentials that we have, based on the knowledge that we Christians have of a heavenly Father who aids us, who fills us with graces and opportunities, and who never abandons us. However, we do not always recognize His closeness and His love. We look for Him only when we are in need, as support to our human insecurity; but then we forget about Him until a new need arises.

In these conditions, man lives immersed in spiritual nothingness, within an existential vacuum that fills him with capricious feelings and confused decisions, which reveal the fragility of his faith and his uncertain hope.

Despite this, God is always with us. He seeks to provide the fullness of joy through his presence. By his grace he freely gives us tools of life that we identify as gifts or talents that manifest themselves in our diverse capacities and abilities. However, for whatever reasons, many times, we do not develop these gifts from God or we are indifferent to them.

In the passage we read, the father makes reference to God and gives the child an inheritance that represents a gift received. The son moves away from the father, begins to live like a libertine, and wastes the gift freely received.

All gifts are given through the grace of God for the purpose of serving others. It must be a priority of ours freely to offer them and distribute them. By doing so, we support one another until we become true witnesses of Christian life.

These gifts are valuable resources that should constantly be used in all situations of our lives. This is especially true in the conjugal relationship in which we should always utilize these gifts to better serve our spouses. By doing so, we constantly help our spouse to discover and utilize our gifts that we offer without selfishness.

It is important to have a clear concept of what selfishness is, since it is one of the main sources of marital crisis. For this reason, it must be considered.

Selfishness is the attitude of one who manifests an excessive love for himself and who only deals with what is in his own best interest and with what will benefit him the most. The needs and desires of others are insignificant. We must always be mindful that we must ***"Let no one seek his own interests but those of his neighbor"*** (1 Corinthians 10:24).

Selfishness is related to ambition, greed, self-centeredness and disrespect; it feeds on roots of bitterness, individualism, materialism, ambition, anxiety and, above all, spiritual

weakness. Usually, the individual that manifests this attitude is unconscious of it; however, it is glaringly evident to all those who witness it and suffer because of it.

Aristotle relates that selfishness is not self-love, but, rather, an inordinate passion for oneself.

Selfishness can destroy marriages because it results in insensitivity to the needs and desires of our spouse. We must become aware of behaviors that demonstrate selfishness because it can quickly destroy a marriage. When an individual draws interest to himself at the expense of his spouse, his behavior is selfish. When someone ignores his spouse when that person is speaking, his behavior is also selfish. When a person demeans his spouse's interests, desires, and needs, he is acting in a selfish manner. If we disrespect and criticize our spouse's point of view and impose our will upon them, even without being argumentative, our behavior is selfish. We must be aware if we criticize our spouse's family and refuse to help them. We must recognize a tendency to make decisions without consulting with our spouse. If we become greedy, distrusting what our spouse spends, and considering ourselves to be the owners of everything, we need to take a close look at ourselves. We are specifically told in 1 Timothy 6: 10: "For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grieves."

All these manifestations of selfishness can generate resentment, hurt, emotional separation and even hatred and violence. ***"Do to no one what you yourself hate"*** (Tobit 4: 15). It is absolutely crucial to recognize these negative attitudes and to work to control them before it is too late. Within our own Teams, it is fundamental that we practice mutual spiritual guidance to help couples grow and discover areas upon which they must improve as well as to discover and develop the gifts that the Lord has bestowed upon them. Through the grace of God, the Holy Spirit acts. When we are given gifts and insights, He expects that they will bear fruit.

3. - DOCUMENTS FOR REFLECTION

Let's read what the NEW TESTAMENT tells us about the gifts.

"As each one has received a gift, use it to serve one another as good stewards of God's varied grace" (1 Peter 4: 10).

"...So we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another. Since we have gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us exercise them: if prophecy, in proportion to the faith; we, though many, are one body in Christ and individually parts of one another" (Romans 12:5-6).

"In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law" (Galatians 5: 22-23).

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER CAFFAREL ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON "L'ENFANT PRODIGUE"

PART 2

"A few days later". It might seem contradictory to what we have said, but if this is how Christ says it, it is to help us see into the psychology of the son; Christ does not speak with abstract language; to address everyone, from the simplest to the most knowledgeable, He speaks in a concrete way and we understand what that means: the child wants independence after a few days. He is weighed by his dependence on his father and wants to be free as soon as possible.

He sells houses, fields, and livestock. Surely a good amount of money is amounted. And putting it all together, the younger son leaves. He is young, strong and healthy, has on his heels the wings of freedom and many miles to go. Since he is rich, he stays in hotels during the night and leaves the next day. It seems to him that his happiness grows as the kilometers traveled multiply, and that the distance becomes greater between his father's house and him. Finally he is free!

"And he left for a distant country." Why to a distant country? He could have gone to the neighboring town or the nearest town. Nevertheless, he does not. He is impatient to have total independence. In the neighboring town, his brother could come and teach him a moral lesson.

"Where he squandered his farm, living like a libertine." A young man from a good family, that has a lot of money and has made many friends, numerous friends. This is how things are when we have a lot of money. He organizes dances, parties, banquets, and is the king of youth in the far away land. At least, he has the quality of generosity. He is not greedy. This is written in his favor, but there are many other things written against him. He lives luxuriously.

TESTIMONY OF BIANCA AND ANTONIO

PART 2

Bianca and Antonio. Our son went to live in a tourist resort for young people, where he was surrounded by people his age, whose only plan was to "have a good time". He used his social, intellectual and emotional skills to win new friends and get free food and shelter, that is, to live off the effort of others. But little by little those who helped him began to realize that he did not wish to work or to share expenses; he did not have the discipline to work, and so his status in the community began to deteriorate. He was wasting his inheritance. One day we went to see him to persuade him to leave that life and return to our home. He mentioned that his job was to contact tourists, to make friends with them, and then to persuade them to stay in a specific hotel or dine in a certain restaurant. He explained that he did this in exchange for food and some money. However,

he also told us that at that time he had already lost his two previous jobs.

Bianca. For a long time, the only people with whom we shared this grief was with the other couples on our Team in TOOL. We did not talk about it except with them and our intimate family. They were good listeners and were supportive and sympathetic. They were mutual helpers. Then close friends joined our prayers and our pleadings. All the intercessors in heaven have received many petitions for this cause and that was the greatest support. These were the bonds that sustained us during this trial before the return of our son, not only to the paternal home, but also to reconciliation with God.

Antonio. The crisis that we lived as a family due to the estrangement of our son and the concern for his future, caused problems among us. Many times we blamed ourselves for the faults of our son, recriminating one another. Over time we understood and were grateful for how much we had received as children of God, as parents and as a family. This feeling of gratitude was a force that sustained us so that we did not lose our joy or hope.

MARIO AND MARITZA'S TESTIMONY PART 2

Maritza. As a result of our differences and the difficult situations that we faced during our first years of married life, we lost a little of the love and respect that we had for one another. The beautiful coexistence that God had given us was injured. This, unfortunately, opened the doors to a series of things that should never have entered our lives: jealousy, distrust, differences, disrespect, discourtesies, lies. Things got so bad that we even dealt with a year of separation caused by Mario's infidelity.

I was devastated. I could not understand what was happening because I was sure that he loved me. I could not understand why he did not even want to fight. Instead, he decided to take the easiest way: to abandon us. I cried a lot. Our daughters suffered. They begged Mario not to leave. They pleaded with him first to go to therapy and find help. He refused. That hurt them very deeply, and they decided never to talk to him again. At that time I was not well; I did not want to eat. I did not want to get up. I just wanted to die. They had to take me to a psychiatrist because I truly had no desire to live any longer. Every time I saw my husband, I pleaded with him to return to our home. His response was always the same. "I no longer love you."

With this, all the expectations that we once had of a beautiful life together were broken: the promise made before God, the plans we had, and the trust we had in Mario as a husband, as a father, as part of a wonderful family. It was all broken. Our plan for a life together was completely lost.

Mario. I left our home looking for things that, according to my damaged understanding at that selfish moment, were considered just. At that time, they seemed to be the right things to do. It was a very difficult time. I had confusing, passing illusions of a new true love. But more than anything else, there was the fact that I was leaving behind everything

that we had built in our married life.

In spite of the difficulty and the pain of facing my family as they begged me to reconsider leaving and to look for another option, I felt that I needed to leave. Our friends tried to advise me to make me stay. But one day I just left my home. I walked away, leaving everything behind. My eyes were set on a new life that I saw before me. I left without realizing the huge damage and pain that I left behind. I did not consider the consequences of this huge decision I had made in my life

I started living a life very different from the one I was used to with my family. It seemed to be different in every way. Different customs. Different ways of seeing and living life. Different responsibilities that I assumed with my new life that, little by little, changed the decision I had made. My perspective changed. There was the illusion of what I was looking for versus the reality of what my existence had become. It changed.

ENCICLYCAL DIVES IN MISERICORDIA. JOHN PAUL II. 1980. NUMERAL 5

That son, who receives from the father the portion of the inheritance that is due to him and leaves home to squander it in a far country "in loose living," in a certain sense is the man of every period, beginning with the one who was the first to lose the inheritance of grace and original justice. The analogy at this point is very wide-ranging. The parable indirectly touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin.

Other recommended readings can be found in annex 2.

4. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE COUPLE REFLECTION /SIT DOWN

If everything is by twos, how do we manage the resources?

Which of the gifts of the Spirit do we consider a priority in ourselves?

Do we know the gifts and graces of our spouses and children?

How are we using those gifts in marriage, in the family and in our environment?

5. TEAM MEETING

A. - GENERAL SHARING

For this part of the Team meeting, we suggest that we share our reflections on what we consider to be our most relevant gifts. How do we apply them in our conjugal and family lives? Also, have we managed to identify hidden talents that we did not know we had ?

B. - PRAYER TIME

THE WORD OF THE LORD: PROCLAMATION:

The Parable of the Talents Matthew 25: 14-30*

“It will be as when a man who was going on a journey called in his servants and entrusted his possessions to them. To one he gave five talents; to another, two; to a third, one—to each according to his ability. Then he went away. Immediately the one who received five talents went and traded with them, and made another five. Likewise, the one who received two made another two. But the man who received one went off and dug a hole in the ground and buried his master’s money. After a long time the master of those servants came back and settled accounts with them. The one who had received five talents came forward bringing the additional five. He said, ‘Master, you gave me five talents. See, I have made five more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’ [Then] the one who had received two talents also came forward and said, ‘Master, you gave me two talents. See, I have made two more.’ His master said to him, ‘Well done, my good and faithful servant. Since you were faithful in small matters, I will give you great responsibilities. Come, share your master’s joy.’ Then the one who had received the one talent came forward and said, ‘Master, I knew you were a demanding person, harvesting where you did not plant and gathering where you did not scatter; so out of fear I went off and buried your talent in the ground. Here it is back.’ His master said to him in reply, ‘You wicked, lazy servant! So you knew that I harvest where I did not plant and gather where I did not scatter? Should you not then have put my money in the bank so that I could have got it back with interest on my return? Now then! Take the talent from him and give it to the one with ten. For to everyone who has, more will be given and he will grow rich; but from the one who has not, even what he has will be taken away. And throw this useless servant into the darkness outside, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth.’”

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE WORD

After reading the Word, we recommend a few minutes of silence so that we can meditate and then freely share what the Lord has spoken to us, how he challenges us, and how this affects our lives.

It is proposed that we reflect on how we can use God’s gifts more effectively.

INTENTIONS: COMMUNITY PRAYER.

A cross is passed so each person has a turn to pray.

We suggest for each couple to make a brief prayer. It can be done according to personal or community needs or by choosing a segment of the biblical passage.

At each request that is freely made, we will respond: "Lord, hear our prayer."

PRAYER

*Lord, our God, if the sky is wonderful and the moon and stars are incredible,
I am the work of your hands; I was created in your image and likeness,
How will I be? How will I be inside?
You have placed the goods (gifts) in my hands so that I can share them with men.
You have made me responsible for my brother,
You have given me to share,
You want me friend to all.*

Psalms for a young man like you
Compiled by Father Jorge Galéaz S.J.

*"Take, Lord, and receive all my liberty, my memory, my understanding, and my entire will,
All I have and call my own.
You have given all to me.
To you, Lord, I return it.
Everything is yours; do with it what you will.
Give me only your love and your grace, that is enough for me. "
Amen*

San Ignacio de Loyola

C. – THE ENDEAVORS: PARTICIPATION

We propose that during the month couples work on the endeavor "The Rule of Life", since the subject for this month's study dealt with applying the graces and gifts received from God for the service to our spouse and to others.

It would also be beneficial if we practice personal, conjugal prayer, etc. We must ask God for the enlightenment to discover the gifts that help us enrich our marriage and our family.

D. - QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY TOPIC

Do I know the gifts of my Team members?

How are we using the gifts received in the different areas of our life? (TOOL Movement and Church)

E. - FINAL PRAYERS:

FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, HENRI CAFFAREL AND THE
MAGNIFICAT

APPENDIX 2**OTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS**

CONFERENCE OF Fr. CAFFAREL TO THE PILGRIMS OF LOURDES (JUNE 7, 1965). OUR
LADY'S TEAMS AT THE SERVICE OF THE NEW COMMANDMENT.

THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON. HENRI NOUWEN 2011, PPC, Madrid, pp. 39-41.
43-49.

PONTIFICAL COUNCIL FOR THE PROMOTION OF THE NEW EVANGELIZATION. The
Parables of Mercy (2015), Ed. San Pablo, Bogotá Colombia, pp.45.

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH. GIFTS AND FRUITS OF THE HOLY SPIRIT. No.
1830 and 1831.

DECREE APOSTOLICAM ACTUOSITATEM. ON THE APOSTOLATE OF THE LAITY. No.3 and 4

TEAMS OF OUR LADY
STUDY TOPIC 2018
RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE

CHAPTER 3

CRISIS AS AN OPPORTUNITY FOR CONVERSION

1. - LISTENING TO THE WORD.

"Now when he had spent everything, a severe famine occurred in that country, and he began to be impoverished. So he went and hired himself out to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to feed swine. And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating, and no one was giving anything to him" (Luke 15:14-16).

MEDITATION

The prodigal son did not take advantage of the goods he had received, nor was he proactive when facing difficult times. He wasted every penny he had. To aggravate the situation, there was a great famine in the region and his reality became so difficult, that his life changed radically. One day he lived with abundance and splendour; the next day he was cast into a life of hunger and potential starvation. His professed exaltation at his wealth and independence was transformed into misery as his life fell into a bottomless abyss. He did not even have morsels to eat. He had lost everything.

The same can happen in our lives when we believe that everything is going perfectly. During these times, we can become complacent, thinking that God is not needed and that we are capable of achieving everything that we desire without Him. When we build our lives on foundations of sand rather than on rock (Matthew 7:24-27), any difficulty or crisis that comes our way will send us cascading downward into a chasm of failure and oppression.

This is the case for the prodigal son. His life seemed perfect until things went woefully wrong. He is cast into a unexpected pilgrimage through hardship, starvation, mockery, abuse, and humiliation. For a Jew there were few circumstances that were worse than caring for pigs, animals that were considered to be filthy, despicable, and impure . Yet the son's situation had become so desperate that he was thankful for the bean pods that they ate. What a shameful turn his life had taken!!

Have you ever experienced this feeling when you have distanced yourselves from the Lord? Our lives become self-absorbed, as we turn away from our neighbors, our spouse, our family, our friends, and our colleagues. Then suddenly we see our real selves—the individuals we have become. We stand before ourselves, full of self-interest, self-indulgence, and greed. We recognize the injustices we have inflicted against our spouse, friends, and family. We experience deep shame and remorse. We wake up to the realization that we have lost our honour and respect, not only to others, but to ourselves.

2. – INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER AND ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

The objective of this chapter is to motivate us to understand that crises often arise in our personal, work, and family lives that may cause us anxiety, anguish and suffering. However, we can take advantage of these difficult circumstances to reassess, reprioritize, and reorganize the way we live our lives, placing God in the center of everything. It is critical to understand and accept the fact that our lives are empty unless the love of God and the love of our neighbours are our primary focuses.

