

Father Caffarel on the importance of certain religious practices in the life of christian couples¹

(March 1963 editorial)

I have just re-read some pages of sermons by St John Chrysostom and, once again, I am filled with delight and wonder: what concern for the spiritual progress of the married Christians who were listening to him! What acute awareness of the needs and difficulties of married and family life! How boldly he invites his listeners to the pursuit of perfection in the christian life! And, at the same time, how realistic he is in the demands he makes!

In the text I have before my eyes, I am struck by the primary importance he gives to the meditative reading of the Bible in the home. Let me quote a few sentences of this great preacher: *“I beg of you, come often to church, to listen to Holy Scripture - but do not listen to it only in church. When at home, take hold of the divine Books and glean with great care what they contain of benefit to you... just as material food increases the strength of the body, so reading Scripture increases the strength of the soul. It is spiritual nourishment which strengthens the soul, gives it more energy and makes it wiser. ...So, when you go back home, lay two tables: one for the body’s dishes, the other for Holy Scriptures’ dishes.*

My reading of St John Chrysostom has just re-awakened in me a concern that never leaves me for long: should we not have included such and such major religious practices among the obligations of our Charter? Can our teams claim to set couples on the road to the fullness of the christian life if these practices are disregarded by couples? I have in mind the regular and meditative reading of Scriptures, the study of christian doctrine and acquisition of a deeper knowledge of it, quiet prayer, frequent reception of the Eucharist and recourse to the sacrament of Reconciliation.

I clearly remember why obligations concerning these various practices were not introduced in the Charter: the couples joining the Teams are too diverse in age, religious culture, spiritual evolution, conditions of life... The Rule of Life should - at least we hoped - allow each member to establish these various religious exercises progressively and to suit his/her circumstances. They would thereby be helped to grow into a more mature christian spiritual life.

In fact, I have observed that the practice of the Rule of Life does not often correspond to what one expected of it. Too many team members insert only minor obligations into it, and neglect to make it an instrument of spiritual progress. It is true that, to insert what is essential into it, they needed to know what is essential... But is it not in order to discover what is essential that you join together in a team and is it not the reason why each team benefits from the presence of a Spiritual Counsellor?

Henri Caffarel

¹ **Note:** Father Caffarel wrote this editorial for the “Lettres des END” in March 1963 under the title of “Sound the alert about the Rule of Life”. At that time, the Charter defined the Rule of Life as *“determining the time and place which one intends to allot to attendance at mass, to the sacrament of reconciliation, to quiet prayer, to spiritual reading”*. This “making time and place for God” was the first ‘obligation’. The only religious practices specified at that time among the ‘obligations’ of the Charter were daily family prayer and the annual retreat. The choice of other religious practices was left to the individual member via his/her Rule of Life. In 1967, the Rule of Life was redefined as *“the efforts that each member decides to undertake to make his/her life conform to the will of God”*. Although this broader definition could be said to encompass the original concept of the Rule of Life, it meant that the previously mentioned religious practices were no longer encouraged by name in the Rule of Life. In 1970, however, the regular reading of the Word of God and daily quiet prayer were added to the ‘obligations’.

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FATHER CAFFAREL SPEAKS TO US

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