

"Discover your Vocation"

Vocations According to Father Caffarel

Man's vocation is succinctly defined in paragraph 1699 of The Catechism of the Catholic Church, *"Life in the Holy Spirit fulfils the vocation of man. This life is made up of divine charity and human solidarity. It is graciously offered as salvation."*

But as with many definitions, the most concise ones are very often the ones that require the most commitment... and here, this is the case!

Man, with all the weight of his sin, assumes his creation in the image and resemblance of his creator by living fully in the Holy Spirit. This Spirit of God is given to him as a grace by Christ himself in the revelation that he made to us of his Father. It is in this revelation of the mystery and Love of the Father that Christ will call each one of us to our own true vocation. This vocation, unique and specific to each person, enables us to discover our true creator by adhering to Him to reach full and blessed perfection.

The discovery of our personal vocation responds to a true desire for happiness as well as simultaneously to a deep adhesion to Christian Beatitudes. It implies each person's freedom and responsibility in the full and complete exercise of the vocation that is suggested to him by the Lord.

Our vocation impacts our states of life but in each of the latter, particular acts that constitute our global and human vocation. In this sense, Lord has given us numerous charismas that enable us to travel, throughout our live on earth, along the road towards holiness to which we are all called; and amongst these acts figure personal prayer and intercession.

May you be challenged, as Father Henri Caffarel was, by the necessary discovery of the particular vocation that the Lord gave us.

Gérard & Marie-Christine de Roberty

SPIRITUAL LETTER – Father Caffarel's Vocation

We all have heard the story that Father Caffarel told about his vocation, but it is useful to re-read it. *"At the age of twenty, Jesus Christ in an instant became someone for me! Oh! Nothing spectacular. On that faraway day of March (1923), I knew that I was loved and that I loved, and that from then on, between him and I, it would be for life."* He also said, *"From that day onwards, I had only wish: to enter into an even closer relationship with Christ, and this other wish to bring others along to that, because it was capital in my life. It gave me the joie de vivre, the grace to live, the impetus to live. And so, I could not but wish the same thing for others to experience this meeting with the living Christ, this discovery that God is love."* (cited by Jean Allemand, *Henri Caffarel, un homme saisi par Dieu*, p 14-15)

Father Caffarel's did not leave us too many confidences. Many priests of that time acted in this way: they wanted to step aside to leave all the space to God. However, these confidences are more numerous that we would have thought. When he spoke of others, Father Caffarel revealed his experience, his heart. They are in the story he gave us, they are in his words, they open us up to his soul. In these lines, he is complete present, but totally discrete, in order to leave the space to the Lord. Thus, in the first words of his book,

Présence à Dieu, Cent lettres sur la prière (p 11), “A sensation of distress seizes us when, upon our arrival in an unknown town, no one is there to meet us. On the contrary, if a joyful face welcomes us...” How can we not think of Father Caffarel’s (great) welcome in Brazil! But how can we not also think above all of his daily experience: in prayer, the Lord was waiting for him. And similarly, he connected with those who came to him: his first words spoken, with arms wide open, to those on retreat at Troussures were “*The Lord is waiting for you!*” Jesus is “*Someone for him,*” and he wishes that Lord also becomes someone for those on retreat. Everything has its beginning in that first experience of his vocation.

Another example of his very discrete manner of talking about his vocation is also to show the universal nature of God’s call. He wrote a very moving page on the Rich Young Man. “*Jesus looked at him and loved him.*” (*Présence à Dieu*, p. 37-39). “*Love and a look are intertwined. You need to look to love, but also you need to love to look truly.*” And Father Caffarel showed this, “*Nothing better than a look reveals love. A person who is looked at in such a way is not mistaken.*” Father Caffarel wrote about human love with great delicacy. But he never forgot that human love finds its fulfilment in God’s love that it incarnates. “*There is an even more admirable situation, when this look of love is a Christian’s, someone who in the light of Christ, discerns (...) the kind of love with which God loves us. I am certain that God would like for each person to encounter at least once in their lifetime such a look.*” For Father Caffarel that took place in March 1923. That was his vocation. Did he experience other encounters with God that were as strong? We do not know. However, it happens that when God becomes “*Someone*” for a person that this light is sufficient to impulse their whole life. This momentum will find its completion and fulfilment in heaven, in God’s presence and in the presence of the human brothers and sisters that we were given to love. Father Caffarel advanced in faith.