One thing is clear: pain enters into God's plan. That is the reality, although it is difficult for us to understand and accept. It is also true that God our Lord does not cause the pain to his creatures, but he tolerates it because after original sin, it is part of the human condition.

We start with the fact that a crisis, unexpected or not, is a difficult condition that can threaten every aspect of our lives. Crises are inevitable and cause great pain and upheaval in the ordinarily calm lives of all people and their families.

We can identify three reactions to a crisis: the first is to try to avoid the crisis when we see it coming; the second is to adapt the attitude with which we will face it; and the third, hopefully, is to see the positive in the experience and to learn from it.

In the first case, success will depend on whether we can identify the crisis in advance. This is the equivalent of a vaccine in medicine. We eliminate the problem before it grows. In family relationships, it is critical to recognize that a difficulty exists and to give it sufficient attention to thwart its growth into something much worse.

In the second case, in our married lives, the burdens of day-to-day circumstances almost always create some type of difficulties from time to time. Some appear as a natural consequence of the family life cycle: marital responsibilities, customs, and habits; family politics; the arrival of children and then their schooling; the complexities that come with developing adolescents; the inevitable pressures of professional choices; the intricacies of the marriage dynamic; adaptation to the distresses of the empty nest, old age and widowhood. Every normal stage of married life brings with it joys, as well as difficulties with which we must deal.

However, marriage may also bring unexpected difficulties that represent treacherous mountains that we must painfully scale. Too often, marriages also bring infidelity, divorce, unemployment, illness, disability, violence, addictions, premature death, etc. When we least expect them, significant hardships may arise.

The social and cultural deterioration in which we live today too often can lead to a crisis within the family. The family nucleus must be very strong to deal effectively with issues such as divorce, abortion, gender ideology, legalization of homosexual unions, and the lack of freedom in decisions for the education of children.

When we deal with difficulties and hardships, we must remember always immediately to gaze upon God, surrendering to his infinite mercy and asking him to strengthen us to face any situation with serenity and without despair. We can never lose hope. We must pray that He helps us to adapt ourselves to what is coming and to take the action that He deems to be best. In cases where we do not find immediate solutions or there is no solution, we must pray for understanding and acceptance of reality. Of utmost importance is to maintain family cohesion, to support one other, and to seek professional help when needed. Of course, there is always the support of our TOOL team, friends, and family.

Finally, in the third case, we must take advantage of the opportunities that crises bring, despite their pain and hardships. Although it is never easy, we may take difficulties of life as opportunities for growth and maturation. With time, we can become better, stronger individuals. When we least expect them, resources to help us may come to light. We may realize qualities within ourselves that, until this time, have been hidden to us. Bonds with people who have gone through similar circumstances may develop as we are guided to make wise decisions. Ultimately, the strength we have attained through our difficulties may become the testimony that we give to others as the light that guides them out of the darkness of their own crises.

To expand on this third case, we refer to the words of Fr. Tadeuz Dajczer in *Meditations on Faith*. (We refer to this source also in the “Other Recommended Readings” section of this book.)

“God expects us to look at all the situations we live in, and, in particular, the difficult ones, with the eyes of faith. In the parable of the talents, Jesus warns us not to close ourselves to the divine knowledge that flows from faith.

“Talent is not only having something, but also the lacking of something. In the light of faith, health is a talent, but it is also a talent to endure diseases. Jesus, in each case, asks you: What do you do with this gift, because you can waste your health, as much as you can waste the lack of it. Everything is a gift; and talent is also a gift.

“The man of faith cannot fail to see the deepest meaning of his own experiences, and evidently, the search for that meaning is already in itself a way to use talent. For example, if you feel fear of suffering or death, you find yourself faced with an opportunity.

"If there are certain situations that cause you tension, that means that, framed within them, there is a diamond covered by ashes; that diamond is your talent. What will you do with it? How will you take advantage of it? Everything must serve for your sanctification, and in that sense, everything is grace. The suffering that overwhelms you, or the unpleasant circumstances that you face-- everything is a set of talents. But we, often, act like blind people, like little children who do not understand many things.

Talents can have a lot of or little value. If something goes well for you, if you have achieved something, you have undoubtedly made good use of a talent; but if something does not go well for you, you are facing an even more valuable talent.

"You have to look at your own life in a different way; you have to look at it with the eyes of faith. Only then will you notice the constant gift that God gives you. You will notice that your whole life is a complex of hidden opportunities, to help you achieve continuous interior transformation, in which everything is grace" (Dajczer, chapter 2).

"Pain is the megaphone that God uses to awaken a world of deaf people" (C.S. Lewis, *Lands of Penumbra*).

3. - REFLECTION DOCUMENTS

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL ON "THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON," L'ENFANT PRODIGUE

PART 3

But as the youngest son had spent everything in a few weeks, in a few months, he squandered his fortune in the name of the enjoyment of freedom. No restrictions! When he had spent everything, there was a severe famine in that country and he begins to live a series of deprivations. The people of that country live on their reserves, but he does not have any reserves. What does he do? We cannot imagine it quickly. He is going to knock on the door of his cheerful friends and colleagues. A door opens half way. They recognise him, they know that he no longer has money, but neither does he have friends. The door closes, once, twice, three times. He has finally understood, but he has to eat anyway. After having visited many friends, he has only one alternative left, which is a countryman who offers him services in the slums and praises himself as a worker, as a servant, as a mercenary.

Once departed, leaving the city for the countryside, he clings to one of the citizens of that country and our boy, proud of his independence, being a family child, is reduced to carrying out the most humiliating activities. This citizen of a faraway country, who probably was not in need of another worker, takes pity on him and sends him to his fields to feed the pigs. Once again I am referring to the sobriety of the story of Christ. This detail is very

interesting. Feed pigs ... Why not goats? Why not sheep? Why not lambs? Again, there is an intention of Christ. It should be known that, for the Jews, the pig was the impure animal. You do not eat pork. So, being reduced to keeping pigs is the ultimate baseness. In fact, being a pastor is a great shame, because Jewish pastors could not really practice the law, especially the law of the Sabbath. It is necessary that, in spite of Saturday, the animals drink and eat. But if it is already a low situation to be a pastor, how much lower to be a pig keeper! Christ wants to show us that the desired independence finally leads to the most atrocious slavery.

*The Gospel continues, **“And he would have gladly filled his stomach with the pods that the swine were eating...”** Notice the frankness with which Christ speaks: I remember the reaction of a mother who was here during a week of prayer and who told me: ‘Father, you were right when you said that Christ does not have false modesty; when I was in boarding school with the nuns, it was not permitted to say that one had stomach pain, it was necessary to say: I have pain under the apron. But Christ has much more freedom of words, without prudery.’*

The youngest son did not even have the right to the pigs' food. He, the son of a family has become jealous of pigs. Obviously, he did not dare to put his arm in the feeder of the pigs to remove the carob. He asked the master, but he was not given any. That the pigs were big and fat, in fact, was the master's greatest ambition. If his employee was as thin as a bicycle wheel, it did not bother him too much. He did not give any crumbs to his worker.

BIANCA AND ANTONIO'S TESTIMONY

PART 3

Bianca and Antonio. Our son continued to use his gifts to live off the kindness of others. However, with time, they realized that he had no intention of paying them back or working to pay for his keep. The people who had been helping our son grew tired of his selfish behaviour. They no longer wanted him as a friend and began to distance themselves from him. As they turned their backs on him, he had more and more issues that made personal relationships impossible to maintain. His self-esteem and self-respect vanished. He began to rely more and more heavily on alcohol and drugs to cope with life. As his drug and alcohol use escalated, his behaviour became more and more offensive and intolerable. It grew so bad that one night several people ganged up on him and gave him a severe beating. In this horrible, broken state, he showed up at our house. He promised that he had had enough and would change his ways. He agreed to enter a drug rehabilitation center. We were hopeful that things would change, and he would be better. Unfortunately, this was not the case. Yes, there were short periods during which he was clean of the drugs, but he always returned to his old bad habits. Again and again. The drugs and alcohol caused many, many problems. Things were very bad for him. Finally, he agreed to try a new therapy treatment. Again, we had so much hope, but again he repeated the cycle: more and more drugs and alcohol. It seemed like we tried everything; but with each new try, things became worst.

This impossible situation lasted for ten years. Finally, one day he was at the wrong party and with the wrong people, and he was accused of a crime. People were angry. Even though he had not committed the crime, his previous unacceptable behaviour made him look like the perfect main suspect.

Bianca. God heard our many prayers and granted us the grace to have the extraordinary strength that we needed during that time. We stood together as a team. When one of us was down emotionally or spiritually, and we didn't have the will to face another new episode with the drugs or with a new rescue or a new rehabilitation, the other took the post and stood strong. We took turns taking charge and moving forward. God granted us peace, courage, and integrity. We were a united front. We were united in solidarity. Because we joined together with strength and determination, we admired one another. We thanked one another.

Antonio. During this time, the whole family was put to the test. As parents, we were. Our other children were. They faced the hard reality of their older brother making mistake after mistake. They tried to deal with the situation, each in his own way. There was great anger and constant complaining. There was the social shame that kept them away from public places. There was the anxiety before he came home. How would their brother behave this time? They suffered intense pain, paired with the pity they felt for their brother who was hurting. Over and over again, he left and then returned. And time and time again they watched and listened as their parents fought and fought.

Bianca and Antonio. Despite everything, over time, love grew much, much bigger in our home. God showed us that love had to become the center of everything. In spite of the many different crises of violence and humiliation that our family experienced with our son, we made absolutely sure that he knew how very much we loved him, no matter what! We made sure that he understood that we would always love him, regardless of poor behaviour, regardless of his drug use, regardless of his dropping out of school. We love all our children. We realized that God and only God had given us the love to go forward. Only God had kept us from falling into co-dependency that could have complicated things even more. God had given us the strength to avoid further co-dependence on our son's illness.

MARIO AND MARITZA'S TESTIMONY

PART 3

Mario. My life began to be very difficult, to be extremely sad. To begin with, the relationship with my wife was filled with great anger and sadness. There were loud complaints and huge misunderstandings. On top of that was the devastation I felt over losing my daughters. My two older daughters refused to speak to me or to have anything to do with me. I was their father, but they turned their backs to me. I only had contact with my youngest daughter. And she had been forced to be the link between me and my family. But I discarded even this last link to my family, in search of a new life filled with new dreams and illusions.

Somehow I squandered all the gifts that God had given to me in my life. I abandoned my wife and family. I also surrendered the confidence and security that I had attained in life. When I left my home, I left everything. I left with the clothes on my back and nothing else. This is how I went out to face my new illusion of life. I had no idea where I was going or what the future held for me.

The days passed and *change* began to happen. Change came to the life that was once normal. The things that I was accustomed to, changed. I no longer had a home of my own. I no longer had our daughters at my side. I left my wife to deal with all the family responsibility without me.

Maritza. I had to change my life, too. I had to look for work and take charge of the business that we had. I had to handle the expenses of our family. Despite all the problems, I could still recognize the greatness of God. Despite the fact that I had not worked in many years, I found a job within a month. My life was acted out on a very different stage then. I had to get up a 3:30 a.m. in order to distribute bread. Then I returned home, took a shower, and went to the office. After a long day at work, I had to take care of our daughters who were suffering as a result of their father leaving as he had. They were struggling in school. Their hearts were broken, as was mine. The life I had know and hoped for was destroyed. Life continued amidst immense pain and suffering. I was lost, living in a crazy world where I didn't understand what had happened

I also had to leave the Movement because I no longer had a husband. I asked God why he had taken away the *two loves of my life*, "*my husband and the Movement*". I cried continually. When there was an event for the Movement, I went and hid in the kitchen to feel close to all my brothers and sisters in Christ, who, of course, held my hand and were always with me in the midst of so much pain.

I was waiting for the day when Mario would come and ask if he could come back, and I knew exactly what I would reply. I was going to shout angrily, "***NO! It's too late! You have lost everything!***"

ENCYCLICAL DIVES IN MERCY. JOHN PAUL II. 1980.

NUMERAL 5

"That son, who receives from the father the portion of the inheritance that is due to him and leaves home to squander it in a far country "in loose living," in a certain sense is the man of every period, beginning with the one who was the first to lose the inheritance of grace and original justice. The analogy at this point is very wide- ranging. The parable indirectly touches upon every breach of the covenant of love, every loss of grace, every sin.

"The analogy turns clearly towards man's interior. The inheritance that the son had received from his father was a quantity of material goods, but more important than these goods was his dignity as a son in his father's house. The situation in which he found himself when he lost the material goods should have made him aware of the loss of that dignity."

Other recommended readings can be found in Annex 3

4. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE COUPLE REFLECTION/SIT DOWN

What has been the criteria used to deal with our marital and family crises?

What crisis can we identify in our married life?

Have we been able to look at our crises as an opportunity for conjugal growth?

5. THE TEAM MEETING

A. - GENERAL SHARING

The issue of crises is something very important to consider within marital life, since it can generate decisions that seriously affect the relationship. As such, it would be very enriching for the team during this part of the meeting for one or more couples to share some crisis that they have experienced during their married life and how they dealt with it.

It is important that the couples have talked about this prior to the meeting and agreed to share. It would be advisable to keep the sharing as concrete as possible.

B. - PRAYER TIME

READING OF THE WORD

Mark 4: 35-41

On that day, as evening drew on, he said to them, "Let us cross to the other side." Leaving the crowd, they took him with them in the boat just as he was. And other boats were with him. A violent squall came up and waves were breaking over the boat, so that it was already filling up. Jesus was in the stern, asleep on a cushion. They woke him and said to him, "Teacher, do you not care that we are perishing?" He woke up, rebuked the wind, and said to the sea, "Quiet! Be still!" The wind ceased and there was great calm. Then he asked them, "Why are you terrified? Do you not yet have faith?" They were filled with great awe and said to one another, "Who then is this whom even wind and sea obey?"*

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE WORD

After reading the Word, we recommend a few minutes of silence so that we can meditate and then freely share what the Lord has spoken to us, how this challenges us, and how this affects our lives.

It is proposed that we reflect on concerns that we may have about not using our gifts to their full potential.

INTENTIONS: COMMUNITY PRAYER

A cross is passed so that each person will have a turn to pray.

We suggest that each couple say a brief prayer. It can be done according to personal or community needs or by choosing a segment of the biblical passage.

At each request that is freely made, we will respond: "Lord, hear our prayer."

LITURGICAL PRAYER

Psalm 31, 8-11; 15-17

R / In you, O Lord, I seek refuge.

*I will rejoice and be glad in your mercy,
once you have seen my misery,
[and] gotten to know the distress of my soul.
You will not abandon me into enemy hands
but will set my feet in a free and open space. R/.*

*Be gracious to me, LORD, for I am in distress;
affliction is wearing down my eyes,
my throat and my insides. R/.*

*My life is worn out by sorrow,
and my years by sighing.
My strength fails in my affliction;
my bones are wearing down. R/.*

*But I trust in you, LORD;
I say, "You are my God."
My destiny is in your hands;
rescue me from my enemies,
from the hands of my pursuers.
Let your face shine on your servant;
save me in your mercy. R/.*

C. –THE ENDEAVORS: PARTICIPATION

In the introduction to the chapter, the importance of knowing how to identify a situation to anticipate a crisis was mentioned. It was advised that when we are facing a crisis, we should have an attitude that reflects our gaze on God. We should also surrender ourselves to his divine mercy, asking him to strengthen us to face any situation serenely. That is why we propose conjugal dialogue (sit down) as a concrete endeavour for this month. We strive to be able to converse and remember the crises that we have experienced in our marriages. We should also recall how we faced them and resolved them, and what positive experiences we have learned from these difficult situations.

D. - QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY TOPIC

How should the Team react to a crisis that a couple may encounter?

