

“Watch and pray”

(October 1966 editorial)

After thirty-six years of priestly life, it seems increasingly obvious to me that, if so many Christians are spiritually and psychologically sick, worried, depressed or overexcited, if so many couples do not achieve agreement, harmony, union and the joy they had hoped for, if Christianity is so deeply divided - as much in its thinking as in its action - it is because the importance of prayer is not really known. When individuals or societies no longer link up with God by prayer, they are handed over defenceless to the forces of disintegration.

People plead lack of time or freedom of thought or urgent daily or apostolic tasks to be done. This is ludicrous! What would you think of a mother who would claim not to have enough time to eat because her two children were ill, or because housework took all her time and energy?

The whole question is to know whether praying is any less vital than eating. In other words, do we gravely jeopardise our mental and spiritual health by not praying, or, on the contrary, does the person who prays find stability, joy in life and the ability to love?

My experience leaves me in no doubt: prayer is as vital for you lay people as it is for us priests. Get me right; I am not referring to a quick morning or evening vocal prayer, but to what we call quiet prayer or meditation.

I know so many Christians, members of Teams, who, despite heavy family, job or apostolic commitments, devote every day a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even longer, to quiet prayer. I can bear witness to the fact that their mental and physical stability, their married life, their various activities, their Christian life as a whole, find in it a source of daily renewal. Great is my joy to see some of them achieve, thanks to daily quiet prayer, this constant prayer that Saint Paul recommended, as did Christ: *“Pray constantly; and for all things give thanks to God”* (1 Thes 5: 17-18).

What more encouragement to pray do you, members of Teams, need than the thought of all these couples throughout the world who, lacking the enlightenment and graces with which you are blessed, are unhappy, sick, dying? There are some indeed whom you can help directly, but how many others are there – how many more – whom only your prayer can reach? You might answer: there are contemplative monks and nuns who pray. This is true but, on the one hand, they are few in numbers and, on the other hand, the same applies to prayer as to the apostolate, it is help from like to like that should come first.

I cannot believe that the Christian life of a couple can be very deep if they do not feel responsible for their fellow men and women, if they do not feel the need to intercede for couples who do not know the mind of God on love and marriage, if they do not think that, somewhere in the world, there are couples for whom they are especially responsible spiritually.

We often speak of mature Christians. These are mature Christians, mature couples: those who feel responsible, who know themselves to be responsible, who want to be responsible for their fellow couples, who have discovered their mission as intercessors and who boldly assume it as readily as their apostolic tasks.

At a time when marriage and family are splitting up and disintegrating, when so many spouses consciously scorn the mind of God on marriage, it is imperative, as never before, that Christian couples should present themselves united as a group to God. Then, acknowledging their powerlessness to bring about, by their own effort, a worldwide renewal of marriage, they should commit themselves to a life of prayer and intercession so

as to obtain from God that which, by their own action, they are totally unable to accomplish.

If our Teams of Our Lady in the thirty-five or so countries, in which they are established, do not constitute this force of intercession, they betray an essential aspect of the reason for their existence. They are then only a gathering of privileged people; and history teaches us that, sooner or later, a tidal wave comes to sweep away those who associate only to increase and defend their privileges.

Some of you understand all this so well that they ask for quiet prayer to be an obligation - not only for those with responsibilities - but for all couples in the Movement. I do not think it is necessary to multiply the obligations [*Father Caffarel did in fact make it an 'obligation' in 1970*]. Nevertheless, of this I am convinced that if, after two or three years in Teams, couples do not, on their own initiative, come to make time for quiet prayer in their life, they have not yet understood very much about Christian life and their spiritual responsibility.

Perhaps you will say to me that quiet prayer is not easy. Quiet prayer is indeed a science and an art. People who want to learn to type practise for weeks on end. Whoever can play a Beethoven sonata today must have plagued his/her neighbours for years. To pray also needs to be learnt – and we never stop learning.

My wish today is that, thanks to brotherly mutual help within teams, we each learn to pray better, that is to say, when all is said and done, to love God better.

Henri Caffarel