Paul-Dominique Marcovits, o.p.
Spiritual Counsellor to the Intercessors

What does Vocation mean

In the etymological sense, a vocation is a calling (from the Latin, *vocare*, to call). For a long time, it referred to a calling to commit to a consecrated religious life (priesthood, monastic life, etc.) The concept is rooted in the Bible and is correlated to the idea of listening. Today this word is used in a broader sense to designate a calling that people can feel for a particular mission: humanitarian, professional, spiritual, scientific, priestly, the consecrated life or married, etc.

Christian Churches have always called on vocations to ensure the spreading of the Word of God (contained in the Bible): pastors, deacons, priests, bishops, nuns, etc.

A vocation is understood as a divine calling: God himself kindles vocations through the prayers of the faithful. In this respect, vocations are seen to be close to a spiritual experience and can be linked to a spiritual awakening. In particular, perpetual adoration is conceived of as a means to awaken vocations.

Marriage, the family and baptism—**although these realities do not belong to the same category**—are also called vocations.

In the Christian faith, a vocation is a calling sent by God to a believer. The latter chooses to answer this call or not. Vocations in the plural designate the number of those who want to enter the consecrated life. It is important to understand the number of religious vocations in the world.

According to statistics published by the Vatican, the number of seminarians in the world has increased by 79.96% between 1978 and 2004, reaching approximately 116000 in 2009. This increase is mainly due to the African, American and Asian continents. Africa is the most dynamic continent in terms of vocations (+6% of seminarians in 2004). In Europe, the number of seminarians decreased between 1978 and 2004 by 2.15%.

This figure should be aligned with the increase in the number of Catholics (+45% in the world, again due to the same continents), parallel to the increase in the world population over the same period.

In the same time frame, the number of permanent deacons worldwide has increased from 5500 to 32000.

Between 2000 and 2008, the number of students and seminarians, diocesan and community based, has increased worldwide from 110583 to 117024, an increase of 5.8%.

Sources: Wikipedia & the Vatican website

THE CALL.... THE CHRISTIAN VOCATION ACCORDING TO POPE FRANCIS

"I would like to reflect on *the missionary dimension of our Christian calling*. Those who drawn by God's voice and determined to follow Jesus soon discover within themselves an irrepressible desire to bring the Good News to their brothers and sisters through proclamation and the service of charity. All Christians are called to be missionaries of the Gospel! As disciples, we do not receive the gift of God's love for our personal consolation, nor are we called to promote ourselves, or a business concern. We are simply men and women touched and transformed by the joy of God's love, who cannot keep this experience just to ourselves. For "the Gospel joy which enlivens the community of disciples is a missionary joy (*Evangelii Gaudium*, 21).

Commitment to mission is not something added on to the Christian life as a kind of decoration, but is instead an essential element of faith itself. A relationship with the Lord entails being sent out into the world as prophets of his word and witnesses of his love."

Message of his Holiness Pope Francis for the 54th World Day of Prayer for Vocations, May 7th, 2017

A CHRISTIAN'S VOCATION

The vocation of a Christian is primarily to exist as a Christian, but a Christian only receives their life within the people who make up God's family. Next, a Christian has a place within the people of God and when he understands that he ought to bear witness to God, he does not go alone towards others, he works and cooperates with the people who bear witness. He participates in the great testimonial that the people of God, God's Church, brings to men.

Father Caffarel's first speech in Brazil in 1972

THE MARRIED VOCATION OF JOSEPH & MARY, ACCORDING TO HENRI CAFFAREL

"In fact, another volume dedicated to couples will appear in a few weeks' time. It could only be written at the end of many long years of meditation on the married vocation and the mystery of prayer. The subject of the book is the two most holy people ever, Joseph and Mary and its title is *Take Mary home as your wife*. When I was working on it, someone said rather ironically, "*What could you ever say about them, about their married life that would not be purely imaginary?*" Big mistake. On the one hand, the Gospel, read through the lens of Mary and Joseph's union enables us to perceive admirable things. On the other

hand, one can say, unequivocally, that their love is the best known of any love. We can be sure, when we prolong our most pure impulse of love, of approaching somewhat their mutual dilection, not only because the impulse of their hearts was not restricted by any heaviness. But also, because each of them was led by love-charity and because what we can call the psychology of charity is known to us thanks to the New Testament writings and more particularly by the writings of St Paul and St John.”

Rémy Montour’s Interview with Father Henri Caffarel, 1983

HENRI CAFFAREL, A SEEKER OF GOD

Father Henri Caffarel was born in 1903 and died in 1996. So it was that he worked in the service of Christ and the Church in the 20th century, at a time of great transformation. This is how he spoke about his vocation.