E. - FINAL PRAYERS

FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, HENRI CAFFAREL AND THE MAGNIFICAT

ANNEX 3

OTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS

POPE FRANCIS. OPENING SPEECH TO THE CONGRESS. "THE JOY OF LOVE, THE PATH OF FAMILIES".

FATHER TADEUSZ DAJCZER. MEDITATION ON FAITH. (CHAPTER 2).

TO THE SOURCES OF OUR LADY'S TEAMS. INITIATION AND PROGRESS. (1959).

SPONSORED BY THE SANTA MARÍA FOUNDATION. NOVEMBER 1987.

Introduction by Jean Allemand. Translation by Annie Hurlot.

**TEAMS OF OUR LADY
STUDY TOPIC 2018
RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE**

CHAPTER 4

RECOGNIZING OUR FRAGILITY

1. - LISTENING TO THE WORD

“But when he came to his senses, he said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!’”(Luke 1:17).

MEDITATION

The evangelist, enlightened by the Holy Spirit, initiates this verse with the phrase "*but when he comes to his senses*", making reference to the fact that the son, in his desperation, paused to reflect on the situation that he faced upon his arrival. It seems that he had to lose everything, even his filial bond, to enter the depths of his being.

"*He came to his senses*" is to do a self-analysis. Many times, it is a painful situation that leads us to reflect on our life, questioning ourselves about what we have done and the consequences of our decisions, whether they were good, bad or inconsequential. We may stop to consider, also, if we have hurt someone as a result. In this process, we also reflect on our talents. Have we taken advantage of the gifts that God has given us or have we wasted them? Have we utilized God's gifts to become the best individual possible? Or, on the other hand, have we used them only for pleasure, fun, and convenience?

In the second part of the verse, the youngest son regrets being hungry, while in his father's house, even day laborers enjoy abundance. He takes the time to stop and reflect upon his foolish actions. Prompted by hunger and poverty, he realizes the great value of what he had and what he squandered. Need drives him to consider the possibility of rectifying and recovering what he has lost. Through his pain, he apprehends his mistakes and fragility, and, ultimately, he is able to take the opportunity to return home after having abandoned it.

The beginning of a conversion is the result of deep reflections that we have made in the face of difficult circumstances in our lives. It is these reflections in our time of trial that allow us to recognize our shortcomings, weaknesses, limitations, and, more importantly, our mistakes or failed plans. Like the youngest son, we must stop to consider the truth about our lives. Like the youngest son, are we repentant sinners who are willing to convert?

Let us take the time to meditate on and evaluate the actions of our lives. Let us not wait to lose what is really valuable that we have received from the Lord (love, family, faith, health, our talents, work, property, dignity, etc.) before we realize what we have wasted. Let us keep in mind that, like the prodigal son, even if we lose everything, we will always continue to be the blessed children of God. This trust in His everlasting love, though sometimes a bit blurred, gives us the strength to resume our role as children of God. God's love for us is not based on any merit. In fact, it is from our weaknesses and fragility that we better understand the greatness of redemption and divine filiation. We are children of God!

2. - INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER AND ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

The objective of this chapter is to teach us to recognize our weaknesses as a first step toward triumphing over them.

The ultimate end of our existence is our encounter with the Creator. We reach that end only after a journey filled with experiences. Every stage of life—childhood, marriage, parenthood, friendship—brings growth. Throughout the journey of life, we attain self-knowledge by facing and accepting our abilities, gifts, and limitations. Through self-discovery, we realize the importance of leading virtuous lives as a means of knowing God. By living with humility, generosity, responsibility, respect, faith, etc., we live as the beloved children of God.

Unfortunately, our modern society often makes living lives filled with virtue a tremendous challenge. It often seems that everywhere we look, infidelity, disrespect, dishonesty, injustice, and inequality are promoted as acceptable and even desirable. Too often the media promotes a culture where drug use, violence, and materialism are the norm. The family as the center of society is disappearing. Rather than being strengthened by Christian values, they are being inexorably damaged and destroyed. The challenge that we must face is to bring God to the forefront of society. Individuals must be taught about His greatness in order to bring about a positive change in all humanity.

In the media today, marriage is often presented as unneeded and unwanted. But society, as we know it, needs marriage if it is to survive and flourish. Marriages do not need to end in divorce. Couples can be taught how to have stronger marriages. One of the best pieces of advice that any couple can learn is the necessity for the two individuals to accept each other as they are. Each is a unique individual.

Frailty and weakness can be turned into a gift that serves to strengthen and make fertile the conjugal and family life. When couples chose to recognize their weaknesses and decide to act upon them to make the situation better, love, happiness, and holiness can grow. Couples can work together to improve their marriages through an environment of support. Only by facing weaknesses can they be improved upon. Of course, the living image of fragility that bears fruit and becomes a never ending source of grace, is Mary, mother of Jesus, our Blessed Mother.

To recognize the weaknesses of one another takes time, and we are not always prepared to cope with situations that may arise along the way. We are all individuals with different strengths and weaknesses. We may bring any number of frailties to a marital union, and to build a marriage that works, we must bring a willingness to work together for the good of one another.

There are three qualities to be mindful of that can help to overcome frailties within marriage.¹

1. Couples should recognize that each of the spouses arrives at the marriage with his own burdens, needs, and fears. An individual may be hesitant openly to share concerns that arise because of past failures and limitations. Low self-esteem may prove to be a deterrent to sharing openly with a spouse.
2. Couples should understand and accept that there will be times when frictions and disagreements arise. There may even be times when they are hurtful to one another. However, it is important to understand the love they have for one another; and experiencing suffering, hopelessness, and loneliness can destroy even the strongest marriages. They must be always aware that their actions may bring undesired consequences.
3. We must hold fast to the knowledge that conjugal love is capable of overcoming all fragility and weakness. It allows us to affirm that we know ourselves, that we love each other, that we respect ourselves, and that we assume our own weaknesses.

For this help to become effective, we must take advantage of all the moments and opportunities to improve our relationship, through marital dialogue and through communicating our feelings. A couple can never forget the foremost desire they have: to make one another happy.

2. - REFLECTION DOCUMENTS

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL ON "THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON," L'ENFANT PRODIGUE

PART 4

¹ Based on the book "Vivir en Pareja", P. Manuel Iceta. Chapter 2, Asuming Frailties.

***“When he came to his senses.”** This was a path he had never followed. He lived on the periphery of himself, on a corporal level, on an emotional level; but in the depths of his heart, it is clear that he had never reached this path. In order to reach the depths of his being, he had to put himself there. This was the way to come out of his misery to rediscover himself.*

***“He said, ‘How many of my father’s hired men have more than enough bread, but I am dying here with hunger!’”** However, it amazes us that the memory of his family home which perhaps had never been present to him for weeks and months, and especially the memory of his father's workers and the abundance in which he used to live, is what motivates him. This motivates him more than the suffering of his father who had seen his son leave in an insolent way. Well, yes. Christ wants to show us a child who returns to his father's home with better feelings, but he also wants to show us a child who only has a mediocre repentance.*

For sometime while reading this passage, I asked the Lord: “But, Lord, why have you given us the example of a sinner who has a mediocre contrition? In fact, he plans to return mainly because he is hungry.” And Christ told me and made me understand: “Do not think that I have visions or revelations; imagine that he presents a son crying all the tears of his heart, thinking of his father's pain. What would have happened? By reading this passage, those who are not capable of true contrition for their sins would have closed the Gospel saying: this is not for me. I can not cry warm tears for my faults and my sins. Well, I just wanted each sinner to reach the end of the parable, so I presented exactly what is needed: a sinner who is first motivated by his interest, but who has, nevertheless, a certain repentance.

BIANCA AND ANTONIO’S TESTIMONY

PART 4

Bianca and Antonio. The accusation of the crime made against our son was very serious. He tried to explain that he was not guilty, but he could not find anyone to believe him. At that moment, he understood clearly that he meant nothing to the people around him. He knew that they were also taking advantage of him. They saw him as nothing but a guy with whom they could spend time. They did not even feel a commitment to him as a friend. They had no affection for him, nor any feeling of solidarity. Worst of all was that they felt absolutely no mercy for him. He finally realized how far he had fallen. He had lost every bit of his credibility. He knew that everyone saw him as a total failure, incapable of doing anything. Finally, he came to understand that the life he was leading was totally different from the life that he wanted, and had had when he was in our home.

Bianca. Our son finally understood clearly then, that he could not continue living as he was. Today he calls it living like a "troll", a selfish person who only sees others as providers of his needs. The troll takes without ever giving anything in return. These experiences

that my son had were very hard for everyone, but he could finally see the light and totally comprehend the seriousness of his situation.

Antonio. I did not know whether or not to believe in his innocence with regard to the accusations made against him. He swore to me that he had not done it, but I could not be sure. All the evidence seemed to be against him. But I had to stop and say to myself, that, first of all, he is my son. If someone was going to judge him, it would not be me. So from that time forward, I decided to help him defend himself against the accusations.

MARIO AND MARITZA'S TESTIMONY

PART 4

Maritza. I was able to understand that God was with me, and that He was the true love in my life. I came to the conclusion that I had failed a lot too. I realized that I was a person obsessed with jealousy, who was constantly complaining to my husband about things that were not true. I had to take responsibility and start healing. I did not have a church, so I searched for a priest to whom I could confess and discuss all the pain that was inside me. I still did not understand why my husband had left me. The priest listened to me and then helped me understand how this trial was also going to help me. I began to pray more, and I asked my Dearest God to heal my heart. I faithfully believed that even though I had been far from God for some time, He was going to help me. I never questioned the love that God had for me, and I know that God is faithful in love. I started to dedicate more time to the Lord and, of course, to my daughters. I spent more time with them. I made sure that they understood that they only had one father, and that even though he had left our home, he still loved them very much. They had to forgive him.

Mario. My life began to become very difficult because of the decisions I had made. New situations arose that were not easy to live and cope with.

I still remember with great pain and sadness leaving my youngest daughter at home when she needed me so badly. I will never forget the rejection of our other daughters. When I think of that time, I cry tears of grief. I had made a terrible decision.

In my heart I knew that I had made a huge mistake. If I continued to live the mistake I had made, my future would be nothing but a miserable failure. I finally began to understand the damage my terrible decision had caused my wife and daughters. I had even put Mariitza's life in danger when she had to work in a job that required her to go out and work before dawn. She faced so many dangers. Because of my bad decisions our oldest daughter had failed her senior year of high school. She was so angry at me that she decided that the best way to get revenge and hurt me was to give up her chances for an education. This hurt me very much. I was afraid that her future was destroyed because of me. This was very upsetting for me, but with the help of God, she has overcome the damage done at that time.

I started to picture myself as an older man. I would be alone without a wife, without daughters. There would be no one to spend time with me. There would be no one to support me as an old man who needed help. I would be totally alone.

I also became to question my decision to have two families. That was a double commitment. I already had a family. Why did I want to sink deeper and deeper into a life without a future?

All this began to weigh heavily on my mind. How had I made such horrible decisions? Finally, I understood the depth of the pain that I had caused. How could I have behaved so cruelly? Of my own free will, I had left a wife who loved me, and who I loved, also. I had turned my back on wonderful daughters who needed me. Because of my selfish decision, they no longer wanted to love me. They did not want me in their lives.

For obvious reasons, I ended up leaving the person for whom I had left my family. I started a new phase of my life with the help of my mother. Finally, I made a good decision that opened the doors for me and helped me find and recover what had used to be part of my life.

Other recommended readings can be found in Annex 4

4. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE COUPLE REFLECTION/SIT DOWN

Do we know our defects and weaknesses and those of our spouse?

How do we suggest a change or improvement to our spouse, without offending him or her?

Do we deal with the issue of personal weakness within our conjugal dialogues?

Is God always present in our decisions?

5. THE TEAM MEETING

A. - GENERAL SHARING

We suggest, during this part of the team meeting, that couples comment on their experiences of how they have learned to accept each other's frailties. How have they improved as individuals and within their marriages as they sought happiness, holiness and love?

Knowing that the testimonies are very helpful to other Team members at the meetings, it would be helpful for one or two couples to comment on how they have overcome some

problem that they faced in their lives. It is important that the couples have discussed this earlier and have agreed on the subject, before sharing it during the meeting.

B. - PRAYER TIME

READING OF THE WORD

2 Corinthians 12: 9-10, 15

"...but he said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for power is made perfect in weakness.' I will rather boast most gladly of my weaknesses, in order that the power of Christ may dwell with me. Therefore, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and constraints, for the sake of Christ; for when I am weak, then I am strong.*

I will most gladly spend and be utterly spent for your sakes. If I love you more, am I to be loved less?"

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE WORD

After reading the Word, we recommend a few minutes of silence so that we can meditate and then freely share what the Lord has spoken to us, how he challenges us, and how this affects our lives.

INTENTIONS: COMMUNITY PRAYER

A cross is passed so that each person will have a turn to pray.

We propose that each participating couple make a brief prayer. It can be done according to personal needs or by choosing a segment of the biblical passage. At each request that is freely made, we will respond: "Lord, hear to our prayer."

LITURGICAL PRAYER

Psalm 103, 8-14

Praise for the Blessings of God. The Psalm of David.

R / Bless, the Lord, my soul.

*Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
He will not always accuse,
and nurses no lasting anger;
He has not dealt with us as our sins merit,
nor requited us as our wrongs deserve. R/.*

*For as the heavens tower over the earth,
so his mercy towers over those who fear him.*

*As far as the east is from the west,
so far has he removed our sins from us. R/.*

*As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.
For he knows how we are formed,
remembers that we are dust. R/.*

C-THE ENDEAVORS: PARTICIPATION

This chapter involves the reflection of the couple in a direct way. This is why we recommend putting emphasis, for this month, on three concrete endeavours: conjugal prayer, conjugal dialogue (sit down) and the rule of life.

D. - QUESTIONS FOR THE DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY TOPIC

Has team life helped us turn our weaknesses into grace?

What help from the Movement has been useful for us to better know ourselves, our spouses and the members of our team?

F. - FINAL PRAYERS:

FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL AND THE MAGNIFICAT

APPENDIX 4

OTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS

**APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION FAMILIARIS CONSORTIUM OF HIS HOLINESS JOHN PAUL II
ON THE MISSION OF THE CHRISTIAN FAMILY IN THE CURRENT WORLD. No. 8.**

**ENCYCLICAL LETTER DIVES IN MERCY OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF JOHN PAUL II ON
DIVINE MERCY. No. 11, NOVEMBER 30 1980.**

**JOY OF BELIEVING, JOY OF LIVING. FRANCOIS VARILLON, S.J. BIBLIOTECA DE TEOLOGIA,
VOL. 10. MESSENGER, 1999
VOL. 10. MESSENGER, 1999.**

**REFLECTION OF BENEDICT XVI. SERIES OF MEDITATIONS REGARDING THE PSALMS AND
THE BIBLE. SECTION "WEDNESDAY HEARING", ZENIT AGENCY, JANUARY 11,**

2006.

REFLECTIONS APPLIED BASED ON THE TEXT OF LOWNEY CHRIS. THE LEADERSHIP TO THE STYLE OF THE JESUIT, EDITORIAL NORMA, 2004, PAGES. 109-129.

**TEAMS OF OUR LADY
STUDY TOPIC 2018
RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE**

CHAPTER 5

THE PAIN OF OUR FAULTS

1. - LISTENING TO THE WORD.

“I will get up and go to my father, and will say to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven, and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son; make me as one of your hired men.’ So he got up and came to his father” (Luke 15: 18-20).

MEDITATION

The son makes the decision to return to his father and begins to prepare what he will say to his father so that he will take him back. He wants to appeal to the special bond between fathers and sons—filled with love and mercy--, a bond that has sat dormant for a considerable time. A new hope arises within the son as he considers returning to his father. He recalls the father that he has always known, a good man who would give the best to his children, regardless of the sacrifice. *"Which one of you would hand his son a stone when he asks for a loaf of bread, or a snake when he asks for a fish?"* (Matthew 7: 9-10). In the depths of his being, the son knows that his father loves him. The father demonstrated this from the moment he handed over the inheritance to the son and permitted him to walk away.

He finally truly comprehends the foolishness of his past actions that were spurred on by selfish immaturity. He recognizes the great depth of disappointment and pain that his actions have caused his father. Filled with newfound empathy and sorrow, he decides to open his heart to his father, without excuses or attempts to justify his contemptible behavior. He will happily accept any penance that his father might impose. Aware of his pitiable limitations, he begins to develop an attitude of humility. He approaches his father with no aspirations of wealth. His only desire is to be allowed to live and work at his old home.

Within our own personal and conjugal lives, we may fall prey to temptation and foolishly commit indiscretions that are not acceptable to our spouses. If this occurs, instead of feeling defeated and immobilized by our poor behavior, we must admit our error and move toward a solution. When we admit our weaknesses and mistakes and put aside our pride, we begin our conversion or reconciliation with God. It is important to recognize fully that our misdeeds are committed selfishly without consideration for our standards of behavior and the love that we hold for our injured spouse.

We must be willing to accept the consequences of our misdeeds. They offend God. Our selfish, poor decisions often leave deep, festering wounds in our partner that cannot be healed easily. When we admit our misdeeds openly and honestly, and work to reconcile with our partner with sensitivity, consideration, and kindness, our relationship can recover and, even, thrive.

The prodigal son makes the decision to speak openly and honestly with his father about the mistakes he has made. He understands that his actions were selfish and that he hurt his father deeply. He admits to squandering his inheritance. There are no excuses given. The son is willing to take whatever punishment his father can give. Through his actions, we realize that the son has determined that his former life that was filled with excesses and debauchery must be left behind. He knows that his ways were sinful, and he could not continue this sinful behavior and survive.

As Catholics, we must always have the image of God as Father. He is our refuge and strength, to whom we can go with the certainty that he will listen. It is He with whom we can converse and share our faults and hardships, as well as our triumphs and joys. We can vent our feelings and thoughts at any time, knowing that he will always welcome us with infinite love. This is also the attitude that God the Father expects of us, his children.

2. - INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER AND ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

The purpose of this chapter is to lead us to meditate on remorse and repentance, as the path to conversion and reconciliation.

In this passage of the parable of the prodigal son, Luke leaves open to the reader the possibility of multiple interpretations in relation to the attitude of the son. We wonder if the son returns to his father strictly out of physical need. Is he motivated only because of his extreme hunger and deprivation?

The Catechism of the Catholic Church (No. 1439) directly refers to the parable of the Prodigal Son. (See the reflection documents included in this study.) The Church recognizes and accepts that the son reflects upon his actions and that he repents. He also pleads guilty and accepts a penance. The son makes the decision to return to his father's house. According to the Catholic Church, the parable is a tale about a process. It is a story about a journey to conversion.

Recognizing our capabilities and limitations allows us to accept and correct our faults. Things seldom improve if we refuse to accept their existence. Once there is acceptance, we can move forward to address and eliminate the problem. Within a couple or a family, there must also be communication about difficult issues. Couples (families) must take the time to share their feelings and concerns about problems that inevitably arise. If decisions are made hastily, without discussion and a consensus, the actions that result may cause problems. The individuals involved may experience feelings of pain and remorse. The conjugal (or family) environment itself may be damaged.

Correcting a problem begins with self-knowledge, self-possession, and then self-surrender. An individual recognizes a problem. Once he acknowledges that there is a problem, he must have the strength of character to decide to change. Then he can surrender to making the change. At this point, a personal change can be initiated. Change implies remorse, repentance, and conversion. The individual must feel sorry for his action; he must want to change his troublesome behavior, and then he can bring the change through his actions. It is a process.

Recognizing a fault and having the determination to correct it does not eliminate it. Change always implies action. Change or conversion is not easy. We must turn to prayer and deep reflection. We must call upon the Holy Spirit to help us recognize the truth of our actions, to find a way to change. Only then can we achieve the fullness of our life that lies before us as a reachable possibility.

A marriage is sacred. It must be cherished and carefully tended. However, over the years, mistakes in judgment can be made that bring sadness and despair. Too involved in our own lives and our own interests, we may forget the needs of our spouses.

We can become so self-absorbed that we forget about their needs and desires. After years filled with pain, we may withdraw into a world filled with a feeling of loneliness that takes control of every part of our being. Our union becomes so damaged that we are unable to recognize the role that evil is playing in our failing marriage, contributing to feelings of rejection and isolation. We, if possible, must be aware of this condition before it occurs.

An offense is more painful when it comes from a loved one; this confirms that the capacity for suffering is directly related to the capacity for love. This allows us to affirm that the remedy against pain and sadness is love.

Something that each one of us has to discover is the meaning that pain has in one's life. Suffering is not made to be understood, but to be fought. When we do not get an answer, the best way to find it is to look at the Cross, which is the strength of God. St. Paul says in 1 Corinthians 1: 18: "*The message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.*"

Pain and sadness can be overcome in the family like nowhere else. Comfort is found in the compassion of relatives. The home environment is a secure, welcoming place where the suffering individual is welcomed and loved. Within this environment, the person can overcome the deepest pain.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church gives us many conditions to work and reflect on relating to the pain of our faults. This leads us to consider the sacrament of Reconciliation, which is also called the sacrament of conversion, penance, confession and forgiveness. It is a blessing given to us by Jesus in order to radically reorient our lives and to have a conversion to God.

The conversion of the heart - inner penance - is oriented towards the desire and resolution to change one's life; it is the work of God's grace, which gives us the strength to begin anew.²

Finally, we have other forms of penance in the Christian life: fasting, prayer and almsgiving, which express conversion in relation to oneself, in relation to God and in relation to others.³

3. - REFLECTION DOCUMENTS

CATECHISM OF THE CATHOLIC CHURCH,

² Catechism of the Catholic Church. Numerals 1430 to 1433.

³ Ibid. Numerals 1434 and 1435.

Numeral 1439

The process of conversion and repentance was described by Jesus in the parable of the prodigal son, the center of which is the merciful father: ³⁷ the fascination of illusory freedom, the abandonment of the father's house; the extreme misery in which the son finds himself after squandering his fortune; his deep humiliation at finding himself obliged to feed swine, and still worse, at wanting to feed on the husks the pigs ate; his reflection on all he has lost; his repentance and decision to declare himself guilty before his father; the journey back; the father's generous welcome; the father's joy - all these are characteristic of the process of conversion. The beautiful robe, the ring, and the festive banquet are symbols of that new life – pure, worthy, and joyful - of anyone who returns to God and to the bosom of his family, which is the Church. Only the heart Of Christ Who knows the depths of his Father's love could reveal to us the abyss of his mercy in so simple and beautiful a way.

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER CAFFAREL ON “THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON”, L'ENFANT PRODIGUE.

PART 5

***"I will rise, I will go to my father and I will say to him: Father, I have sinned against heaven and before you".** Then, you see, he is on the path of repentance. But the deep motivation is rooted in interest. "I no longer deserve to be called your son, treat me like one of your day laborers." He says to himself: my father is a good man, I really can not ask him the impossible to get my place back as a son in the house, but he will not refuse to treat me like one his workers. This young man, is a "primary", we see it well in his character, that is, someone who, as soon as he thinks about something, does it. Having thought that, he gets up, grabs his staff, maybe even a saddlebag, and leaves the pigs and sets out on the road.*

***"And getting up."** This is what is good in him. He does not despair, and he does not abandon himself. There is abundance at home. He is going to the father, yes, to his father; it is so easy to say. After a few kilometers, he can no longer continue; he has not eaten for ten days. He lies down in a ditch, resumes the way with the help of his staff. But very quickly again, he is exhausted. At night he does not even know if he can find a stable to sleep on the hay, nor or if someone will give him a crust of bread. He has no idea how many miles he has traveled between the family home and the country where he had resided. Oh! It is that at first, he had the wings of freedom on his heels to go to this distant country, but now on the way back, he has the stomach on his heels; it is quite different. He wonders if he will ever reach his father's house.*

"And, getting up, he left for his father." Christ, showing us the misery of this son, wants us to understand that sin is precisely giving oneself to misery, sin, which may have a glorious appearance at the beginning but takes us away from dependence on God. We want to conquer our freedom, we cannot bear the yoke, we do not want to depend on God, and we just want to depend on ourselves. How many of our contemporaries are here! And that is what separates them from God! To say goodbye to God is to dedicate us to misery! This is what Christ wants to show us here! He also wants to show us that not everything is lost! And we will see this later on.

BIANCA AND ANTONIO'S TESTIMONY

PART 5

Bianca and Antonio. The shame of the accusation and the fear of being imprisoned made our son seek our help. This time he was serious. He put himself in our hands and agreed to do what we said. He agreed to be rehabilitated, and he began to change into the young man who had left our house: TO BE THE MAN WHO HE WAS INTENDED TO BE, BY GOD.

Bianca. On each occasion, we relied on his will to enter the rehabilitation centers and that allowed him to advance, each time, a little more. This could only be possible because of God's mercy on us. Every time he entered a therapeutic community, we let him know how brave he was and how much we valued his strength. This occasion was no exception. Sometimes, it was difficult to see the light in him, because his dark sides obscured that brightness. Occasionally, we even thought that the light of God did not shine at all on him. But we kept alive the hope that our son had been called by Him for a purpose he would later find. Meanwhile, we had to keep fighting and praying.

Antonio On the other hand, we as parents, with the help of the therapies received and the professionals visited, had undergone a conversion process. The look on our son's face was more compassionate than before. We could see that despite living under the same roof as his brothers and sisters, and receiving the same care and admonishments, he had a unique personal story that had marked him differently. We understood then that he was our special son, and we began to correct the mistakes we had made with him.

MARIO AND MARITZA'S TESTIMONY

PART 5

Mario. I understood the mistake I made; I had acted on a fleeting dream or illusion. I left what I had chosen for my life; and, by doing so, I made the individuals I loved most suffer. I suffered too. I caused great pain to many people who loved me. Above all, I betrayed the trust that God had placed in me.

I began to change my life. I began to approach my wife and daughters again, in a kind, gentle way that encouraged them to have trust in me. I did not know if it was going to

work, or if they could forgive my mistakes and forgive me for the suffering I had caused them.

At that time, I let my wife know I was aware of all my mistakes and that I was sorry for doing what I had done. I told her of my intention to change and of my hope to rebuild our lives. I understood that this might not have the positive effect that I wanted, but with faith and humility, I tried. I did not know what our daughters' responses would ultimately be. They, also, had suffered a great deal, and they had lost the trust they once had in their father. As our eldest daughter once said: "I had my father on a pedestal, he fell and broke into pieces, and now, how can I rebuild him?"

Today, I also know that at this difficult time in our lives, we were not alone. Many of the individuals who knew us and loved us, were praying for us, giving support to Maritza and asking God for my conversion.

Other recommended readings can be found in Annex 5

4. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE COUPLE REFLECTION/SIT DOWN

What behaviors do we assume when our spouse is experiencing pain and sadness due to an offense that we committed?

What errors in judgment has our spouse committed that has caused us pain? How do/did we overcome it?

Does remorse necessarily imply repentance?

5. THE TEAM MEETING

A. - GENERAL SHARING

Couples must have previously spoken at home, before sharing during the team meeting. They may reveal some episode of pain - conversion – repentance, etc.-- that they have experienced during their married life. This can serve as testimony to help others in a similar situation.

B. - PRAYER TIME

READING OF THE WORD: PROCLAMATION.

1 John 3: 1-6

“See what love the Father has bestowed on us that we may be called the children of God. Yet so we are. The reason the world does not know us is that it did not know him. Beloved, we are God’s children now; what we shall be has not yet been revealed. We do know that when it is revealed we shall be like

him, for we shall see him as he is. Everyone who has this hope based on him makes himself pure, as he is pure.

Everyone who commits sin commits lawlessness, for sin is lawlessness. You know that he was revealed to take away sins, and in him there is no sin. No one who remains in him sins; no one who sins has seen him or known him”.

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE WORD

This reading invites us to recognize the love of the Father, to become like him, and to take care of each other. We must avoid causing any evil to one another during any circumstances of our personal or conjugal life to one another.

We recommend a few minutes of silence so that we can meditate and then freely share what the Lord has spoken to us, how he challenges us, and how this affects our lives.

INTENSIONS: COMMUNITY PRAYER

A cross is passed so that each person has an opportunity to pray.

We propose that each participating couple make a brief prayer. It can be done according to personal needs or by choosing a segment of the biblical passage. At each request that is freely made, we will respond: "Lord, hear to our prayer."

LITURGICAL PRAYER

Psalm 51: 2-13

R / Create in me, oh God, a clean heart.

*When Nathan the prophet came to him after he had gone in to Bathsheba.
Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant
compassion blot out my transgressions.
Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me. R/.*

*For I know my transgressions;
my sin is always before me.
Against you, you alone have I sinned;
I have done what is evil in your eyes*

*So that you are just in your word,
and without reproach in your judgment. R/.*

Behold, I was born in guilt,

*in sin my mother conceived me.
Behold, you desire true sincerity;
and secretly you teach me wisdom. R/.*

*Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure;
wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
You will let me hear gladness and joy;
the bones you have crushed will rejoice. R/.*

*Turn away your face from my sins;
blot out all my iniquities.
A clean heart create for me, God;
renew within me a steadfast spirit.
Do not drive me from before your face,
nor take from me your holy spirit. R/.*

C. – THE ENDEAVORS: PARTICIPATION

As we review this chapter on remorse, repentance, and the journey toward conversion and penance, we suggest that during the month there be a great deal of personal and conjugal prayer and a dialogue. Reflect on your journey of conversion as members of TOOL and utilize the endeavors that benefit you the most, as a result of this dialogue. We also propose to attend a Eucharistic celebration during the week and take the opportunity to go to confession.

D. - QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ON THE STUDY TOPIC

How are we living the sacrament of Reconciliation? Do we go often?

Team life: Is it useful for your way of conversion? In what way?

E- FINAL PRAYERS:

FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL AND THE
MAGNIFICAT

ANNEX 5

OTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF POPE FRANCIS. CUSTODY THE HEART. CONFESSION AND FORGIVENESS OF SINS. ACIPRENSA, 22 FEBRUARY 2015.

RICARDO YEPES STORK. "UNDERSTAND THE WORLD OF TODAY". ED. RIAL, 4th EDITION, 2001, PAGE 133-134.

ENRIQUE ROJAS. "REMEDIES FOR THE DESAMOR". ED. PLANET, ARGENTINA. APRIL 2000. 7TH EDITION, PAGE. 85.

MIGUEL ÁNGEL MONGE SÁNCHEZ - JOSÉ LUIS LEÓN. "THE SENSE OF SUFFERING". ED. PALABRA, S.A., 1ª EDICIÓN, 1998, PÁG. 19.

JUAN LUIS LORDA. "TO BE CHRISTIAN". EDICIONES RIALP, S.A. 1991. PAGE 43.

TEAMS OF OUR LADY STUDY TOPIC 2018 RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE

CHAPTER 6

MERCY AND FORGIVENESS, SIGNS OF LOVE

1. - LISTENING TO THE WORD.

“But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and felt compassion for him, and ran and embraced him and kissed him. And the son said to him, ‘Father, I have sinned against heaven and in your sight; I am no longer worthy to be called your son.’ But the father said to his slaves, ‘Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet.’” (Luke 15: 20-22).

MEDITATION

This moving text highlights the compassionate and merciful attitude of the father as he sees his son return. The Sacred Scriptures reveal to us two of the attributes of God. First, there is Compassion: *“If someone who has worldly means sees a brother in need and refuses him compassion, how can the love of God remain in him?”* (1 John 3:17). The second is Mercy: *“But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us, even when we were dead in our transgressions, brought us to life with Christ (by grace you have been saved)”* (Ephesians 2:4-5).