“... But I can talk only about what I practice, about what I live out and I talk about God just because he conquered me some fifty years ago in the month of March 1923. That was a milestone in my life. There is before and there is after that day when God entered into my life, and since that day I’ve been serving Him!”

A radio broadcast by Jacques Chancel with Father Henri Caffarel, France Inter radio, March 15th, 1973

What had been more or less clearly a calling and a hesitant move towards a choice of life then crystallised into a definitive vocation and an intuition arose from that encounter that was at the root of all of his work. This Christ who proposed his love to him awaited a “YES,” a commitment to the future. And he said yes and decided immediately that he would be a priest. He became a priest to lead others to the same encounter with the Lord, to the same reciprocity of love.

HENRI CAFFAREL, A PASTOR OPEN TO THE VOCATIONS OF THE WORLD

Providence placed couples, widows, future couples, and Christians who wished to deepen their relationship to God and the calling that they had received from Him on the priestly road of Father Caffarel.

Thanks to these encounters, he gave himself over completely to the service of new human realities: to the service of men and women of that time within the Teams of Our Lady or the Fraternity of Our Lady of the Resurrection movements that he founded, accompanied and guided for the first 27 years.

Father Caffarel knew to recognise the call of the Holy Spirit in this concurrence. He encouraged them deeply to undertake a reflection and guided them throughout the years in the charisma of their vocation. In a truly prophetic intuition, half a century before the great crisis of the family, they wished to offer to God the sacrifice of their human love and any other maternity, so that couples could live out authentically their married love and be generous in the welcoming of life.

Henri Caffarel, A la rencontre, Gérard & Marie-Christine de Roberty, ed. Le livre ouvert, 2007

VOCATION AND FRAGILITY

Monsignor Thomazeau, then Archbishop of Montpellier, at the Xth Gathering of the Teams of Our Lady in Lourdes, September 6th, 2006, reminded us of what Father Henri Caffarel thought about the fragility of vocations.

“Henri Caffarel appeared at the end of his life, in the fragility of age, as if he were inhabited by an intense flame, truly a priest’s soul with the unique passion to love and to make the Lord be loved. This was not completely painless for him, although it ever rattling his hope. He observed with alarm society’s evolution, the fragility of couples even in profoundly Christian families.”

“Henri Caffarel was given to the Church with a prophetic breath that inhabited him. Throughout the turmoil of the era, the couple and family were the main places to announce the Gospel and Father Henri Caffarel demonstrated that holiness in marriage lights up the way of the only vocation that does not disappoint, by seeking to love the way Jesus loves us.”

“He demonstrated that the way to a personal encounter with the Lord in a heart-to-heart was the most reliable way to achieve holiness.”

Monsignor Guy Thomazeau

GENERAL PRAYER INTENTION

Everyone receives a calling, everyone has a vocation, a vocation to be a Christian, a couple within marriage, a father or mother in a family, to be consecrated, a deacon, priest or bishop. Lord, let us recognise your call.

May Jesus help us through his Gospel to experience these vocations in the love of God and our neighbour.

May the Holy Spirit help humanity and ourselves to rediscover the meaning of God’s call for each of us and that this call may be the subject of tenderness, sharing and peace. We pray to you, O Lord!

INTERNATIONAL COLLOQUIUM

HENRI CAFFAREL, A PROPHET FOR OUR TIMES, AN APOSTLE FOR MARRIAGE AND A MASTER OF PRAYER

The Bernardins, Paris, December 8th & 9th 2017

Under the high patronage of Cardinal André Vingt-Trois, Archbishop of Paris

A Colloquium at the service of the Cause for Canonisation of Father Henri Caffarel. This event, organised by the international Association “The Friends of Father Henri Caffarel,” aims to demonstrate the influence of the thinking and intuitions of Father Henri Caffarel on the theology and spirituality of marriage and on prayer.

A scientific colloquium. The organising committee of the event called upon the participation of researchers and scientist to explore aspects of the personality or thinking of Father Henri Caffarel and the validity of his works: his vocation as a man of God, his foundation within the Church, his teachings, his vision for couples and marriage, as well as his pedagogy for private prayer. The talks will be enlightened by testimonials from numerous countries: France, Brazil, Cameroon, Italy, Ireland, Lebanon, Portugal, Spain, the US, etc. They will demonstrate the universal character of his propositions that remain relevant for today’s men and women.

PARTICIPATING IN THE IINTERCESSORS’ LIVES

We thank those who can for their help in financially contributing to the development of the Intercessors. By giving, you help us distribute the letter, make up posters, finance communication means for countries that do not have the means.