Let us meditate on this narrative that is so rich with emotions, that it allows us to know the response of God our Father. We realize the strength of his tremendous compassion and mercy, despite our faults. He is always on the lookout, anxiously awaiting our return to Him; and when he sees us, he runs to give us a warm embrace of great welcome. It is a great consolation to see that God is shown to us as a true Father; and it fills us with joy to know that this will always be his answer, because *the essence of his being is LOVE. “Whoever is without love does not know God, for God is love.”* (1 John 4: 8). Can we aspire to be and to act as a reflection of our heavenly Father, with our neighbor?

2. - INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER AND ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

The purpose of this chapter is to demonstrate to us the way to recognize that God always anxiously awaits all sinners with open arms and happily runs out to welcome us. This overwhelming attitude of love is the very heart of our merciful Father who always forgives us, welcomes us home, and gives us back our dignity, redeeming us. We are forgiven only by the grace of God, and *not* by our merits. In the loving image of the Father, we must bring love into every aspect of our lives, particularly in our lives as couples. Our attitude toward our spouses must resemble the loving attitude of God, full of love-- welcoming, loving, and forgiving, without conditions.

The prodigal son had the courage to admit his guilt and to repent. With humility, he returned to his father, telling him that he was truly unworthy to be treated as a son. With contrition, he accepted any harsh penalties that would be imposed on him. Yet, despite the extent of his shamefully despicable behavior, his father shockingly reacted in a manner that was the complete opposite of what was expected. With great exultation, the father ran out to meet his son. With tremendous love, he welcomed him, forgiving any wrong he may have committed. Without conditions, the son is accepted as a beloved son, and is given back every part of the dignity that he may have squandered away in selfish, self-centered behavior.

As Fr. Henri Caffarel says, *"God is not in search of those whose values are worthy of his love; he seeks the poor; in the biblical sense of the term, that is the sinner, the fool, the weak-- in a word, the one in whom he finds a void to fill. Yet we behold the sinner, as he ignores God's most essential quality of Divine love. This ignorance causes him to reason that God will turn on him for his bad behavior and will despise him, reflecting the words of St. Peter: 'Get away from me, Lord, I am a sinner!' However, God never stops loving us. The misery of the sinner is like a monstrosity in which His Love is manifest"* (In the Presence of God, 49).

Within our marriages, we must strive to always assume the Lord's attitude of loving, welcoming, and forgiving without limit. Couples are called, out of love, to help one another to achieve sanctification and salvation. Therefore, when one individual commits an offense, whether minor or serious, there is a call for genuine reconciliation. It is first necessary for the offending spouse to recognize the nature of his offense and to have sincere repentance. He must first forgive himself. Then he may ask for forgiveness from his spouse. The spouse must then forgive the offense, which, depending on the nature of the offense, may take time and prayer. Overall, it is also important to remember that genuine reconciliation cannot occur without having achieved two conditions. First, there is absolute forgiveness, without reservations. The second is the determination not to commit this offense again. There is a call for both parties actively to take part in the steps they must take toward healing, forgiveness, and harmony.

Married couples must openly discuss their love for one another. It is crucial that they communicate their love for one another. Too many times, we assume that our spouses know that we love them. We may think, "We've lived together for twenty years. Of course, he knows that I love him!" But this may not be the case. Love must be expressed. Couples can learn from the father and the prodigal son. The son returned home filled

with dread knowing, without a doubt, that his father hated him for his foolishness. Yet his assumption about his father's love was wrong. We must stop to consider, are our assumptions wrong? Are we openly sharing our love? If not, why not? What prevents us from openly expressing our love? In addition, communication of our feelings is crucial. We must also share our happiness when, after a disagreement, our spouse makes the effort to show his love by doing the things that make us feel loved. Expressions of love feed the marriage, making it stronger. We must strive to have relationships in which, despite the pain that a spouse may have experienced during a disagreement, his love is so great that he will push it aside, making room for the love that he holds firmly in his heart. His actions demonstrate the depth of his love.

Within the conjugal relationship, it is also important to recognize, identify, and understand attitudes that stand ready to destroy love. In particular, the attitude of selfishness is especially hazardous. A selfish person is so devoted to caring for himself that other individuals' interests, needs, and welfare are unimportant. Within any relationship, individuals must stop and consider what is at the base of their union. Leviticus 19: 18 reminds us to "Love thy neighbor as thyself", and shows that love extends from a "pure heart" that loves unconditionally without expecting anything in return. Couples must analyze their relationship in light of this. How selfless is your love for your spouse? Without selflessness, we may be experiencing false love. According to Gebattel, "Under the banner of love, many frigates of selfishness sail. Often this love is simple vanity or a form of self-formation, or a way of satisfying an affective or sexual need, or a kind of compensation for other needs. The happiness of the other is not intended, but fundamentally the own happiness and own narcissistic *splendor*."⁴

It is advisable to work every day to acquire the divine attributes of love and to apply them in all aspects of our lives, remembering that love without compassion or mercy cannot survive. The individual who really wants love must necessarily respond to the needs of the other, and vice versa.

3. - REFLECTION DOCUMENTS

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL ON THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON, "L'ENFANT PRODIGUE."

PART 6

⁴ Rafael Llanos Cifuentes -Egoísmo y Amor, Minos publishing house, 2000 edition

The main character of this section of the chapter will no longer be the son, but rather the father. And it is there that Christ will unfold all the resources of his imagination and his heart, and will try to make us discover something about his admirable father.

"But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him". *This suggests that the father, for months, went every day to the bend of the road, from where you could see the valley all the way down to the horizon, always hoping to see a small silhouette in the distance; at dawn he returned home.*

This reveals to us that God Almighty shows us this father who, every day watches on the horizon, hoping to see the son return, the lost son.

This small silhouette on the horizon is that of the prodigal son. Any other person would not have been able to recognize him. Love has been defined as the ability to predict. The father, immediately, without any hesitation, recognizes: This is my son. "That small blurred figure on the horizon is my son! He is wobbly, not because he is drunk-- poor boy-- but because he is exhausted by fatigue."

"And felt compassion for him, and ran." *If today, this surprises us, how much more must it have surprised Jesus' listeners, especially since, among the Jews, it was quite unusual to see a father running. He was giving up his dignity. With this knowledge, we are prompted to say, "You are an old man! You are risking a heart attack! It's not dignified! Just wait for him! This is unreasonable!" Yes, perhaps this is true. But love is never reasonable! The father runs. He does this to make us understand the tenderness of God the Father towards a poor and sorrowful sinner.*

Then, the father runs to his son. If it were I, instead of the father--assuming I could run--would stand there with both fists on my hips, and I would have scolded: "So! What happened?" But his father instead embraces him, as if he were the one asking his son for forgiveness. "He embraced him". This is what Christ says to tell us about the God Almighty with respect to the poor sinner. And he embraced him for a long time. The son did not expect that at all-- poor boy-- he was very surprised.

A father who goes down to the street to receive a child who returns from afar is not common. That the father runs to meet his son, in some cultures, we see. But in this culture: never! This is crazy! This is not conceivable for us. Maybe in the case of a mom, she would maybe run to the street to receive her son: but a dad--very rarely.

This means that Christ has made very unusual comments. He may even have scandalized his audience, but he does not regret it. This is the way that Christ makes us discover the unimaginable and scandalous love of the Father in Heaven.

And the Gospel continues: "But the father said to his slaves". *The father and son take the road again and head to the house. They see the servants in the fields around the house and the father calls them. When they arrive, the servants, who probably do not recognize this emaciated, filthy, smelly young man who may seem like a vagrant of the lowest*

condition, listen to the father tell them to bring the best robe for him. This was the manner through which important guests and distinguished visitors were welcomed and honored. And it must also have been very pleasant for the traveler who had sweated in his clothing and who was full of dust, to have fresh and clean clothes to put on after a trip.

Wait a moment! Listen very carefully! Before that, the father had said to the servants, "Quickly!" This reminds me of what we read at the beginning: "After a few days, the youngest son left." He was eager to conquer his independence. Our attention is drawn to the father who seems impatient as he is portrayed forcefully commanding an urgent order, which he does because he is eager to see his son regain his place in the family. And that's why the servants should bring the robe quickly. And listen carefully; do not let any words escape you! And the most beautiful thing to observe, I think, is the servants! The servants had to be quite amazed and totally confused: some might even have said, "This is still a disaster! This young man was living like a pig, and here we are giving him the most beautiful robe in the wardrobe! That is not reasonable!" But love is not reasonable. This is a parable to speak to us about the Father in Heaven welcoming home a sinner.

"Quickly bring out the best robe and put it on him." *The most surprised is still the son; he really did not expect this.*

"Put a ring on his hand." *It is important to understand that this is not a common ring like you or anyone else could use. It was a seal ring, the kind of ring that was used to sign documents. The servants were not wrong if they were to think, "And if the father ceased to exist, the young man can sell the house, the stables, the fields; and the older brother will sleep on the straw, and so will we." To them, it was not reasonable to put this ring in this son's hand. "*

*"Put the ring in his hand." Yes! The Lord Jesus Christ only wants us to understand something: **to forgive is to return all trust**. This is what Jesus did with Peter. When he forgave him, he restored the Church: **"Feed my lambs, feed my sheep"**.*

*Let us look at the son's poor feet. The father commands, **"and sandals on his feet."** These were not the sandals of the servants, but the shoes worn by the masters. **"Put shoes on his feet,"** his poor bloody feet, covered with dust.*

BIANCA AND ANTONIO'S TESTIMONY

PART 6

Bianca and Antonio. Regretful and with a tremendous desire to change, our son agreed to enter a rehabilitation facility, again; but this time his attitude was very different. He seemed absolutely certain of his recovery. He requested not to have a prolonged confinement because he knew he did not need it. There was such a huge change in him! Both of his doctors and we, his parents, agreed to his request. He left the rehabilitation center with a totally different attitude, much more mature. He was full of apologies for everything he had done and to his family for everything he had put them through.

Bianca. When Antonio returned home, I was surprised that he asked to prepare a meal with all the finest things in the house, to celebrate his return. His great joy was contagious as he even toasted with wine. The table was more elaborately decorated than usual, even on holidays. Of course, his return was a good reason for this. I seemed to perceive a bright light that radiated from within my husband. After all the suffering that we had lived through, this pleasant scene seemed like a contradiction. After sinking to the depths of sorrow, here we were celebrating his return. We raised our glasses and gladly wished our son a welcome home, confirming how much we loved him and how much we hoped that he would remain here in our home, safe and sound. We knew that his brothers did not yet understand how we could celebrate the return of a son who had caused so much pain. But their expressions and behavior showed that they respected our conviction, even though they did not understand it.

MARIO AND MARITZA'S TESTIMONY

PART 6

Maritza. God gave us the grace and the gift of forgiveness. Mario had to work hard so that we could forgive him. Every time I had feelings against my husband, I prayed earnestly, asking my great God to heal my heart and to give me the strength to show our daughters that our love was true. I fervently prayed that Mario recognize that he had been wrong and that he deserved our forgiveness. Little by little, our daughters noticed a change in their father, and their anger for him turned into love. Their love for him grew as they realized that he was deeply sorry for all that he had done, and that he loved them with all his heart. He wanted desperately to return to our home and to recover his place as father and husband.

Mario. The most amazing and wonderful thing that stands out during our reconciliation was the attitude and behavior of my wife Maritza. Because of her deep faith that is built upon the love, mercy, and the strength of God's forgiveness, she was able to accept that we could resume a life together, despite a shattered marriage. The love, hope, and confidence that Maritza held within her heart were so great that they allowed us to recover our marriage and our family, which I had damaged so badly. With the strength of prayer, supplications to God, and good advice from many people, we were able to become a family again. All our effort and faith began to bear fruit. We finally managed to rebuild our lives and recover our marriage. Today, after many years, we are living a wonderful new phase of our marriage.

Other recommended readings can be found in Annex 6

4. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE COUPLE REFLECTION/SIT DOWN

Do I consider myself compassionate or, instead, am I indifferent to the sufferings of others?

In what ways has God come to share our married life?

How do you express your love to your spouse and/or what prevents you from expressing it?

5. THE TEAM MEETING

A. - GENERAL SHARING

The content of this chapter invites couples to make an assessment regarding love and forgiveness:

1. In what ways have we fallen short of being the best spouse we can be? How can we be more effective?
2. When we have been hurt in some way by our spouse, have we done an effective job of forgiving? How can we improve?
3. Do we effectively express love to our spouse? How can we better do so?

B. - PRAYER TIME

THE WORD OF THE LORD: PROCLAMATION

Matthew 18, 21-35

“Then Peter approaching asked him, “Lord, if my brother sins against me, how often must I forgive him? As many as seven times?” Jesus answered, “I say to you, not seven times but seventy-seven times. That is why the kingdom of heaven may be likened to a king who decided to settle accounts with his servants. When he began the accounting, a debtor was brought before him who owed him a huge amount. Since he had no way of paying it back, his master ordered him to be sold, along with his wife, his children, and all his property, in payment of the debt. At that, the servant fell down, did him homage, and said, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back in full.’ Moved with compassion the master of that servant let him go and forgave him the loan. When that servant had left, he found one of his fellow servants who owed him a much smaller amount. He seized him and started to choke him, demanding, ‘Pay back what you owe.’ Falling to his knees, his fellow servant begged him, ‘Be patient with me, and I will pay you back.’ But he refused. Instead, he had him put in prison until he paid back the debt. Now when his fellow servants saw what had happened, they were deeply disturbed, and went to their master and reported the whole affair. The master summoned him and said to him, ‘You wicked servant! I forgave you your entire debt because you begged me to. Should you not have had pity on your fellow servant, as I had pity on you?’ Then in anger his master handed him over to the torturers until he should pay back the whole debt. So will my heavenly Father do to you, unless each of you forgives his brother from his heart.”

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE WORD

We recommend emphasizing mercy, love and forgiveness.

After reading the Word, we invite you to take a few minutes of silence so that you can meditate and then freely share what the Word has spoken told you, how God challenges you, and how this affects your lives.

INTENTIONS: COMMUNITY PRAYER

A cross is passed around so that each person has an opportunity to pray.

We propose that each participating couple make a brief prayer. It can be done according to personal needs or by choosing a segment of the biblical passage.

At each request that is freely made, we will respond: "Lord, hear to our prayer."

- LITURGICAL PRAYER

Psalm 103: 2-13

R / Clement and compassionate is the Lord

*Bless the LORD, my soul;
and do not forget all his gifts,
Who pardons all your sins, and heals all your ills,
Who redeems your life from the pit,
and crowns you with mercy and compassion,
Who fills your days with good things,
so your youth is renewed like the eagle's. R/.*

*The LORD does righteous deeds,
brings justice to all the oppressed.
He made known his ways to Moses,
to the Israelites his deeds. R/.*

*Merciful and gracious is the LORD,
slow to anger, abounding in mercy.
He will not always accuse,
and nurses no lasting anger;
He has not dealt with us as our sins merit,
nor requited us as our wrongs deserve. R/.*

For as the heavens tower over the earth,

*so his mercy towers over those who fear him.
As far as the east is from the west,
far has he removed our sins from us.
As a father has compassion on his children,
so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him. R/.*

C. –THE ENDEAVORS: PARTICIPATION

There are so many questions that we can ask ourselves in relation to love, forgiveness, selfishness, etc., but it is worth highlighting the importance of the sit down and to strengthen it with conjugal prayer and the rule of life.

D. - QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY TOPIC

If God is merciful, does it mean that he can forgive everything or are there any conditions?

How can our society do a better job of teaching young people about the place that love has with others?

E. - FINAL PRAYERS:

FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL AND THE MAGNIFICAT

ANNEX 6

OTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION AMORIS LAETITIA. POPE FRANCES. 19 MARCH 2016. No. 106

to 108 and 113.

MISERICORDIAE VULTUS. BULLE OF CONVOCATION OF THE EXTRAORDINARY JUBILEE OF MERCY. POPE FRANCIS, APRIL 11, 2015.

FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL. IN THE PRESENCE OF GOD. HUNDRED LETTERS ON PRAYER.

TRANSLATION OF MERCEDES LOZANO. PPC, EDITORIAL Y DISTRIBUIDORA, S.A. PRINTERS.
2015.

RAFAEL LLANOS CIFUENTES. SELFISHNESS AND LOVE. EDITORIAL MINOS. EDITION YEAR
2000. PAGE 94.

TEAMS OF OUR LADY STUDY TOPIC 2018 RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE

CHAPTER 7

THE SENSE OF HUMAN JUSTICE FACING DIVINE JUSTICE

1. - LISTENING TO THE WORD.

“Now his older son was in the field, and when he came and approached the house, he heard music and dancing. And he summoned one of the servants and began inquiring what these things could be. And he said to him, ‘Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound.’ But the son became angry and was not willing to go in; and his father came out and began pleading with him. But he answered and said to his father, ‘Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours; and yet you have never given me a young goat, so that I might celebrate with my friends; but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes, you killed the fattened calf for him.’ “And the father said to him, ‘Son, you have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours. But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found’” (Luke 15:25-32).

MEDITATION

In this part of the parable, Luke communicates several interesting details about the older brother. We see him as a hard-working man who returns home after a day of work. That day he finds himself surprised that his father has had a party to celebrate the return of his younger brother. Instead of making him happy, it angers him. His sharp response to his father illustrates his deep feelings of resentment and distress.

The depth of his resentment toward his father lies deep within him and has probably been held within himself since his brother left. He acknowledges these long-held resentments when he contentiously responds that, despite all his past efforts and hard work, the father had never recognized his loyalty and dedication. Never had he been allowed to enjoy the fruits of his labor with his friends.

He is also extremely resentful towards his younger brother, to whom he bitterly refers as "*that son of yours*", because, despite having squandered his entire inheritance through living licentiously, he is welcomed with great celebration and fanfare by his father. Upon learning of his older son's feelings of indignation, the father explains to his firstborn son

that he had never considered the need for incentives or rewards. Surely the older son had known that every single possession that the father owned belonged to him. He explains that the rapturous celebrations are held because this son, whom he believed to be lost and dead, was, in fact, very much alive. Surely, the older son could understand his jubilation.

This narrative portrays circumstances that many individuals find problematic. They question the decisions made by the entire family. How could the father just hand over a large amount of money to a young man without question? How could the younger son have ever thought that he had a right to be given a fortune without any expectations? Why didn't the older son explain his deep consternation to the father when the gift was freely given? When the younger son returned home full of shame after having thrown away the inheritance, why didn't the father greet him, at a minimum, with disappointment and anger? The questions can go on and on. The truth is that within our modern standards of human justice, many of us agree with the older brother. Within the order of modern human justice, his expectation that his younger brother, at the very least, receive some type of reprimand or punishment is warranted.

It is worth consideration, also, that the older son does not go directly to his father to express his shock and bewilderment about his brother's return and the great celebration being held in his honor. Instead, he goes to one of the servants for answers to his questions. Why didn't he go to his father, who would have had the answers? Why go to a servant who, in all probability, would have been ignorant of many of the details? What does this imply about the relationship between the elder son and his father? At the very least, we recognize a lack of self-confidence, with regard to his father.

When the older brother confronts his father, he reacts to the affronts he feels he has experienced regarding his loyalty and obedience through his many years of service to his father. His concern regards compensation. What *things* can he receive in reward for services rendered? In truth, as a result of his behavior, we can understand much about his character. His concern is for superficial objects, not for the strength of a cherished relationship between father and son. It seems obvious that his love for his father is a false love, a "love with interest".

On the other hand, the father's response demonstrates a true love. He does not even require explanations or apologies from the younger son, despite his past sins. His is the perfect example of the merciful love of God. This wonderful narrative teaches us that, in spite of all our offenses, what God seeks is to recover his son. In the parable, the only thing that matters is that the son remains beside the father where he can help his son to rediscover himself, to mature, and to achieve conversion.

Many people may question the behavior of the individuals in this tale. How could the father forgive without consequence? Perhaps this would not happen within the precepts of justice during modern times. Yet, lucky for us, the divine criterion for justice is contrary to the human one. The parable teaches us about God's great, unconditional, unquestioning love. Individuals in marriages experiencing the death of a marriage due to

great anger, pain, and bewilderment may draw upon the lesson of this great tale. We may question forgiveness as a viable option; however, we also must stop to reconsider. Perhaps we should call upon the example of God's great forgiveness as the force that restores life within our marriages.

2. - INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER AND ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

The objective of this chapter is to become aware of the difference between human and divine justice. Divine justice focuses on forgiveness, which is synonymous with love. We rejoice when the forgiven son returns, which is a direct product of his father's unfailing love. On the other hand, within the scope of human justice, we are overcome by the oppression of envy, discontent, and jealousy that call for the young son's punishment.

According to the Catechism of the Catholic Church, *"Justice is the moral virtue that consists in the constant and firm will to give their due to God and neighbor. Justice toward God is called the "virtue of religion." Justice toward men disposes one to respect the rights of each and to establish in human relationships the harmony that promotes equity with regard to persons and to the common good"* (No. 1807).

For Plato and Aristotle, justice was no longer a virtue, but was rather the synthesis of all virtues. We are told that, inscribed in the books of the Bible was the declaration that "righteous is the man who is faithful to the covenant and fulfills the will of God". Most of us will agree that when God, through a pact or covenant, promised to free Israel and guarantee its future, He was doing the correct thing. On the other side, it was also just when God punished the infidelity of the Jews as individuals and as the chosen people.

The declaration of the Law (Torah) was not only intended to stand as the divine plan. It also contained a set of the precepts that formed social and community order. Law was designed with a theocentric concept of justice and government, with divine law being equal with earthly law.

In the New Testament, on the other hand, justice is given to mankind by faith in Jesus Christ, and by the gratuitous redemption that man receives as the fruit of his life, passion, death and resurrection, which is the sacrifice that God offers for the salvation of humanity. It is the New Covenant, in which God offers his own Son as expiatory offering.

The new law that Jesus Christ establishes in the world, as the basis of justice, is the love of God and neighbor, which is engraved in the heart of all humanity. As Christians, we are strengthened through the action of the Holy Spirit in the sacraments of Baptism and Confirmation.

In the reference verses in this chapter of study (Luke 15: 25-32), the father and the eldest son are the two sides of the coin with which we can differentiate divine justice and human justice.

In divine justice there is love for neighbor, mercy, forgiveness, and welcome. Divine Justice is oriented toward God and has been revealed by the Father through the prophets and, above all, through the life, passion and death of his Son, Jesus Christ. We turn, sometimes as a last resort, to Divine Justice when circumstances have resulted in a problem or an injustice. Divine Justice produces rest and peace in the soul of anyone who seeks it. In return, it requests that the person be guided in life by love and mercy.

Human justice, on the other hand, is world-oriented and is based on the customs and conditions of the time. It is highly imperfect as it rules upon some of the most troublesome events and elements of society. Generally, within the bounds of human justice, decisions considering one's guilt or innocence are final and are usually sanctioned by authoritative bodies. In many cases, incarceration or official punishment leaves an indelible stain on the affected person that follows him for the rest of his life, subjecting him to a lifetime of discrimination and retaliation.

Because of modern society's structure and organization, Divine Justice is often difficult to carry out. Therefore, we are going to resort to the moral teachings of the Church with the purpose of addressing the virtue of justice

St. Thomas Aquinas defines virtue as "*good operative habits*" and as the opposite as "*bad operative habits*" that he calls "*vices*." All virtues have excesses or shortcomings; for example, with regard to the virtue of order, the absence is called "disorder" and its excess is referred to as "mania or obsession with order."

Within our marriages we must question and analyze the decisions that we make. This is especially true during times of conflict. We must question: during a conflict, have we, based on bad habits, judged our partner unfairly? Have we come to a conflict armed with preconceived opinions about our spouse's guilt and involvement? If this is the case, finding a solution to the problem will be far more difficult. The resentments that fester within us only further fuel the fire of conflict and can potentially damage the relationship.

Therefore, we must ask ourselves, how should spouses behave when faced with unjust situations in the marriage? When judging our partner, what is it that we intend? Do we want to prove that we are always right, and if so, what do we gain?

To find a solution to problems, we can never forget that the answer is God. The most important thing is to remember to seek the help of God in the light of the Gospel. It is Christ himself who speaks to us and helps us to be just and merciful. We can never forget that one of the blessings of our Movement is available to us at any time. A counselor priest or a spiritual counselor or companion is available to give us the support and enlightenment to find the solutions that we seek. Of course, one of our biggest sources of help and support is found within our own Team.

It is worth remembering what Paul mentioned about the theological virtues in his letter to the Corinthians. "***So faith, hope, love remain, these three; but the greatest of these is love***" (1 Corinthians 13:13). Applying this advice to conjugal life means that through love

we will find answers to any problems that we have. Our Heavenly father will give us the resources we need without question or judgment. But we must turn to him. We must strive to live a life with love, as He loves

When applying divine justice within our marriage, it is advisable to practice the human virtues of respect, fidelity, generosity and humility. On a daily basis, we must strive to work together, seeking the good of the other. We must work tirelessly to maintain a happy life together in order to achieve the sanctification of the other, as the Gospel tells us in 1 Corinthians 7: 16: ***"For how do you know, wife, whether you will save your husband; or how do you know, husband, whether you will save your wife?"***

3. - REFLECTION DOCUMENTS

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER CAFFAREL ON "THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON." "L'ENFANT PRODIGUE."

PART 7

The last part of the parable will show us God's attitude towards the righteous, that is, towards those who are not major sinners, and also the Pharisees.

"Now his older son was in the field ", and since returning after working, he goes home with his tools on his shoulder and as he approaches, he hears music and dancing. *"It is not possible!"* he says to himself. He gets closer, and that is precisely what is happening: music and dancing. Then his heart turns toward evil. How? How could this be? He encounters one of the servants, probably one of those who left the banquet room to go find a piece of firewood or a bottle of wine. He calls him and asks what is happening? We must recognize that this servant is not a great psychologist or a diplomat. He responds quickly: ***"Your brother has come, and your father has killed the fattened calf because he has received him back safe and sound."*** He did not want to say it was because he recovered him alive.

"But he became angry and was not willing to go in." Then the Gospel does not tell us anything else, but it is necessary to provide the missing words. The servant came to the house, went to the father, bowed, whispered to his ear and said, "You know that your eldest son is really the utmost." In his joy, the father had forgotten that he had an older son. And it happens that he does not want to enter the house. He is furious. If it were I speaking, instead of the father, I would have told the servant, "Listen, you will go and look for him and tell him that if he is jealous, like a twelve-year-old child, he should just stay where he is." But that is not what our Father would say.

"And his father came out and began pleading with him." The father begged the son, which really is not reasonable, but love is not reasonable. He begged to his irritated and angry older son. ***"But he answered and said to his father, 'Look! For so many years I have been serving you and I have never neglected a command of yours.'"*** It does not

matter who this eldest son was. He believed his position was really "just". He had been a virtuous man and for this the father never gave him anything to celebrate with his friends. He gets belligerent with his father, **"but when this son of yours came, who has devoured your wealth with prostitutes."** He is not aware, but he is also humiliating his brother. He also tells his father, "that son of yours". He does not even say: "my brother". He does not want to have anything to do with his brother. With great anger, he says, **"you killed the fattened calf for him!"**

But then the father, almost insulted by his eldest son, says "my son", almost the same words used by the Virgin Mary when she meets Jesus in the temple. This is how he speaks to this eldest son who has insulted him and who shows no contrition, but who has a bitter loyalty to the father.

"Son, you have always been with me." This father seems naive because he considers it to be the supreme happiness of a son to be always with his father. Here, Christ wants to tell us about the happiness of men to be with God, to share the life of God.

"You have always been with me, and all that is mine is yours." That was something I had never suspected. This verse speaks to us of a God in relation to men, of God who wants us to know his intention to offer us all his riches. **"But we had to celebrate and rejoice, for this brother of yours was dead and has begun to live, and was lost and has been found."**

We have the feeling that the eldest son maintains his bitter and hostile attitude. It does not change and it's over. But no, the story is not over. There is still the final point that tells us many things. Only this small and simple point: The rest of the story questions, "What became of the eldest son? Did he return to the banquet hall?" We do not know. The parable is truncated, mutilated, but full of meaning. And to understand this final point, one should think that at Jesus' public hearings there were not only good people listening. All these men and women, who had the joy of listening to Jesus, seem to be very simple people, people of the town, but there were also scribes, Pharisees, wrapped in their virtuous dignity, who tried to trap Jesus, who did not forgive "His impiety", because Jesus was considered ungodly as he sat at the table with sinners. A story like this could only have a not so happy ending.

Jesus speaks. If there is an endpoint, we do not know, the probabilities are not assured. For Jesus, the eldest son represents the Pharisees and Jesus does not decide if the eldest son came back or stayed outside. But we know the story! Oh! The Pharisees did not return to the banquet hall!

BIANCA AND ANTONIO'S TESTIMONY **PART 7**

Bianca and Antonio. Our son changed. His new life was free from drugs. He was healed, mostly from the wounds that led him to that life in the first place. He became an ally of

the Blessed Sacrament. In it God found his greatest benefactor. He established a relationship with God and affirmed that it was God who gave him the idea to get involved in the work that he does with drug rehabilitation. Today he is a mature, useful, and productive person who feels good about himself. He has managed to contribute to our family psychologically, materially, and spiritually. His inner light is already visible. We know that there is more to shine, but we believe that by persevering in prayer, our son will be a faithful apostle of the Lord. If it is God's will, he will continue with his daily healing. It is true that it took quite a while for his brothers to believe that his recovery was real. Although they were happy about their brother's transformation, they fear that he will fail again.

Bianca. We went through a lengthy process with a great deal of therapy that included all of the family. We knew it was very difficult for all our children. They were enduring a lot. I remember a very painful moment when I came to realize that one of them, perhaps the one who most wanted to understand all this drama, had fallen into despair. He had the overwhelmingly sad belief that his older brother would never change. I remember my pain when I heard his words during a family therapy meeting in front of all his siblings.

MARIO AND MARITZA'S TESTIMONY **PART 7**

Mario. The joy of receiving the forgiveness and mercy of God through my wife and daughters had its complicated moments. There were people who reprimanded Maritza over and over about how she could possibly return to a man who had cheated on her and left her and her daughters for another woman. They told her that I did not deserve forgiveness. They told her again and again that she was making a mistake.

The return home was not easy at all. At the beginning it was very difficult to regain confidence, and sometimes it was very painful. It was logical for things to be this way. Our lives had been broken. We had not had a relationship of many years. But I was not alone; I had the help of God. With prayer and with a good deal of humility, we finally worked things out. I went through a time with many questions. There were many moments filled with bad memories and crying.

Maritza. It was not easy for me to tell my husband to come back. I had my friends and family against me. They had stood by my side when I went through so much pain, and they could not understand how I could make the decision to forgive him and start over. They told me that he was going to betray me again. They even warned me that if I returned with Mario, I could not count on their support. They informed me that they would never again allow him to go to their homes and that they would never talk to him again. There were so many people that went on and on about how bad he was.

I decided to move on to rebuild our marriage. Trusting in God I prayed, "I believe in you and I trust in you. Help me to be happy together with my husband and daughters, for as long as you want." I told God that I would accept whatever He wanted to give me. But I needed to heal my heart to be able to forgive him. Every time doubts came to me, I

would squeeze my heart with my hand and say to the Lord, "Heal me, heal me!" And so he did.

Other recommended readings can be found in Annex 7

4. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE COUPLE REFLECTION/SIT DOWN

Do I recognize myself as capable of having the merciful attitude of the Father?

What can we do to achieve the merciful attitude of the Father?

Do I identify with some of the attitudes of the older son?

What virtues do we need in our conjugal life?

5. THE TEAM MEETING

A. - GENERAL SHARING

After agreeing to do so, we invite couples to share an episode in your lives involving justice and mercy. This could have occurred within the marriage or outside of it.

B- PRAYER TIME

READING OF THE WORD: PROCLAMATION.

Matthew 20:1-16

"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out at dawn to hire laborers for his vineyard. After agreeing with them for the usual daily wage, he sent them into his vineyard. Going out about nine o'clock, he saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and he said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard, and I will give you what is just. So they went off. [And] he went out again around noon, and around three o'clock, and did likewise. Going out about five o'clock, he found others standing around, and said to them, 'Why do you stand here idly all day?' They answered, 'Because no one has hired us.' He said to them, 'You too go into my vineyard.' When it was evening, the owner of the vineyard said to his foreman, 'Summon the laborers and give them their pay, beginning with the last and ending with the first.' When those who had started about five o'clock came, each received the usual daily wage. So when the first came, they thought that they would receive more, but each of them also got the usual wage. And on receiving it, they grumbled against the landowner, saying, 'These last ones worked only one hour, and you have made them equal to us, who bore the day's burden and the heat.' He said to one of them in reply, 'My friend, I am not cheating you. Did you not agree with me for the usual daily wage? Take what is yours and go. What if I*

wish to give this last one the same as you? Am I not free to do as I wish with my own money? Are you envious because I am generous?' Thus, the last will be first, and the first will be last."

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE WORD

After reading the Word, we invite you to take a few minutes of silence to meditate and then freely share what the Lord has spoken to you, how he challenges you and how it affects our lives. We recommend focusing on justice and mercy.

INTENTIONS: COMMUNITY PRAYER

A cross is passed so that each person will have a turn to pray.

We propose that each participating couple make a brief prayer. It can be done according to personal needs or by choosing a segment of the biblical passage. At each request that is freely made, we will respond: "Lord, hear to our prayer."

LITURGICAL PRAYER

Psalm 51: 3-17

R / In your mercy, Lord, have mercy on me.

Have mercy on me, God, in accord with your merciful love; in your abundant compassion blot out my transgressions.

Thoroughly wash away my guilt; and from my sin cleanse me. R/.

For I know my transgressions;

my sin is always before me.

Against you, you alone have I sinned; R/.

I have done what is evil in your eyes

So that you are just in your word,

and without reproach in your judgment. R/.

Behold, I was born in guilt,

in sin my mother conceived me.

Behold, you desire true sincerity;

and secretly you teach me wisdom. R/.

Cleanse me with hyssop, that I may be pure;

*wash me, and I will be whiter than snow.
You will let me hear gladness and joy;
the bones you have crushed will rejoice. R/.*

*Turn away your face from my sins;
blot out all my iniquities.
A clean heart create for me, God;
renew within me a steadfast spirit.
Do not drive me from before your face,
nor take from me your holy spirit. R/.*

*Restore to me the gladness of your salvation;
uphold me with a willing spirit.
I will teach the wicked your ways,
that sinners may return to you. R/.*

*Rescue me from violent bloodshed, God, my saving God,
and my tongue will sing joyfully of your justice.
Lord, you will open my lips;
and my mouth will proclaim your praise. R/.*

C.- THE ENDEAVORS: PARTICIPATION

A spiritual retreat would be a great time to reflect on the injustices that we have experienced in our lives, both individually and in our marriages. If a retreat is not possible, focus on personal and conjugal prayer, along with the rule of life, as alternatives. Let us open our hearts to share the feelings that we have realized that we hold within with our teammates.

D. - QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION ON THE STUDY TOPIC

To be able to have the merciful attitude of God in spite of the difficulties that come our way in life, seems at first very difficult to fulfill, but as Christians in search of truth and good, it motivates us to seek Him and listen to Him in order to act like Him. Then we question ourselves:

If I cannot be merciful, is it because of lack of faith?

What virtues are we missing or in which are we weak? How can we strengthen them to become more merciful?

Given the faults of our spouse, does human justice or mercy prevail?

F. - FINAL PRAYERS:

FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL AND THE
MAGNIFICAT

ANNEX 7**OTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS**

TAKEN FROM THE CATECHESIS OF POPE FRANCIS ON PERFECT JUSTICE AND INFINITE
MERCY. FEBRUARY 3, 2016. ZENIT.ORG

ENCYCLICAL LETTER DIVES IN MERCY OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF JOHN PAUL II ON DIVINE
MERCY. NOVEMBER 30, 1980. NUMERAL 5, 5º PARAGRAPH.

ENCYCLICAL LETTER DIVES IN MERCY OF THE SUPREME PONTIFF JOHN PAUL II ON DIVINE
MERCY. NOVEMBER 30, 1980. NUMERAL 4, 11th PARAGRAPH .

JOACHIM JEREMÍAS. ABBA AND THE CENTRAL MESSAGE OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.
BIBLICAL STUDIES LIBRARY. EDICIONES CRISTIANDAD, 1977.

**TEAMS OF OUR LADY
STUDY TOPIC 2018
RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE**

CHAPTER 8

THE JOY OF THE REUNION

1.- LISTENING TO THE WORD

“Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate; for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found. And they began to celebrate”(Luke 15: 23-24).

MEDITATION

Every festivity is synonymous with celebration. In this case, the passage demonstrates why this is true: ***“for this son of mine was dead and has come to life again; he was lost and has been found”***. How great must be his exultation that this father drops everything to have a huge extravagant celebration! And this overflowing happiness is the natural attitude of any father who finds a son who had been hopelessly lost, even dead! What better way to proclaim his overflowing joy than through inviting all his friends and family to share his delight? The gospel relates joy and happiness with hope because happiness is the fruit of joy, and joy is the fruit of hope. ***“ May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, so that you may abound in hope by the power of the Holy Spirit”*** (Romans 15:13).

Hope is truly the mother of the word " await ", for, as any new mother will tell us, it communicates the great desire and limitless trust that that beautiful arrival will come. Surely, in this narrative, the father intimately understood this. Surely, deep in his heart there was an overwhelming hope and all-powerful faith that was sustained within him year after year. This hope gives him the strength to wait, to keep alive the dream that his son will return. ***“Rejoice in hope, endure in affliction, persevere in prayer”*** (Romans 12: 12).

When we begin with a bed rock of faith, hope survives. It never fails. We have the knowledge that true love never abandons or fails us. Thus, with the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, infused by the Holy Spirit, we may live filled with the possibility of enduring joy. For those who wait for the seemingly impossible, as the father does, there is the faith and hope that, sometime, once again, they will experience the joy of reunion.

In addition, the action of the Spirit of God is manifested through its fruits. One of these is joy, which commits us to be its bearers and to be witnesses at all times of our lives. This is especially true within the family. These fruits are mentioned in Galatians 5: 22-23: ***“In contrast, the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”***

2. - INTRODUCTION TO THE CHAPTER AND ELEMENTS FOR REFLECTION

The objective of this chapter is to motivate us to live the joy of reunion fully. To do so effectively, we must always celebrate the joy of return, fully experiencing the feeling of welcome. In addition, to better reap the possibilities of happiness within a meeting with others, we must have an understanding of the value of repentance and of the conquest of conversion. Bringing with us the peace of forgiveness and the grace of mercy, our unions with others are richer, and it is possible to live new lives filled with true freedom, in which we can fully celebrate love.

“Joy is a natural movement of the soul that is known to possess goods. According to the assets that are possessed, so will be the joy they produce. There is a joy that comes from satisfying elementary needs such as eating or drinking. Another that occurs when we are given a gift or we acquire a material good: a house, a car, when we get paid for a job, when they raise our salary, etc. But none is as strong and as elevated as that produced by love: knowing oneself loved and understood. Love is the greatest good that man can possess. That's why love is what produces most joy.

“And within love, the most stable, the firmest, the most faithful and the most powerful is the love of God. We Christians know we are loved by God, who treats us as his children. For this reason, joy is the natural tone of Christian life: joy is the necessary consequence of divine filiation, of knowing that we are loved with predilection by God our Father, who welcomes us, helps us and forgives us. If we feel as the favorite children of our Father in heaven, which we are! How can we not always be joyful? Think about it ”.⁵

Within conjugal life, at times there are eventual situations when life's circumstances and our individual dispositions lead to strained relationships. At other times, joy and happiness seem to prevail. However, there are relationships in which disappointment and anger seem to be the inherent characteristics of the union. On the other hand, there are, of course, relationships that are filled with contentment. Whatever the condition of our marriage, it is wise for us as couples to stop to assess and to determine the state of our relationship with our spouse in order to evaluate and better understand it. It is true that in most of our relationships, we are able to identify certain predominant characteristics or personalities that are manifested by us and by our spouses. Although we can sometimes correlate particular individual personalities with corresponding

⁵ Juan Luis Lorda- "To Be a Christian". Fourteenth edition. Ediciones Rialp, S.A. Theme · 10 " La Alegría " pages. 109 to 111.

qualities or dispositions that seem to characterize the relationship, blaming the individual personality on the mood of the relationship is not feasible. Life brings with it many complexities that may be challenging to marriages, and the atmosphere of the conjugal union may reflect this. Illness, difficulties with children, loss of work, etc. are just a few of the many difficulties that we may face in marriage. It is only fair to assess how these difficulties affect the relationship of the couple. However, it is also important to regard our actions and behaviors in relation to our lives as Christians. As Christians, have we allowed attitudes, qualities, and behaviors that are characteristically not Christian-like to infiltrate and undermine our integrity as individuals and as partners in our marriage? It is wise to take time from our busy lives to evaluate this, for we cannot improve a problem unless we first identify that the problem exists. If we recognize qualities and characteristics that we find troublesome, we must take responsibility to take the action necessary to improve them. If our marriage lacks joy, we must be open to recognize this. If we focus predominantly on problems such as lack of respect and failure to demonstrate love, we must recognize it. If arguments constantly arrive over unresolved resentments; lack of understanding; and feelings of abandonment, loneliness, lack of love, etc., it is time to consider why these attitudes prevail and what we can do to improve the situation.

Our study of the wonderful parable of the prodigal son must be viewed as a gift of grace from God. We have been invited to recognize and understand the characteristics of God's unending, unquestioning, ever-present love for us. As couples, within that love, we can find answers to complex difficulties and situations within our family surroundings.

Finally, we are called to remain faithful to the love of God by living according to two specific commandments that the Lord left us: ***"The first is this: 'Hear, O Israel! The Lord our God is Lord alone! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength.' The second is this: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' There is no other commandment greater than these"*** (Mark 12: 29-31).

However, so often as human beings full of sin and weakness, we may find ourselves questioning our ability to love as completely as God charges us. In our human nature, weakened by original sin, this may seem very difficult to achieve. However, experience demonstrates that this can be done. We can always strive to live with these commandments in mind. We may look to the lives of Jesus and the saints that provide us with the knowledge, determination, and perseverance to live lives full of love. By calling on their guidance, we, as Christians, can participate in the joy of the Kingdom of God and become missionaries to fulfill his plan that we will all be saved. ***"I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance"*** (Luke 15:7).

In a conjugal marriage there is no better testimony to God than to live a joyful, happy Christian marriage. We have the power to develop such a marriage by living as Christ taught us on a day-to-day basis. It is important to develop attitudes that free us from judging our partner. We must always remember that our spouse is the person with whom we walk together hand-in-hand through life, so we must treat them with great respect

and unconditional love. We must celebrate their joys and share in their sorrows. We must turn from sins, and strive to serve God each and every day, placing Him in the center of our marriage, and love our spouse as we love ourselves. We must strive always to find joy in our spouse's presence; and when we are separated from one another, we, like the father, must find joy in their return. Within our heart we must hold the knowledge that we are God's blessed children whom he never stops loving.

3- REFLECTION DOCUMENTS

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL ON "THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON," "L'ENFANT PRODIGUE."

PART 8

*And the servants want to leave, go back to the field to work. The father stops them and asks them to " **bring the fattened calf** ". This may not mean anything to readers of the twentieth century (today, the twenty-first) and city dwellers. But we should know that, on a farm in Palestine at that time, the fattened calf was a great character. It was destined for the next big celebration, for example, the marriage of the eldest son. This is why the servants feel this request is a sacrilege: to kill the fattened calf for this young man?*

***"Bring the fattened calf, kill it, and let us eat and celebrate."** What is the idea of a celebration? The father will invite flutists, tambourine players and will offer a great banquet, but do not get me wrong. The celebration is not the kind of festivity that takes place outdoors. The celebration, in this case, is in the heart of the father. And it is because in his heart there is a celebration that he wants the whole house to become a celebration in which everyone will rejoice with him. This is to show us how God welcomes a sinner. "There is more joy in heaven for a returning sinner," Christ said in another passage.*

A rabbi once told the following story: "I want to make you understand that, through sin, man cuts the link that connects him with God. But when the man repents and returns to God, the latter takes the two ends of the tie and makes a knot to have the sinner tied; but the interesting thing is that as you tie a knot, you shorten the rope. This is done so that the sinner is closer to God after his sin than before his sin. If we have committed many sins, then we have a real rope of knots to go to God. Sounds logical. As the servants are so confused, the father gives them an explanation: "Because my son was dead and revived..." He wants to say emphatically: "He was dead, he was dead..." He was not in good condition, that was for sure. Because of sin, he is considered a dead man. It is as if Christ forgot the symbolism and the parable, to tell us about reality. In fact, a sinner is a dead man. A body without a soul is a corpse, but a body and a soul without the Holy Spirit is a dead person, a spiritual corpse. He was lost, he was found, and then they began to celebrate. "

BIANCA AND ANTONIO'S TESTIMONY

PART 8

Bianca and Antonio. When our son left his addiction behind, his brothers and we were also different. We started a new family life with this son who had been reborn to a new life.

We believe that after this experience, our son will be able to explain what it means to live in love. We can do the same. The Lord gave us this opportunity. We live with the expectation that God has plans for him. We trust that God will be merciful, as he always has been on this loving journey.

After a while, a man of God contacted us. He proposed to us that we join in some solidarity projects to assist a particularly vulnerable sector. Later, we discovered that the actual, wonderful project for which God had called us was our own son. The most vulnerable thing in our lives that was our greatest priority at the time was our son. This wise man led our son back to God, the Father's House. Our son lived through a profound healing experience. He met God. He understood his own wounds and was able to work to heal them. For us this was a time of waiting. We waited to see what the next step was that we had to take together. We had to continue this dynamic journey that seemed to have already come to an end

We never stopped doing things to try to help him. When we waited in silence because of his absence, we felt this was part of a freedom that somehow he needed. Our son was using this freedom, although it hurt us terribly. We kept praying tirelessly. Prayer was our source of tranquility that enabled us to find new resources to help him and to restart our efforts to save our son. During those months of absence, we recharged our souls so that we were able to start over again and again.

We understood that our life was not a tragic melodrama. It was a life full of blessings; but this pain was part of it. We both knew it. God never got tired of showing us how much He loved us. Now we understand that our lives would not be the same today if we had not lived through this experience. We began to understand that there was a connection between the suffering that we lived and our acceptance of the decisions our son made again and again. We began to understand the transforming power that suffering allows. We allowed ourselves to live in it. We even began to find a kind of joy in the good that we were doing for our family. We tried to incorporate it within our lives with the greatest joy that the Holy Spirit allowed us.

We never lost hope. We began to think of our son as "great". God had to have designed this plan for him to live through *via crucis*. Maybe God had put us all through these difficult times to learn the greatest lesson of our lives: to love unconditionally. God had done all this out of love. We are all better people today for having lived through these hardships.

MARIO AND MARITZA'S TESTIMONY
PART 8

Mario and Maritza. Actually, God our Father is and has been wonderful with us. He loves us so much that he was happy to bring us back together. Our difficulties helped us to grow as a couple, as a family, and as Christians

We are completely sure that to God accomplished all this. He surrounded us with so many people who did not abandon us. They prayed for us, fasted, and did anything they could think of to help us. The Lord listened to everything, and His will was done. He celebrated a great feast with us and for us.

Today we see ourselves to be like the phoenix that rose from the ashes and took flight. Today we give testimony and help many people who are experiencing similar difficulties of our own. We have dedicated our lives to the service of Teams of Our Lady, to the service of the Church, and to the service of marriages.

Our daughters also lived through the pain of separation and then the wonderful experience of conversion and forgiveness between us. When they made the decision to marry, they did so in the Catholic Church, trusting in the grace of the Sacrament of Marriage, as a gift from God.

Today, we have an understanding that problems must be resolved. When problems arise, we cannot ignore them. Married couples must work have good communication. This is so important! There must be respect, humility, and above all, a lot of love. These things have brought us the happiness that we have today.

Other recommended readings can be found in Annex 8

4. QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE COUPLE REFLECTION/SIT DOWN

Have we celebrated a reconciliation?

When we have moments of sadness, are we able to discern what is at the root of these feelings?

Do we consider our spouse optimistic and cheerful?

For us, where does true joy come from?

5. THE TEAM MEETING

A. - GENERAL SHARING

Since this chapter invites us to celebrate reunions, we invite couples to share about any life situation within the marriage or in family life that involves joy. (Couples must have agreed to do so prior to the meeting.)

B. - PRAYER TIME

THE WORD OF THE LORD: PROCLAMATION.

Luke 15:4-10

“What man among you having a hundred sheep and losing one of them would not leave the ninety-nine in the desert and go after the lost one until he finds it? And when he does find it, he sets it on his shoulders with great joy and, upon his arrival home, he calls together his friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found my lost sheep.’ I tell you, in just the same way there will be more joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine righteous people who have no need of repentance.”

“Or what woman having ten coins and losing one would not light a lamp and sweep the house, searching carefully until she finds it? And when she does find it, she calls together her friends and neighbors and says to them, ‘Rejoice with me because I have found the coin that I lost.’ In just the same way, I tell you, there will be rejoicing among the angels of God over one sinner who repents.”

PERSONAL REFLECTION ON THE WORD

After reading the Word, we invite you to take a few minutes of silence to meditate and then freely share what the Lord has spoken to you, how he challenges you and how it affects your lives.

INTENTIONS: COMMUNITY PRAYER

A cross is passed around so that each person has an opportunity to pray.

We propose that each participating couple make a brief prayer. It can be done according to personal needs or by choosing a segment of the biblical passage. At each request that is freely made, we will respond: "Lord, hear to our prayer."

LITURGICAL PRAYER

Psalm 126:1-6

R / The Lord has done great things for us.

When the LORD restored the captives of Zion,

*we thought we were dreaming.
Then our mouths were filled with laughter;
our tongues sang for joy. R/.*

*Then it was said among the nations,
"The LORD had done great things for them."
The LORD has done great things for us;
Oh, how happy we were! R/.*

*Restore our captives, LORD,
like the dry stream beds of the Negeb.
Those who sow in tears
will reap with cries of joy. R/.*

*Those who go forth weeping,
carrying sacks of seed,
Will return with cries of joy,
carrying their bundled sheaves. R/.*

C.-ENDEAVORS: PARTICIPATION

The content and objective of this chapter invites us to carry out a conjugal dialogue during the month, accompanied by personal and conjugal prayer. As a result we must be able to implement the rules of life that will help us be joyful and live a happy marriage. We invite couples to be generous and share their feelings, within the meeting.

D. - QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY TOPIC

How do we experience the joy of reconciliation?

How do the fruits of the Holy Spirit compromise our lives?

F. - FINAL PRAYERS:

FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL AND THE
MAGNIFICAT

ANNEX 8
OTHER RECOMMENDED READINGS

APOSTOLIC EXHORTATION POSTSINODAL AMORIS LAETITIA. ABOUT LOVE IN THE FAMILY.
POPE FRANCISCO. 2016

EXCERPT FROM HENRY J. M. NOUWEN. THE RETURN OF THE PRODIGAL SON. PPC,
EDITORIAL Y DISTRIBUIDORA, SA. MADRID, 2011, PAGES 121 A 125.

EXCERPT FROM JUAN LUIS LORDA. " TO BE CHRISTIAN ". EDICIONES RIALP, S.A., 1991.
PAGS 110 AND 111.

TEAMS OF OUR LADY
STUDY TOPIC 2018
RECONCILIATION, SIGN OF LOVE

CHAPTER 9

MEETING EVALUATION

OBJECTIVE

You should have an evaluation within the team, in light of this study topic, reflecting on each one of the verses of the parable. You should consider the influence they have had within your life, reflecting on the specific things this great lesson of the “Merciful Father” has taught you. We should all keep in mind that we must be ever mindful of our obligation to imitate this Father, which is a reflection of God’s love.

INTRODUCTION

“Be merciful, just as [also] your Father is merciful. Stop judging and you will not be judged. Stop condemning and you will not be condemned. Forgive and you will be forgiven” (Luke 6: 36-37).

While studying this theme, our feelings sometimes were closer to the experience lived by the youngest son, and in other reflections, to the attitude demonstrated by the eldest son. Nevertheless, the difficult part was to identify with the father and his primary attitude: mercy.

At the end of our lives, we will be judged on the love and mercy that we have shown to others during our lives. The parable of the prodigal son leads us to acknowledge the greatness of the merciful father and his unquestioning forgiveness of his sons. Without question, he was ready to bestow forgiveness deeply rooted in love to both of his sons. His love allowed him to forgive both his hedonistic younger son and his proud older son. Despite the mistakes that the sons made, the father was able to show the sons love without condition. We can only hope that the sons go from forgiven sinners to merciful Christians. ***“And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors”*** (Matthew 6:12).

This parable calls us to become the father who loves, forgives, welcomes and returns lost dignity. We must strive to be the image of God on earth as we are asked to be holy as God our Father is Holy. ***“So be perfect, just as your heavenly Father is perfect”*** (Matthew 5:48). This sanctification is only achieved by loving *“misericordando”*⁶ from a converted heart that has experienced this closeness to the Father. Jesus extends an invitation to sinners to turn their hearts toward love and mercy.

The study topic we have reviewed throughout this year shows us that mercy and love are inseparable. God continually manifests his love by showing us his infinite mercy⁷. This is very clearly expressed by Father Manuel Iceta in his book, Love, Who Are You? He defines love for us: *“Love is the ability to cope with the miseries of the other ... The feelings and sensations that are awakened when discovering the wounds and weaknesses of the other, could be recapped in one word: mercy. ”*

LISTENING TO THE WORD

⁶ Papa Francisco (being merciful).

⁷ Ephesians 2: 4 “But God, who is rich in mercy, because of the great love he had for us”.

" While he was at table in his house, many tax collectors and sinners came and sat with Jesus and his disciples. The Pharisees saw this and said to his disciples, 'Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?' He heard this and said, 'Those who are well do not need a physician, but the sick do. Go and learn the meaning of the words 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' I did not come to call the righteous, but sinners'" (Matthew 9:10-13).

After reading the Word, we invite you to take a few minutes of silence to meditate and then freely share what the Lord has spoken to you through his words. Following this meditation, we invite each participating couple to make a brief prayer of petition, thanksgiving and/or praise.

MEDITATION

Matthew's words tell us what happens just after his own conversion as he accepts Jesus' call to follow him. We can say this is an example of a day in the public life of Jesus: welcoming and meeting with the "excluded" and the "different"; evangelizing every moment with his Words; and, above all, teaching the multitudes through his actions. His words and actions are often direct contradictions of what is accepted by supporters of the "status quo" and by those who follow the law based only on their own interpretations of it. Most important is the way He carries out every action and speaks every word with a clear mission: to convert sinners and lead them to His Father.

If we are Christians, it is because we are followers of Jesus. We have made His Word, His Gospel, our own. We live according to his message each and every day. We are called to bear witness to his saving graces through our words and actions. Our lives must be a testimony of the great mercy and love that God has freely offered to us. At times, the path on which He leads us may seem difficult to follow. But the rewards for following are too great to ignore. We must commit to always traveling by His side throughout our lives. We must always faithfully remember his teachings, especially the "greatest of all the commandments": "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind and with all your strength. ... And you shall love your neighbor as yourself"(Mark 12: 30-31). There is nothing greater than love. It is the foundation for the solution to every problem in life. Jesus teaches us: "***As I have loved you, so you also should love one another***"(John 13: 34).

REFLECTION DOCUMENTS

EXCERPT FROM THE HOMILY OF FATHER HENRI CAFFAREL ON "THE PARABLE OF THE PRODIGAL SON," "L'ENFANT PRODIGUE".

"And felt compassion for him."

What is compassion? The best definition of compassion I cannot find in my dictionary, but in the letter from Madame de Sévigné to her daughter, who had bronchitis. I find

compassion as she exclaims, "My daughter, I have chest pains" because of your illness. That is compassion. The pain of the other hurts me. The Father in the parable of the Prodigal Son grieves because of the evil deeds of his son, and Christ wants us to understand that Almighty God, the Father of Mercy, is painfully ill because of the evil deeds of his sinful son. In the eyes of God, this young sinner is wounded before the God's eyes. The son has willingly brought the pain of sin to himself, and that is what God finds unbearable. He shares the pain of his son.

To this boy, we'll give the most beautiful dress in our wardrobe. And that is not reasonable. But love is not reasonable. This gesture is to speak to us about our Father in Heaven, welcoming a sinner.

I also think, I'm sure, that the youngest son is upset with himself because the love of his father, which he had never suspected, becomes evident; the festive events are necessary for him to discover how much he is loved. He has a true revelation of love the day he is welcomed back. This is our story; it is the day we come to God with our poor sins and God forgives us. This is the greatness of the sacrament of reconciliation ...I have seen people upset with themselves who do not dare to believe that after terrible sins, they can still be beloved children ... The son discovers his father's love, the unimaginable love of his father. And as a result, he never felt so special; he never felt so close to his father!

I would like to point out, in conclusion, that the youngest and the eldest son, have indifferent feelings toward their father and God. Both are sinners; each, in his own way, has committed the same sin. Both have an inaccurate idea of their father's love. And that is a very serious sin. I understood it one day when I opened the door of my office in Paris and found myself in the presence of a woman who I almost did not recognize because her face was devastated by pain. She came in and sat in the chair in front of me. This may have been the only time in my life when I saw someone tell the truth with so much pain: her throat was so tense that she could not speak. Then she handed me a letter from inside her purse. I looked at the letter. I looked at the signature. It was from her daughter Helen, and I read, "Mama, when you find this letter it will be midnight, maybe two in the morning in my room. I know by this time I will be at the bottom of the canal. I committed an unforgivable sin. Bye, Mom."

This woman was deeply hurt. She made me understand what I would not have guessed by myself. What troubled her deeply was to realize that her daughter Helen had such a small idea of her mother's heart. How could she imagine that in her Mother's eyes she could ever have been seen as **unforgivable**? How could her child ever think that her own mother would close the door to the love in her heart? That's what hurt this woman.

Well, I think that one of the most serious sins we can commit against God is not to realize how great the love is for us in his heart. The younger son had no real idea of the love in his father's heart. He thought that his father would only accept him as a servant. The elder brother, on the other hand, did not dare to ask the Father about the younger brother. He also had no true idea of the father's heart.

Having a small idea of the heart of God is precisely what offends the heart of our Holy Father . To have a real idea of the overwhelming love of God for us within His heart during our ordinary days that are filled with sin, allows us to be able to glorify God. We must ask ourselves from time to time: do I have a true idea of the love in God's heart? Of His fatherly love? Of His mercy?

This is what Christ wants us to understand. He hopes for each one of us, as we read this parable again, to share with awe His unimaginable great love! I firmly believe that there can be no greater joy for Christ and the Father than for us to have an idea of his great love.

QUESTIONS TO GUIDE THE EVALUATION MEETING AS COUPLES AND TEAM

We invite you to have a sit-down, first as individual couples, and then as a team at your monthly meeting. This will help you to evaluate the path you have traveled during this year, in light of this study topic. This will further enable all of you to participate in one of the important activities within the Life of the Team and the Movement.

Let us ask the Holy Spirit to open our hearts and our minds, as we look back, so that we can make decisions that will help us to live within the sacrament of marriage more effectively. This will also help us to strengthen our Team in the future.

During this part of the evaluation, we want to emphasize, as our Movement has been proposing, that we set in motion our mission within the Church, with the help of Jesus and Mary, our mother, to strengthen the sacrament of marriage.

1. If we have learned to accept one another, do we accept one another with love, allowing the other the freedom to make his own decisions and, perhaps, to make his own, mistakes?
2. If we are aware of the gifts received from God, do we use mutual help to offer these gifts to the service of the team, to other married couples and to the Church?
3. If we have faith in the power of personal, conjugal and team prayer, especially in times of crisis, how have we practiced it? How has the power of prayer been manifested? Do we pray for marriages? Do we pray with faith?
4. If we consider that one of the most difficult endeavors is conjugal dialogue or the sit down, do we set clear goals and prepare ourselves well in order to have the best results possible? Do we set rules of life for ourselves and for our marriage?

5. If we recognize that we have been forgiven by God and have learned to ask for forgiveness and to forgive, are we able to carry this message of mercy to other people and couples who are experiencing difficulties?
6. Are we really convinced that there is no love without mercy?
7. What has it meant for us, as a couple and as team members, to read this study topic?

FINAL PRAYER

Prayer to Our Lady of Fatima

Oh, Most Holy Virgin, you appeared repeatedly to the little children; I would also like to see you, hear your voice and tell you, my Mother, to take me to heaven. Trusting in your love, I ask you to obtain for me, through your Son Jesus, a living faith, intelligence to know Him and love Him, patience and grace to serve Him, and to one day join you in heaven. Amen.

PRAYER FOR THE BEATIFICATION OF THE SERVANT OF GOD, HENRI CAFFAREL

God, our Father,
 You planted deep in the heart of your servant, Henri Caffarel,
 A fountain of love, which bound him totally to your Son
 And inspired him with a wonderful capacity to speak of Him.

A prophet for our time,
 He revealed the dignity and beauty of the vocation of every person
 In the words Jesus addresses to each of us: "Come follow me."

He made couples enthusiastic about the greatness of the sacrament of marriage,
 The sign of Christ's fruitful love for the Church and of His union with her.

He showed that priests and couples
 Are called to live a vocation of love.

He was a guide to widows: love is stronger than death.
 Prompted by the Holy Spirit,
 He accompanied many Christians on the path of prayer.
 Seized by a devouring fire, he was a dwelling place for you, Lord.

God, our Father,
 Through the intercession of Our Lady,
 We ask you to hasten the day
 When the Church will proclaim the holiness of his life,
 So, that people everywhere will discover the joy of following your Son
 In accordance with their particular vocations in the Holy Spirit.

God our Father, we invoke the intercession of Father Caffarel for.....
 (Indicate the particular favor being sought)

Prayer approved by Monsignor Andre Vingt-Trois – Archbishop of Paris. "Nihil obstat": 4th January 2006 –
 "Imprimatur": 5th January 2006. In the case of a particular favor obtained through the intercession of
 Father Caffarel, contact: The Postulator, Association "Les Amis du Père Caffarel" 49 rue de la Glacière – F
 75013 PARIS

MAGNIFICAT

"My soul proclaims the greatness of the Lord,
And my spirit exults in God, my Savior,
Because He has looked upon His lowly handmaid.

Yes, from this day forward,
All generations will call me blessed,
For the Almighty has done great things for me.

Holy is His name,
And His mercy reaches from age to age
For those who fear Him.

He has shown the power of His arm,
He has routed the proud of heart.

He has pulled down princes from their thrones
And exulted the lowly.

The hungry He has filled with good things,
The rich sent empty away.

He has come to the help of Israel, His servant,
Mindful of His mercy
according to the promise He made to our ancestors -
Of His mercy to Abraham and to His descendants forever."

Our Lady, Queen of Teams
Pray for us!